

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

Book Review

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

EXAMINING THE SHIFTING PARADIGM WITHIN FREEMASONRY

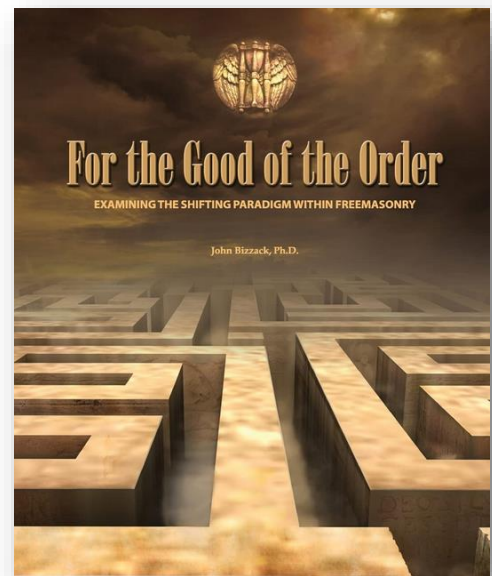
By: John W. Bizzack, Ph.D.

Reviewed by: Dan M. Kemble, Past Master and Fellow, William O. Ware Lodge of Research

I knew John Bizzack quite well before I ever met him. I told him that once, and he looked at me as if I was slightly crazy. (Occasionally, he still gives me that same look.) In 2013, I was serving as the Senior Warden in two separate Lodges, preparing for a term as Master in each. I discovered John's book, *For the Good of the Order*. It not only exposed me to his manner of thinking, it so captured my imagination that I purchased four additional copies to give to the men that I thought would be serving as Wardens of the respective Lodges during the year that I would be Master. "Read this," I instructed them. "This will be the foundation on which our Lodge will operate next year." I didn't realize it at the time, but that was my first step toward the concept of "Observant Freemasonry."

Published in 2013, *For the Good of the Order* was Brother Bizzack's second book about Freemasonry. The basic premise of the book is that the paradigm of Freemasonry has shifted, and continues to shift, whether or not Freemasons are willing to acknowledge the shift. Brother Bizzack first identifies the ways in which the paradigm of Freemasonry has shifted. Next, he offers an analysis of the causes of the shift (or shifts), and, finally, offers some possibilities as to what the future may hold as a result of the changing landscape.

A paradigm is best understood as a norm, or an accepted pattern of operations. As Brother Bizzack points out, all organizations have an operational paradigm, and all paradigms eventually shift. The issue in Freemasonry is not that the paradigm is shifting, but whether Freemasons acknowledge the shift and have a plan in place to meet it. In 2024, just as in 2013, there is little evidence of any comprehensive plan to do so.



In Chapter 1, “Fifty Years of Diagnosis: Questioning the Culpability of the Sociological Condition,” Brother Bizzack examines the actual changes in American society that have occurred since the 1960s, and then discusses the extent to which those changes provide an adequate explanation of the great decline in membership that has continued unabated for over 60 years. While acknowledging that external factors have had an impact on Freemasonry, he urges Freemasons to examine their specific practices to determine whether the Freemasonry that is delivered meets its promise. He briefly introduces the concept of Observant Masonry, about which more will be said later.

Chapter 2, “Committing Masonic Heresy,” is an examination of the role of ritual in Freemasonry. Brother Bizzack asserts that ritual is a means to an end, rather than the end in itself. He calls for an exploration of Freemasonry that goes beyond ritual.

Chapter 3, “The Candidate and Newly Raised Mason,” discusses the attitudes of institutional Freemasonry toward those men who enter its ranks. It describes the lack of a formal approach to Masonic education, relying on the hope that newly made Masons will take it upon themselves to search for the meanings of the symbols, words and phrases to which they have been exposed. Brother Bizzack writes about the expectations that men have when they enter Freemasonry, and the extent to which those expectations are realized. The gap between a new Mason’s expectations, and what he actually encounters, in part offers an explanation of Freemasonry’s generally low retention rate.

Chapter 4, “The Prospective Mason,” is the book’s shortest chapter. Brother Bizzack cites a 2012 study performed by the Grand Lodge of England that indicates that men would be open to Freemasonry, but are either unaware of its existence or hold the mistaken notion that one must be invited to join. While not endorsing the concept of solicitation, Brother Bizzack acknowledges the need for a more effective way of placing Freemasonry before the general public.

In Chapter 5, “Paradigms and Period of Transition,” Brother Bizzack delves into the effects of Freemasonry’s shifting paradigm. He writes:

“If our numbers decline, yet the relevancy of our fraternity is not in question, we have to seriously examine why. Part of that examination requires us to focus on *how* we can offer what is relevant, in contrast to the paradigm in which we exist today.”

In Chapter 6, “The Broken Windows Theory – Self-Fulfilling Prophecies,” Brother Bizzack borrows from his distinguished career in law enforcement. The broken windows of Freemasonry are evidenced by the deterioration of our delivery of Masonic education, superficial manifestations of fellowship, and an overall lack of pride in Freemasonry (the “don’t care” attitude). The exterior decay that many of our Lodges display is an apt metaphor for the intellectual and philosophical decay that have occurred internally. Will 21st Century Freemasons be able to reverse the decline of the fraternity, both internally and externally? A new paradigm will be required to accomplish that task.

Chapter 7, “Hewing and Squaring Men Into Masons: Masonic Education,” takes on the question of how to best ground men in the meaning and purpose of Freemasonry. In this chapter Brother Bizzack forcefully makes the case that it is the responsibility of the Lodge to provide fact-based, comprehensive education for the newly made Mason (as well as for the existing Brethren). Brother Bizzack relates the mandate for Masonic Education to the charge to study the liberal arts and sciences found in the Fellow Craft Degree. Of formal Masonic Education he states:

“Through it all, nothing says to a new member ‘We care about you and your journey as you try and map it out, and want you to enroll and engage yourself in the Lodge and the lessons of Masonry’ more clearly than devoting some personal time to him. It also says to him ‘This is the way we treat Brothers in our fraternity: with interest.’ Seems like a sound message to pass on to succeeding generations, doesn’t it?”

Chapter 8, “The Double-Edged Sword,” deals with perceptions about Freemasonry in the age of the internet, and also contains a hard-edged analysis of the phenomenon of “One Day Classes” in which men are herded through the three Degrees of Masonry in a single day in an effort to shore up Lodge membership rosters and bolster sagging revenues. Such events run contrary to Freemasonry’s professed desire for quality over quantity. Brother Bizzack relies on the writings of Freemasons Dennis Chornenky and Paul Bissell in arriving at his conclusion that while one-day events may produce more members, they do little, if anything, to produce more Masons.

Chapter 9, the final chapter, is captioned “Prognosis of the Fifty-Year Diagnosis.” Here Brother Bizzack returns to the theme of Observant Masonry as being the basis for the hope of a renaissance in Freemasonry. While he acknowledges that Freemasonry moves a glacial speed, he reiterates that Freemasonry’s ever-changing paradigm gives the Craft a unique opportunity to embrace practices that will return its emphasis to the contemplative and philosophical society that it was intended to be.

In closing *For the Good of the Order*, Brother Bizzack writes:

“To attract quality members, Freemasonry must provide a quality experience. To provide a quality experience, it must stay true to its principles. The core ideology of Freemasonry has [n]ever been in jeopardy of becoming outdated and the relevancy of the principles of the Craft is always useful to men in all societies.”

Since the publication of *For the Good of the Order* in 2013, Worshipful Brother Bizzack has gone on to write an additional twelve books about Freemasonry, several of which have been highly acclaimed (see other reviews on this website). *For the Good of the Order* remains an excellent foundational work. It forms a firm basis for Lodge planning, with respect to both short-term and long-term goals.

Reading a book not only communicates the ideas held within the book, but it also introduces the reader to the thinking of the author. Hence, my remark that I knew John Bizzack before I had the opportunity to meet him. If you are looking for an introduction to Worshipful Brother Bizzack,

and, in the meantime, want to digest a thoughtful treatment of the ever-changing norms in Freemasonry, *For the Good of the Order* is an excellent place to begin.

For the Good of the Order remains in print and is available from online booksellers.