

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Book Review

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The Renaissance of Freemasonry:

The Revival of Speculative Masonry in Modern America

David L. Brunelle

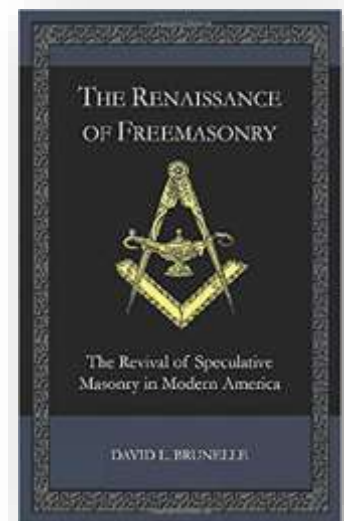
I was into **The Renaissance of Freemasonry: The Revival of Speculative Masonry in Modern America** about 10 pages, and I wanted to put it down. Author David L. Brunelle started with sappy rhetoric about the “new generation of seekers” and “a sweeping return” to Freemasonry; but I persevered. Boy, I’m glad I did.

I devoured the book in just over one hour. Brother Brunelle's obvious enthusiasm for the fraternity takes a more realistic tone after he gets the reader's attention; and his own observations of the Craft should be seriously considered by all Masons.

One of his main points is that Freemasonry is, first and foremost, a “system of instruction,” that will lead a candidate from darkness to light. He then goes on to say, “this is what Freemasonry has done throughout history.” This is where I disagree. I concur that the objective of Freemasonry is that of a system of instruction, but I’m not confident that, historically, American Freemasonry has ever seriously focused on that agenda.

Brunelle goes so far as to give Grand Masters credit for beginning to realize that “Masonic bigness” is gone, and “proficiency, excellence and virtue” are now getting their deserved attention. Unfortunately, once again, I disagree with Brother Brunelle’s observation. I have personally witnessed leadership of the institution not only dedicate their energies to nonsensical degree work (I’m talking about “side” or “fun” degrees, here), but some have gone so far as to exhibit contempt for the serious students of the Craft.

One chapter in the book is called “Circumspection,” where the author delves into the age of fraternalism, the consequences of rapid growth, and the need to, as one brother Mason, Cameron Poe, has phrased it, “Grow down to the right size.” Brunelle says, “The Tyler’s sword must be honed to a fine edge, used as liberally as possible, and as frequently as necessary.” He urges that we only bring the finest caliber of men into the fraternity. Following “Circumspection,” Brunelle writes what is probably my favorite chapter, “Man Know Thyself.” I believe that he really hits the essence of what is both destroying the Craft, and what will eventually be our salvation.



When lodges stop propagating spiritual growth by way of education, the lodge is no longer Masonic. The most basic of Masonic education, the memorization of the catechism, fosters both mental health and spiritual health. Learning the catechism, teaching the catechism and performing ritual not only promotes our own development, but it is the most important bond we hold as brothers.

“Man Know Thyself” talks about the importance of the individual Mason knowing his position in the lodge, his strengths and weaknesses, and his pursuit for spiritual growth. When lodges allow their officers to read the catechism, or, worse yet, promote a man to Master just because it's his turn, the Craft is weakened. We are quite literally diluting our mission and becoming less appealing to men who could potentially become quality members. All men should be capable of learning the ritual. Some just may take longer. Just knowing ritual, however, does not mean you necessarily are equipped to be the Master of the Lodge. There are many ways a Mason can contribute to his lodge, and, as Brunelle states, it is difficult for a man to recognize his own shortcomings, but there is nothing nobler than a man willingly stepping out of line for the good of the lodge. A true Mason would then work on improving his shortcomings.

This book was excellent. It is a quick read, with a clear and concise message. Brother Brunelle peppers the book with quotes and passages that are extremely thought provoking, and that really keep the reader engaged throughout. I think this should be required reading for men wanting to join the fraternity before taking their first step. It is unfortunate that this was written in 2012 instead of 1812. Had we been able to separate the “wheat from the chaff” earlier, many of today's issues may have never come to pass.

First published in 2012 by Mindhive Books, **The Renaissance of Freemasonry: The Revival of Speculative Masonry in Modern America** is available from online booksellers.

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