

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Book Review - October 2019

North American Freemasonry: Idealism & Realism

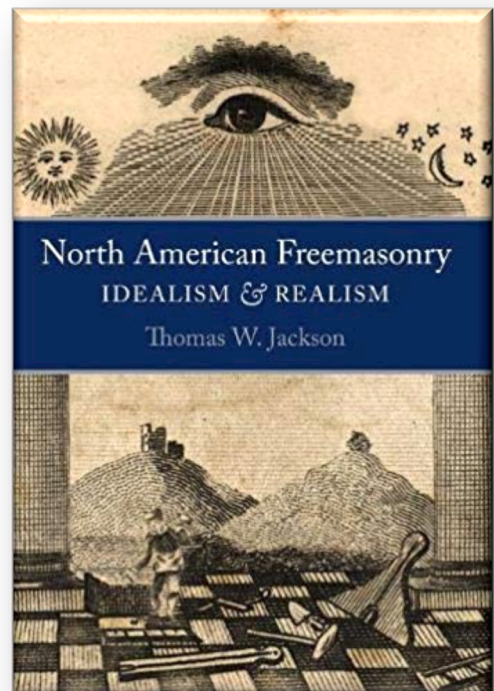
RWB Thomas W. Jackson

If Freemasonry has a voice, especially North American Freemasonry, it is the voice of R. W. Bro. Thomas W. Jackson, the renowned Past Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.

R. W. Bro. Jackson's new book, *North American Freemasonry: Idealism & Realism*, is a collection of presentations that he has made over the course of his many years as a Masonic writer and lecturer. The title of the book is a bit misleading. R. W. Bro. Jackson has plenty to say about Freemasonry outside of North America, but his basic theme is an admonition to North American Freemasons concerning the condition of the Fraternity.

North American Freemasonry: Idealism & Realism describes the idealism that is at the heart of Freemasonry. The intellectual and philosophical tenets of the Craft are designed to enable good men to unlock their greatest potential. By the practice of Freemasonry, men can reach levels of self-fulfillment that they scarcely imagined. The realism portrayed in the book is a snapshot of the extent to which so few contemporary North American Freemasons even understand the fundamental nature of Freemasonry, much less actually practice it.

North American Freemasonry: Idealism & Realism is divided into sections representing the audiences to whom R. W. Bro. Jackson was speaking. There are sections dedicated to Idealism and to Realism, where the audiences were composed largely of North American Freemasons. There are other sections that include presentations made



to international groups of Freemasons, non-Masons and the family and friends of Freemasonry.

Throughout *North American Freemasonry: Idealism & Realism*, R. W. Bro. Jackson makes three major points:

First, outside of religion, Freemasonry has been the greatest source for good in the history of the world and it played a significant role in the formation and evolution of North American society as we know it, including our form of government.

Second, North American Freemasonry has ceased to acknowledge and practice the intellectual and philosophical standards that once characterized it. In too many instances, North American Freemasonry has become little more than a collection agency for public charities. Inexplicably, American Masons have raised and given away huge sums of money, while its own infrastructure is in decay.

Third, North American Freemasonry has been its own worst enemy by lowering its standards for admission. In a futile effort to stem the loss of membership, men have been admitted as members who, only a few decades ago, would have been acknowledged as unfit for consideration as members of a Masonic Lodge. In the pursuit of quantity, North American Freemasonry has sacrificed quality.

R. W. Bro. Jackson points out that North American Freemasonry stands in stark contrast to the rest of the world. Freemasonry is growing everywhere except in North America. R. W. Bro. Jackson credits this phenomenon as existing because institutional Freemasonry outside of North America has retained its intellectual and philosophical underpinnings.

In "The History of the Future of Freemasonry" given at a conference of The Masonic Society, R. W. Bro. Jackson writes:

I have observed Brothers sitting in chairs that not too many years ago would have been beyond their wildest dreams. Just because we are given the title does not inoculate us with the wisdom of former leaders or the knowledge of the past. There must be an effort exerted to learn and programs to teach. Therein has become one of the greatest failures of North American Freemasonry. There is very little effort required to reach 'exalted' positions in Freemasonry today and there exists almost a total failure to teach. There are Past Masters today who reached that lofty position with just a few years of membership and though they may possess the ability to lead, most lack the knowledge of what they are leading and there are very few grand lodges in North America today

supporting any viable education program to teach them. That is unfair to them and possibly destructive to their future. My Brothers, there has never been as osmotic process developed whereby, we could sit and absorb knowledge as too many tend to rely upon on our Lodges today.

R. W. Bro. Jackson is equally critical of the trend among North American Lodges to take on the trappings of service clubs and focus their efforts on fundraising for public charities. He correctly notes that Freemasonry cannot buy respect and that the Fraternity receives very little, if any, credit for its fundraising. While acknowledging charity as a core component of Freemasonry, he distinguishes between the charity shown among Freemasons to each other and the frenzied efforts to engage in what previous generations of Freemasons would have referred to as “alms-giving.”

R. W. Bro. Jackson writes that the purpose of Freemasonry is to make good men better, one man at a time. These good men, in turn, make society better. It is important to note that R. W. Bro. Jackson does not condemn Freemasonry’s involvement with charitable works. It is the fact that it has become the focus (and the identity) of the Craft, to the exclusion of the practice of its genuine aim and purpose, that he laments.

R. W. Brother Jackson’s observations are, unfortunately, entirely accurate and serve to effectively illustrate the wasted state of contemporary North American Freemasonry.

North American Freemasonry: Idealism & Realism is a candid look at Freemasonry from the perspective of a man who recognizes what Freemasonry actually is and is intended to be, and who also realizes that it has dangerously strayed from its original purpose.

North American Freemasonry: Idealism & Realism is available through amazon.com or from other booksellers.

R. W. Bro. Thomas W. Jackson is an eminent Freemason, recognized around the world for his work encouraging and supporting the Masonic Fraternity. Bro. Jackson was made a Mason in Cumberland Valley Lodge No. 315 of Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, and served as its Worshipful master in 1969. He went on to serve a twenty-year tenure as the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, retiring in 1999.

He was the first Executive Secretary of the World Conference of Regular Masonic Grand Lodges, serving from 1998 to 2014. He is now honorary President ad Vitam of that organization.

R. W. Bro. Jackson is a strong supporter of Masonic education and research, serving as the Warrant Master of the Pennsylvania Lodge of Research, a Fellow of the Philalethes Society, a Founding Fellow of the Masonic Society, a member of the Board of Directors of Scottish Rite Research Society and a member of the exclusive Society of Blue Friars.

He has also held leadership positions in many other organizations concerned with the culture of the Craft, including his service as president of the Conference of Grand Secretaries of North America, board member of the Masonic Information Center of North America, the Masonic Restoration Foundation, the Masonic Relief Association of North America and chairman of the board of directors of the Association of Masonic Arts.

He holds honorary membership in 111 Grand Lodges throughout the world. He is the only American Freemasonry holding Grand Rank in the United Grand Lodge of England and holds honorary Grand Rank in 42 Grand Lodges, including honorary Grand Master in 16 jurisdictions.

R. W. Bro. Jackson has presided over 18 local, state, nation, and world Masonic bodies. He has spoken in over 40 countries and had articles published in educational, scientific, and Masonic journals, newspapers and publications in more than thirty countries. His papers have been translated into more than a dozen languages.

**Reviewed by Dan M. Kemble, Master
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