

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

Book Review - November 2019

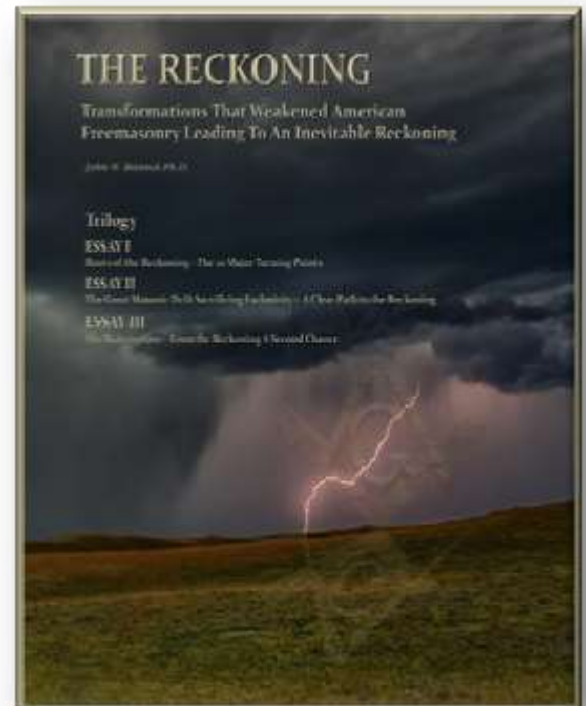
THE RECKONING **Transformations That Weakened** **American Freemasonry**

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According to *The Reckoning* by Dr. John Bizzack, the Masonic evolution from England in 1717, as noted in its earliest minutes, to present day has been a cycle of ups and downs. The key focus emphasized numerous times is to guard the West Gate.

Some of our Fraternity's short comings were self-inflicted and some were patterned by society. Instead of American Freemasonry influencing society by improving our character and behaving as men, we simply mirrored the trends of the outside world. We, as Masons, are a fraternity of men but made up as a wall of brick and mortar relying upon each other to strengthen ourselves and to shed as much light as possible and share that light with each other and the world.

One cannot build a wall without a strong foundation, or a brotherhood without selecting qualified candidates who become leaders of a Lodge and demonstrate strong character in good times and bad. The turning points mentioned



in Dr. Bizzack's book are pivotal moments in Masonic history, from the meager beginning of the early colonists, through the Morgan Affair of the 1820s (not to mention the anti-Masonic movement which even had a presidential candidate), to the Great Civil War. From there the growth of the United States of America and the states added to the country offered a consequential storm of expansion of Lodges.

The 13 colonies could not agree on one Grand Lodge for governing themselves, so now there are 50 grand jurisdictions differing in Landmarks, the ceremonial opening of Lodge in degrees and a mishmash of interpretations, practices, and methods. The slogan "This is the way we always did it" was never formally adopted nor should it ever be. This philosophy will slowly unravel the ties that bind the fraternity of Freemasonry. Bigger is not better.

"Repair and restore" was the theme of the 1843 Baltimore Convention which, rightly or wrongly, on the eleventh hour recommended that no Lodge should open and do business on any degree except the Master Mason degree. Here we are 176 years later, and we are still debating the wisdom of this action.

The next surge occurred from the 1880s to 1930s and the age of fraternalism arose. We as Masons do not solicit membership which appears more exclusive to others, however, when the West Gate is not guarded the light dims. Is Freemasonry supposed to be fun? It makes no mention of that anywhere in the obligations we take to become better men. With that said, statistics prove only an average of 6% of Lodge members are found to be actively engaged in their Lodges and 56% never engage at all. That stated, more than half are paid up dues members that will die and their family will want a masonic funeral for a card carrying "Mason."

Leadership – What is the difference between a true leader and routine leadership? With a military background, I can see the difference in a Lodge and will note "If every brother in a progressive line system mines the quarries as he is expected to while serving in each chair, the progressive line model would not be as ill-fated as it has become." One should not move on until they have demonstrated the leadership qualities necessary. Authority is earned not given and should never be confused with leadership.

Freemasonry is a progressive science. It is based on principals to be learned about the order and be proficient in that learning, demonstrated before moving to the next level. This requires education, the genius ideas around which Freemasonry is composed of through time immemorial. We are not a social club; we are a fraternity of likeminded men who seek wisdom, character, and continual growth mentally and spiritually within ourselves and our Lodge.

Through the 1940s and 1960s the craft expanded over the top in members and Lodges. After World War II men came home, built families, and joined Lodges. What transparently happened was that the exclusiveness disappeared. The funds for Lodges grew, hence dues dropped. Are we comparable to a Wal-Mart or are we a fine tailored suit shop? Being exclusive should come at a cost. A small roster of a Lodge with all members active should not be as troubling as a larger Lodge with few active members.

Two well-known Masonic scholars conversed in 1889 Albert Pike and Robert Freke Gould. Both agreed that no matter its noble purpose, Freemasonry will not be able to side-step fiscal realities of the coming reckoning any more than any other organization facing one. The warning alarm is present when the membership of Freemasonry drops at such a rate due to death or demit and it is impossible to replace members at the same rate. The deciding factor will be Grand Lodges and how they respond to The Reckoning. Freemasonry was never intended to expand into anything! It was designed to “Just Be.” The future motto of freemasonry should echo Albert Mackey’s statement, “The ultimate success of freemasonry depends on the intelligence of its disciples.”

Published Masonic education surfaced in Iowa in 1918 after World War I as the National Masonic Research Society. Its publication, *The Builder*, was popular and read all over the US and abroad. The publication had 20,000 subscribers until 1929 when the Great Depression hit. This question has often been asked what the face of American Masonic education would look like today if the depression had never occurred. Now we enjoy the *Short Talk Bulletin* which provides “how-to” information about operating our Lodges. If the content focused on Masonic leadership, civic and patriotic duty, philosophy, literature, ethics how would our Blue Lodge be different?

In writing this review this day of October 17, 2019 three days before the Grand Lodge of Kentucky meets, I visualize a Masonic Convention where all Grand Lodges would meet and the delegates (and what would be their qualifications?), elected or appointed, would decide the topics to be voted on and the vision of the future for Free and Accepted Masons of these United States. To quote David Joseph Boorstin, “The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance; it is the illusion of knowledge.”

In closing I will quote from the article, *The Future of Freemasonry*, “Statistics of membership give a superficial test of an institution’s condition.” Members there must be, obviously, but without knowing the quality little value can be deduced from the quantity.

Brothers, Guard the West Gate!

The Reckoning, along with other books by Bro. Bizzack, is available through Amazon, Barnes Noble, McCoy Publishing, and thecraftsman.org.

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***The Reckoning* encompasses three separate essays:**

Essay I: The Roots of the Reckoning

Essay II: The Great Masonic Drift

Essay III: The Redemption

