

## CHALLENGING THE PARADIGMS OF FREEMASONRY

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### Introduction and objectives

Right Worshipful, Very Worshipful, Worshipful Brethren, Brethren and all. I'd like to begin by expressing my gratitude for being afforded the opportunity to present to all of you here tonight. I'm truly honoured, and I regard this as **a significant milestone in my Masonic career** ... a career which I hope will be **enduring, fruitful and worthwhile**.

To set the scene for my presentation, cast your minds to the past and put yourselves back in the shoes of a Candidate for Freemasonry.

*[Give the knocks of the EA Degree].*

Universally, these knocks comprise the first sound that a Candidate (whilst still in darkness) hears before taking his first step inside a Lodge of Freemasons in which the Brethren are engaged in their peculiar Labour. Being in a state of darkness and unaware of the ritual that is about to unfold, at that very moment, for the Candidate, the future holds **infinite possibility**, and the journey towards **self-actualisation seems possible**.

**That is the potential of Freemasonry.** Infinite possibility and self-actualisation.

The First or Entered Apprentice Degree ritual (across Constitutions) articulates various obligations and expectations that are imposed on the Candidate, but there are also many subtle references to reciprocal obligations and expectations that can be expected by the Candidate.

In the Irish Constitution ritual, on admitting the Candidate, the Inner Guard (with dagger drawn) is compelled to ask the Candidate certain questions, including:

*“Do you come, with a preconceived notion of the excellence of our Order, a desire for knowledge, and to make yourself more extensively useful among your fellow men?”*

It's irrelevant that this question is particular to Irish Freemasonry (in receiving the Candidate). For me, it is in this single question that the Candidate's holistic interest in Freemasonry is established: **a**

**preconceived notion of the excellence of our Order, a desire for knowledge and to be more useful in society.** In Constitutions where this question is not specifically put to the Candidate, the expectation is still implied. It is the most important expectation of, and expectation by, the Candidate. It is the line in the sand according to which the Candidate will either be enamoured by, or disappointed with, Freemasonry.

It's at this point that I feel we've lost the plot.

In contemplating my Masonic career to date, I can't help but feel that there is a **material disconnection** between:

1. What Freemasonry is **intended to represent**;
2. What we, both individually and collectively as Freemasons, have **interpreted Freemasonry to represent**; and
3. What we're actually doing, both implicitly and explicitly, as **representatives of Freemasonry**.

I'm still enamoured by the potential that Freemasonry presents, but I also have no hesitation in stating that (generally) as Freemasons, we're nowhere near living up to the principles that we subscribe to: brotherly love, relief and truth. Please note: our values are not actually in question, just our actions (and inactions) as Freemasons.

Brethren, my presentation is intended to challenge the preconceived notions of the excellence of our Order. **Challenge, not criticise.** My objective is to **drive introspection and constructive debate** with the express hope that the ultimate outcome will be a contribution towards a positive and sustainable future for Freemasonry. Unfortunately, introspection, by its very nature, is deeply personal, even when necessary. I ask for all of you to listen with an open mind for the next 25 minutes.

I do think we've lost some direction and momentum, and are often just going through the motions.

My concerns are embodied in old wisdom quoted from Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, written in 1865:

*"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"*

*'That depends a great deal on where you want to get to' said the Cat*

*'I don't much care where' – said Alice*

*'Then it doesn't matter which way you go', said the Cat."*

If we just keep on going through the motions, Freemasonry is still bound to end up somewhere, but sadly, that destination might just be the annals of great institutions that used to exist in a bygone era.

It's time to start thinking outside of the box, because as the well known Mason Benjamin Franklin once said:

*"If everyone is thinking alike, then no one is thinking."*

Isn't it our responsibility to constantly challenge the paradigms of our Order?

### **The 3 (three) generations of Macro-Freemasonry**

As a concept, we're all custodians of the 3 (three) generations of Macro-Freemasonry, being:

1. The past (our heritage and the source of our tradition);
2. The present (our current social relevance); and
3. The future (our sustainability).

These generations are all inter-dependant, and equally important. None can survive without the other. Presenting to a Lodge of Research, consider this: without Freemasons in the future, there will be nobody to recount the past (or even this meeting today). Conversely, to quote Lord Kenneth Clark:

*"... I believe that in spite of the recent triumphs of science, men haven't changed much in the last two thousand years; and in consequence we must try to learn from history."*

Lord Kenneth Clark, "Civilisation" (1980).

There is an abundance of literature highlighting a decline in Freemasonry. I must ask, is nobody truly heeding the call? Are we not learning from history. One need look no further than the hope, the aspiration, the glory, the arrogance, the decline and the inevitable demise of the once great and revered **Roman Empire**.

Have we become too comfortable as great historians, lamenting on the days of old.

### **Brethren, is our Rome burning?**

We need to shift the focus away from the past and start concentrating on our sustainability.

### The preconceived notions of the excellence of our Order

Each of the generations of Freemasonry have their own unique challenges, but there are 3 (three) questions which transcend, and (thankfully) unite, the 3 (three) generations. These questions also resonate throughout every facet of Freemasonry:

1. What is Freemasonry?
2. What does Freemasonry offer to an aspiring Candidate?
3. What makes a Freemason?

I hesitate to consider whether the decline in Freemasonry originates in a failure to fully appreciate the crux of these questions. In my mind, adequately addressing these questions would get us back on track.

### What is Freemasonry?

*A system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols?*

We could get into complex philosophical discussions about this, to avoid simplicity for now “striving for a simple definition by complex means”, the United Grand Lodge of England volunteers the following:

*Freemasonry means different things to each of those who join [...] its about:*

1. *making new friends and acquaintances.*
2. *helping deserving causes*
3. *making a contribution to family and society.*
4. *It teaches self-knowledge through participation in a progression of ceremonies.*
5. *Freemasonry does not discriminate on the ground of race, colour, religion, political views or social standing.*
6. *And for most, it is an enjoyable hobby.*

I agree in part, and yet I strongly disagree in part. Isn't Freemasonry far ... more?

### What does Freemasonry offer to the aspiring candidate?

The first material explanation given to me in enquiring about Freemasonry is that Freemasonry makes good men into better men.

Notably, the Grand Lodge of England doesn't say what we do for “men”, but rather what we do for “Freemasons” and “members” in context of “society”.

With this in mind, I'd like to take the liberty of phrasing what Freemasonry offers as **“mentoring and otherwise enabling aspiring men (and their families) to reach their potential as great men, great families and responsible citizens”**.

We offer assistance in the personal and collective goal of self-actualisation. That's our objective, our strategic intent, and the preconceived notion according to which we can be judged.

At this point, does anyone disagree with my statement on what we offer?

#### What makes a Freemason?

Considering what Freemasonry really offers, surely a Freemason is more than just a subscribing member of a Lodge. Being a Freemason isn't just about being initiated. It's a way of life.

#### Paradigm paralysis

Paradigm paralysis refers to the inability (or even worse, the refusal) to see beyond the prevailing way of thinking. In essence, the inability or refusal to consider the possibilities that may be.

As an appropriate example, think of Encyclopaedia Britannica. They failed to embrace the digital age, turning down an opportunity to partner with Microsoft in the release of Encarta. Despite a history of excellence, in 1999 they were bought out at well below market value owing to financial difficulties. They very nearly folded. As of 2012, after being in print for 244 years, only online versions are being maintained. It's not that the content became irrelevant, but the method of delivery (a printed and bound version) was outdated.

To further illustrate my point: I was taught that there are nine planets in the solar system. Factually, there are only eight, under our current knowledge, being Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune. Pluto was re-categorised in 2006 owing to the discovery that it is only one of several large bodies within the Kuiper belt and is no longer acknowledged as a planet.

Freemasonry is an abstraction of reality. Esoteric in nature, practised as a collective, but nonetheless existing within the tangible world. Without a connection to the real world, we're simply going through the motions without any real relevance. As global knowledge increases, we need to adapt to the times (perhaps even try to pre-empt future trends). We will not be sustainable if we perpetuate outdated knowledge and methodologies ... if we suffer from paradigm paralysis.

## Challenging the paradigms of Freemasonry

### Freemasonry and charity

*Freemasonry is one of the world's [ ] and largest ... charitable institutions.*

A common reply for “what do Freemasons do?” is “we do charity work, and lots of it”.

I'm passionate about philanthropy, both inside and outside Freemasonry. With a heritage of giving, you should expect that Freemasonry should be dominating this field ... and yet we're far from market leaders at the moment. Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives are routinely adopted by listed companies to improve their Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) scorecards. High and ultra-high net worth individuals are increasingly donating or bequeathing significant amounts towards Foundations, supporting clearly defined philanthropic objectives.

Philanthropy is no longer just about grant making. Developing approaches to philanthropy, such as social venture capitalism, originate from an acknowledgement that traditional methods of philanthropy are outdated and unsustainable. Social VC is about venture philanthropy and impact investing. Help me, help you, to help me ... and again, to help you. Social VC is about sustainable philanthropy. Wouldn't a leading charitable organisation be a pioneer in this space, or at the very least, have explored the concept?

The latest Giving Report, privately commissioned to investigate the giving patterns of HNWI's in South Africa, identified the following:

- 93.5% of HNW South African donate money, goods or time to social causes
- 19.9% donated between R25,000 and R50,000
- 16,7% donated between R50,000 and R100,000
- 6% donated in excess of R100,000
- NPOs were the most supported type of beneficiary of these funds.

Freemasonry hasn't been a significant conduit of this money from donor to beneficiary. Perhaps it's because we only regard Freemasonry as a hobby.

### Freemasonry as a hobby

To consider Freemasonry as a hobby is to diminish the potential of Freemasonry at all levels of our purpose.

Peter Drucker, a major thought leader influencing management of the modern business corporation, argued more than 20 years ago that businesses and non-profit organisations could learn a great deal from each other. In brief, combine altruistic passion with business discipline, skill and organisation to drive increased relevance, credibility and sustainability.

To be sustainable, non-profit organisations should be acting and thinking like highly organised and competitive for profit organisations ... not like enthusiastic hobbyists.

We should be analysing both Freemasonry and the environment, including how we may need to develop in the future as the environment evolves, taking into account the market (our customers), the competition, available technology, the economy and even the regulatory environment.

**We should be thinking like a highly organised and competitive organisation, guided by a strategic intent, committed to a strategic framework that is aligned to our strategic intent, but adaptive to changes in social, economic and political realities.**

We need to be competing to attract the best, and retain the best.

The apathetic Mason and introducing more men into Freemasonry

For several years, Freemasons have adopted a “strategic” phrase: “we need to bring more men into Masonry”. Respectfully, this hasn’t yielded results.

*“Insanity: Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”.*

Albert Einstein

If our current strategy isn’t working, change it! And, “if you can’t change the people, change the people”.

Freemasons subscribe to a particular set of values. However, we don’t own these values. You don’t need to be a subscribing Mason to hold moral worth.

I’ve heard Senior Masons say that Freemasonry is failing because Candidates with good values are hard to find nowadays and the next generation has no respect for authority. I’m compelled to challenge this:

Do younger Masons really not know their place nor appreciate their duties? Perhaps, but could it also be because we challenge authority and demand accountability? Allow me to provide a useful quote in this regard:

*“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their household. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs and tyrannise their teachers”*

I’m quoting Socrates, dating back to around 400 B.C. These younger generations (my generations and the next) aren’t really that different to the previous generations. We’ve just been taught to question, to challenge. In context of our society, we’ve inherited post-apartheid South Africa, understand that legality and legitimacy are not necessarily the same thing and that corruption can run amok if there is an absence of accountability. It’s naïve to think that we simply don’t respect authority. We’re a product of our past, and accordingly, demand that our leaders are worthy of their respect.

Dealing with the comment that the world today is devoid of values: a huge focus throughout Africa is the concept of Ubuntu. **I am who I am because of who we all are.**

Archbishop Desmond Tutu offers the following definition of Ubuntu:

*“A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others ...”*

He explains further

*“Ubuntu: the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality, Ubuntu, you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole World. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.”*

**Doesn't that sound a bit like Freemasonry?** There are many individuals out there who subscribe to Masonic values, are Freemasons at heart. They just haven't been initiated yet.

We're also in competition with other philanthropic organisations (think Rotary and Lions) and we're in competition with other social clubs (think Gentleman's clubs and Golf clubs). We could extrapolate this analogy further if necessary. In competing for an individual to **prefer** and **prioritise** our Order, Freemasonry needs to provide **a more compelling offering than the available alternatives.**

We need to become better at what we do?

With this in mind, the “Masonic experience” shouldn’t typically comprises of membership drives, poorly planned functions, outdated communication methods and late nights.

#### Ritual as the foundation of Freemasonry

The answer that I routinely received when enquiring how Lodge would make me a better man was an **insufficient**: “come to Lodge, participate in the ritual, and you’ll see”.

This is where I want to challenge the status quo with my next bold statement. **Our rituals, as they are commonly practiced, have little to no value.** Now, don’t misunderstand me. This links into the question of “what makes a Freemason”. Freemasonry is a particular set of values, timeless simply because they speak to the heart of compassion, humanity and greater immutable virtues. In my humble opinion, a Freemason is an individual who abides by and demonstrates these particular values, both within Lodge, but more importantly, as a citizen in the world. Our ritual is just our method of communicating our values. As a pure analogy, without expressing an opinion on religion, our ritual is akin to the Christian crucifix. It is a symbol of faith, but without faith it is just an ornament. A crutch.

Ritual is entrenched in our culture and unlikely to change. We don’t need to remove ritual, and it’s fun, but shouldn’t we be updating it? Also, I don’t mean small cosmetic changes to punctuation, etc. I mean a material overhaul to bring ritual in line with the modern world. Remember, we are concerned with moral values, not debating the merits of Shakespearean vs. contemporary English. Why should you be fluent in early English (Anglo Saxon) or early modern English to understand Masonry.

Respectfully, we’ve gotten to a point where the focus is on **form over substance** (as a general comment). **Ritual without sincerity is nothing more than rhetoric.**

I have no doubt that many Brethren can cite all the values across the three degrees, but how many of us really demonstrate these on a daily basis. Promoting Freemasonry, not by claiming ownerships and saying “I’m a Freemason”, but through our daily actions where objective third parties say “**that’s a good man, I think he might be a Freemason**”.

#### Freemasonry and the law

Freemasonry expects that all members cheerfully conform to the laws of the country in which they reside:

Let me now draw everyone's attention to s. 9(4), read in conjunction with s. 9(3) of the Supreme Law of the Republic of South Africa (the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa):

No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more of the following grounds: race, **gender, sex**, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, **religion**, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

That is an obligation on every person in South Africa, and accordingly, an obligation on every Freemason.

Feel free to contemplate each separately, but I'd like to draw attention to gender, sex and religion.

### Sex and gender

To clarify: sex relates to reproductive anatomy whilst gender refers to personal identification of gender.

Taking you back to the gender neutral position of the United Grand Lodge of England, why exactly is it that we don't permit woman? Our focus is on values and fraternity, not gender. Are we really living up to our obligations as Freemasonry?

Remember, there was a time when slaves and bondsmen were part of society. Human trafficking is now a human rights crisis. Society has evolved, so too has the role of woman in the modern household.

Perhaps there are fraternal reasons for separation (under the current norms of our society), but at the very least, and maybe we're not ready to debate initiating women into our Order, but shouldn't there, at the very least, be reciprocal recognition between male and female Lodges. Not just awareness, but recognition. Freemasonry encompasses family values. Should Freemasonry not be equally available to all family members who wish to be better citizens?

As an interesting thought, which may make many of you uncomfortable, but where does Freemasonry stand on a transgender person born with female genitals, who identifies as male, and subsequently undergoes a sex-change operation to become male? What about an intersex person who may appear to be male but also has female organs. Sure, this discussion might still be largely taboo, but not for long. Think of Caster Semenya. It's not an impossible scenario that Freemasonry may face in the future. I for one hope that we'll show empathy, compassion and acceptance.

## Religion

We're not a religion. True, we don't offer salvation.

*All Freemasons are expected to have a religious belief, but Freemasonry does not seek to replace a Mason's religion or provide a substitute for it. It deals in a man's relationship with his fellow man not in a man's relationship with God.*

Then how do we explain and justify that an express belief in the Christian Trinity is an absolute requirement for certain other Degrees? Is this really Masonic? I have my doubts, as I would if any Side/Higher Degree demanded that a Mason subscribe to an alternative religion.

There might be a question about the relevance of this to Craft Masonry, but remember, there is no Degree higher than that of a Master Mason.

Classic, all Masons are equal, but depending on your religion (which naturally is irrelevant); some Masons are more entitled than others.

## Summary

So what am I actually saying? Am I saying that Freemasonry is irrelevant? Am I saying that Freemasonry has no purpose?

The simple answer is NO. The more cutting answer is that we're not living up to the expectations that our founders set for us. Collectively, we're not fulfilling a Masonic legacy.

So why are all of you Freemasons? This is, after all, a voluntary commitment.

I didn't aspire to be initiated as a Freemason to go through the motions, deliver a flawless ritual and have drinks with Brethren who are (respectfully), often more than twice my age. I'm a Freemason because I have an overwhelming **need** to be more than I am. I don't come to Lodge to pass the time. Brethren, I'm inundated at work and Freemasonry detracts from my time at home as a responsible partner. I attend Lodge because I'm looking for guidance in my personal quest to be all that I can be.

**To become more than I think I can be.** There is also a fraternal element.

Brethren, there is something missing in the way Freemasonry is currently operating. Most of us were drawn to Freemasonry to be mentored in becoming better men. That is our offering to aspiring Candidates. **If Lodges don't fulfil that obligation, then they are not practising Freemasonry.** Our problem isn't bringing more men into Freemasonry. **Our problem is demonstrating the value of Freemasonry and inspiring individuals, and families, to want to be Freemasons.** Do all of us

appreciate the purpose of Freemasonry? Are all of us really living and demonstrating our purpose, both within and outside Lodge?

We need to embrace and adapt to changes in society, delivering our message in a format that is constantly relevant to the future generations.

All of us need to accept our role as brand ambassadors, and this is more relevant outside of Lodge. We need to be living the values on a daily basis

We need to operate within a framework of good governance, but this is a voluntary organisation. I don't need to be here (nor do you), **so we need to have fun in the process!**

### **Conclusion**

I'm not asking any of you to agree (or conversely, to disagree) with anything I've said. I simple asked you to listen with an open mind, to contemplate, hopefully debate and consider. To any Brother not open to this, let me leave you with a pertinent quote from the author Anaïs Nin:

*"Societies in decline have no use for visionaries."*

Worshipful Master, Brethren, thank you.