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***green*MASONRY: NATURE AND FREEMASONRY**

by Geoff Ludowyk

Foreword

The values by which we are to survive are not rules for just and unjust conduct, but are those deeper illuminations in whose light justice and injustice, good and evil, means and ends are seen in fearful sharpness of outline.

Jacob Bronowski¹

I have coined the term ‘*green*Masonry’ to focus on what I see as the principal sense of unease facing me as a Freemason. It also points to the legacy facing my children’s children if I—and others like me—do not act to persuade our decision-makers and our citizens of the need for a turnaround in our thinking.

When I began this paper over two years ago, community thinking on climate change and global warming relegated these to the fringe of politics and the realm of econuts and tree huggers—the ‘noughties’ equivalent of flower power in the sixties. Fortunately, the voices of a concerned few now seem to be seeping into our general consciousness, helped along by the ‘bandwagon effect’ engendered by mainstream politicians and the media joining the fray. With this new awareness of climate change in the community comes this *once in an aeon* opportunity for Freemasonry once more to become influential in diffusing the light of Wisdom and aiding the strength of Reason to the world at large.

Background

A singular preoccupation for Masons in many jurisdictions is the attrition in membership. This was a serious topic as long ago as 1976, when Sir Asher Joel addressed the December Grand Communication in Sydney, at the Grand Master’s invitation.²

In his address at the inaugural conference of the Australian Masonic Research Council in 1992, Harry Kellerman observed that:³

Masonic leaders and those interested in Freemasonry have watched with dismay the regular annual drop in membership throughout the world, especially during the past 25 years. It is felt that for Freemasonry to survive, this tendency has to be reversed. Perhaps it is not too much to say that today the majority of Masons interested in the Craft hold the view that our most urgent problems are how to retain the members we have and how to recruit new ones. These are the vital issues exercising the minds of Freemasons in every Masonic jurisdiction.

There have been numerous other instances of learned papers on the topic of membership attrition and how the tide can be stemmed. To date it seems that these plans and strategies have met with little or no success—whether through implementation failures, or flawed planning is not blindingly evident to me, although some evidence would suggest that flawed planning may be at the heart of the matter. In his address to the Masonic Secretaries Association⁴ in March 2008, PAGM Bill Deeley⁵ discoursed on a strategy for membership. In discussing various initiatives to arrest the decline, he stated:⁶

1 Bronowski, J: (1956) ‘Science and Human Values. 3. The Sense of Human Dignity’ in *Higher Education Quarterly* 11(1), 26–42 doi:10.1111/j.1468-2273.1956.tb00909.x.

2 Joel, A. ‘Freemasonry and Public Relations – Should it have a new look?’, address to the December 1976 Communication, UGL NSW & ACT, reprinted in *Capitol Capers* Vol XIII #9, December 2006, newsletter of Lodge Capitol #612 (NSW & ACT).

3 Kellerman, M H: ‘The challenge of the changes in membership in New South Wales’ in *AMRC Proceedings 1992*, Melbourne 1992.

4 UGL NSW & ACT.

5 Deputy Chairman, Board of Management and Membership, UGL NSW & ACT.

6 Deeley, W A: ‘A Strategy for Membership’ (unpublished), an Address to the Masonic Secretary’s Association on 7 March

There have been a number of initiatives over the past 50 years to deal with the decline in membership. With the exception of the One for Ten Program, which resulted in a slight variation in the graph, none of these initiatives resulted in any real impact on the membership decline.

These initiatives have been more about numbers than about addressing the reasons for decline. They have generally been directed at patching up our existing systems and practices, rather than going back to basics, and getting the systems right. There is also the ever present difficulty in Masonry not creating controversy, and this has stifled genuine debate.

There is no doubt that some of the things that I say this afternoon will not be readily accepted by many brethren. This is because I believe that we need change our views on many issues, and make changes to many of our procedures. No one likes change, but history has proved that those organisations that do not change in order to remain relevant, do not survive.

While Brother Deeley went on to say that he was not ‘suggesting changes to our core principles or rituals’,⁷ I wonder whether we as Masons can afford the luxury of taking such a ‘principled’ stand.

Humans, as members of organisations, seem to be averse to change although, as individuals, we deal with change every day of our lives, be it as trite as a bus not arriving at the scheduled time or as shattering as the untimely death of a loved one. When the viability of an organisation such as Freemasonry is threatened, there is invariably an assumption that the fundamentals do not need to be taken into account in planning to meet the threat. It makes it easier to sell change, but, if the root causes are not addressed, then all resulting changes provide illusory solutions. If root cause analysis reveals that the core principles of an organisation are flawed, then, unless those are corrected, solutions will continue to deal with symptoms and only delay the inevitable.

As a project manager with many years of experience in the IT industry, managing and implementing organisational change is my daily occupation. It is my experience that the concept of change is inevitably linked to ‘loss’ in one sense or another. This stems from our daily individual experiences and while ‘*change = loss*’ can be argued to be more or less true in these circumstances,⁸ it is not necessarily the case in organisational change. A change to the ‘core principles and rituals of Freemasonry’ might well result in an additive instead of a subtractive outcome. To preclude such an outcome at the outset is to deny ourselves the opportunity to trace the chain of causality in direct increments from the effect through all the layers of abstraction to a root cause that still has some connection to the original problem.

This paper is not a treatise on turning the tide of membership. While it is argued by many that nothing is more fundamental to the continuing growth of Freemasonry than a viable membership, my concern is more fundamental. Root cause analysis is not the province of the individual. It is best undertaken by key members of the organisation through using brainstorming techniques and by critically analysing each iteration of ‘cause and effect’ to verify that the cause results in the effect. I am convinced that such an analysis is needed and needs to be performed at a wider level than is customarily the case—that is, not at the jurisdictional level but across jurisdictions—for instance, across Australia and New Zealand. It would take a great deal of time, money and cross-jurisdictional commitment to plan and manage such a program.

As one individual among many in Freemasonry, what I hope to achieve is to persuade our community to think particularly about the future *for* Freemasonry, rather than the future *of* Freemasonry. My hope is that this small and, I trust, thought-provoking contribution to ANZMRC can be one spur to achieving the fundamental and concerted analysis that will provide us with long-term solutions.

Introduction

In taking the stance that *green*Masonry is a fundamental concern for Freemasonry, I do so on the basis that a concern for the well-being of our planet is fundamental to life, to our continuing existence on this planet, and that without it Freemasonry would cease to exist; so would everything else of human origin.

The scenarios for the planet are well documented and I do not intend to delve deeply into these, or into the dissenting scientific views that also abound. Suffice it to say that the mainstream view—that is, that the

2008.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ My perception is that most significant changes in the everyday lives of most people seem to be changes which result in ‘loss’ or have other negative outcomes, and cover a wide range of circumstances, for instance – meeting financial commitments, dealing with job insecurity, coping with grief at the loss of loved ones, surviving serious health issues and generally muddling through life. Windfalls are few and far between for most.

planet is in trouble—is now widely accepted by the United Nations and by governments worldwide.⁹ The mainstream view is succinctly put by the Union of Concerned Scientists (USC):¹⁰

Global warming is already under way. The evidence is vast and the urgency of taking action becomes clearer with every new scientific study. Some of the most obvious signs are visible in the Arctic, where rising temperatures and melting ice are dramatically changing the region's unique landscapes and wildlife—as well as people's lives and livelihoods. Across the globe, other early warning signs include melting glaciers, shifting ranges of plants and animals, and the earlier onset of spring.

Global warming is caused by emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases that are emitted primarily by the burning of fossil fuels and the clearing of forests. These gases remain in our atmosphere for decades or even centuries.

The profound impact rising temperatures have had in the Arctic provides a window into a future we may all experience. With continued warming, we can expect more extreme heat and drought, rising sea levels, and higher-intensity tropical storms. At risk are our coastal property and resources, the livability [*sic*] of our cities in summer, and the productivity of our farms, forests, and fisheries.

We can't avoid all the consequences of global warming, but committing ourselves to action today can help ensure our children and grandchildren inherit a healthy world full of opportunity.

It is also well to remember that the 'greenhouse effect'—the phenomenon whereby atmospheric gases trap solar energy, increasing the Earth's surface temperature—is not new to science; nor is the increase in the levels of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere. For instance:

- The French mathematician and physicist, Jean-Baptiste Joseph Fourier,¹¹ is credited with the discovery in 1824 that gases in the atmosphere might increase the surface temperature of the Earth, the effect now known as the 'greenhouse effect'; and
- In 1896 the Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius, in concert with a colleague, Arvid Högbom, noted an increase in carbon dioxide—the greenhouse gas now blamed for climate change—in the Earth's atmosphere, and ascribed the increase to the burning of fossil fuels.¹²

What is *greenMasonry*?

Such a seemingly simple question, yet the answer is both simple and complex. Let me put it this way: *Do we need Nature?* The answer to this simple question must be a blindingly obvious 'Yes!' at all levels. Do we as Freemasons need Nature? If we turn to the Second Degree¹³ in Freemasonry, then there are three examples we can draw on:

- When the candidate is invested in the Second Degree, the Master observes that he (the Craftsman) is 'expected to make the liberal arts and sciences your future study, in order that you may be better enabled to discharge your duty as a Mason and rightly estimate the works of the Almighty Creator';
- The South-East Charge to the candidate ends with 'you are now in a position to extend your researches into the hidden paths of Nature and Science';
- The candidate is earnestly recommended in the Final Charge to consider 'The study of the liberal arts and sciences, that valuable branch of education which tends so effectively to polish and adorn the mind'.

The Craftsman is also instructed to excel in all that is 'great, useful and good'. This all seems very straightforward and clear. Yet it is all left to the individual to achieve. *Achieve what?* one may ask. *Personal development—the development of the individual*, that is what the Second Degree aims to achieve as part of the Masonic process of taking a good man and making him better.

So why ask the question? Because it demands more than a simple answer and—in my opinion—demands by extension that Freemasonry, not just its individual members, should excel in all that is 'great, useful and good'.

9 The USA is one notable exception, having withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. The US has now signed up to the Bali Convention roadmap (December 2008) to launch negotiations on a new treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol which expires in 2012.

10 http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science/.

11 Better known for the *Fourier Series* and the *Fourier Transform*.

12 <http://www.aip.org/history/climate/co2.htm> (*Discovery of Global Warming site* – a site created by Spencer Weart with support from the American Institute of Physics, the National Science Foundation and the Alfred P Sloan Foundation, and hosted on the website of the Center for History of Physics of the American Institute of Physics).

13 As set out in the 2° Ritual of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

What is the purpose of Freemasonry? Is it just to take good men and make them better through the practice of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth? This is a laudable purpose and of the highest calling. It is an elegant sufficiency in times of calm seas and prosperous voyages. Is it enough, though, when we are in wildly rolling ships, with seas breaking over the decks, with driven rain and icy spindrift, a broken rudder and the looming menace of a lee shore.

Is it enough when our very existence is under threat?

The organisational arms of the many jurisdictions in Freemasonry exist to serve the current purpose of Freemasonry. These organisations set the standards against which the notions of correct Masonic behaviour are judged, and from the commonality of these standards, stemming as they do from common origins, we now have an international brotherhood of Freemasonry. Without a change in standards there is very little scope for new notions of correctness to develop. As a brotherhood, we must not just stand by in abject denial, or be ensnared in the clutches of despair as we contemplate the end. There is a middle ground between denial and despair. As the former US Vice President Al Gore said:¹⁴

what denial and despair have in common is they both let you off the hook. You don't have to do anything. And actually the mature approach is, that all of us have to take, we have to find our way to it, is to act to solve this. And we can solve it.

I contend that Freemasonry must play its part in the survival of the human species, not just through the efforts of individuals but also through its many organisational arms. Here is an untapped force for the greater good of humankind. The corollary is that if Freemasonry does not, then it will have abdicated its responsibility and, by doing so, the consequences are likely to be dire, arising from the mere, natural consequence of the accumulated actions of humankind.

On that gloomy prognostication I contend that humans need Nature, if only at one level to satisfy some primordial instinct; and at another level if only to survive and evolve with the planet. In the development of this premise, I will explore five themes, first by posing four questions:

- What is amiss with the attitude of humans towards nature?
- Is there any alternative to needing nature?
- What do we humans do now to redress the balance?
- How do we achieve a transformation in our attitude?

The first theme defines 'nature' and explores the dynamics between humans and nature, focusing on four major groupings in human society: governments, corporations, interest groups and individuals. Theme two briefly explores potential technological solutions as alternatives to nature. The essayist takes a stance, in the third theme, that humans should assume the worst until a deep and profound understanding of nature is acquired. The fourth theme—transformation—asks and answers some of the questions which humans need to ask to ensure not only their survival but also their growth.

This paper concludes simply: transform, or face extinction. Freemasonry must make a stance.

What's amiss with our attitude towards Nature?

'Woodcutter. Cut my shadow. Deliver me from the torture of beholding myself fruitless ...' So wrote Federico Garcia Lorca.¹⁵ I find the image particularly evocative in this context, and ask: 'Is humankind stripping bare of its fruit the tree of nature?'

Humans need nature, if only at one level to satisfy some primordial instinct; and at another level if only to exist. For the fortunate few—and this is a matter of perspective—there is no distinction between physiological and psychological needs. They are one with nature. Nature is life, and life is nature. We tend to call them 'primitives', when in fact they seem to have achieved, as a society, Maslow's fifth state of 'self-actualisation' in his hierarchy of needs.¹⁶

Many humans at the other end of the 'primitive-developed' continuum—the affluent and the 'comfortable ones' (and their aspirants)—would see these few primitives as eking out a tenuous existence in some forsaken, disease-ridden rat hole. Many of these 'affluents' view nature as a commodity, as a resource to be exploited. These two groups, the 'affluents' and the 'primitives', are out in the wings. Unfortunately, the number of 'primitives' continues to diminish as they are forced out of their niches by the exploitation and the destruction of their habitats, swelling the ranks of the dispossessed.

14 Interview with Andrew Denton on 'Enough Rope', ABC TV 11 September 2006.

15 Lorca, Federico Garcia: *'Canción del naranjo seco' (Song of the Withered Orange-tree)*, Penguin, J L Gili ed, 1960.

16 Maslow, A: 'A Theory of Human Motivation' in *Psychological Review* 50 (1943) pp370–96.

Occupying humankind's vast centre stage are the poor and dispossessed, most unaware of Nature, their waking hours occupied solely with the pressing needs of survival in an environment that is totally unsupportive. They are unknown to the 'primitives', and are either a problem for the 'affluents' or just another commodity to be exploited.

We see this exploitation not only in the dispossession of people's habitats in the dubious name of progress, but also as a cheap and replenishable form of energy sustained by their labour. It is an unjust and unsustainable labour which fuels the economies of the developed and developing nations. As examples, take these three instances:

- The athletic shoe produced by a factory in a developing (or third world) nation. That factory would have been accredited by the brand owner as fit to manufacture its product. It would have competed against other such accredited third world factories to win the manufacturing tender, the successful bidder being the one with the lowest price. The manufactured shoe would be sold to the brand owner at an unit cost around \$2, a sufficient return to ensure the continuing affluence of the factory owner, who belongs to his country's ruling elite. The brand owner eventually retails that \$2 product for over \$200 in the first world. One can only imagine how little those factory workers were paid for their piecework.
- We see a growing number of poor in the first world as well, as jobs are lost to the factory-fodder nations of the third world in the short-term pursuit of monetary gain.
- We see the bread baskets of the world—those great grain-growing regions of the US, Russia and Australia—using a significant proportion of their grain to feed livestock or to produce ethanol as fuel in what is a dreadful misuse of food resources. While estimates vary wildly—depending on the source—averaging the various inputs indicates that 28% of the projected US grain harvest in 2008 will be used to produce fuel for cars. Add to that the grain used to feed livestock to meet an increasing worldwide demand for meat. Per capita meat consumption in the burgeoning Chinese economy alone has more than doubled in the last twelve years—to 53 kg per person and is estimated to increase by 12% per year on a per capita basis. Applying grain needs to meat consumption, China would have required 350.1 million metric tonnes of grain in 2007 to supply livestock for its meat demands.¹⁷

I can refer readers to an excellent Canadian documentary film written by Joel Bakan, entitled 'The Corporation', which sets out with alarming clarity the exploitative power and clout wielded by industrial corporations.¹⁸ Bakan also brought out a book with the film, which is a compelling read.¹⁹

How can we humans harvest the fruits of nature in a manner which ensures that we take only what we need? That we give as much as we receive? To do so we first need to understand what is amiss with our attitude towards nature. We need to understand what truly constitutes progress. We need to dismiss any notion that technology can replace nature. We need to be aware of the consequences of our actions; and we need to transform ourselves.

What is Nature?

To understand what is amiss in our attitude towards Nature, we must ask ourselves, 'What is Nature?' There is an inference in our Western society that Nature is something that is 'out there'—an arena in which humans are pitted against Nature. Patently it is not. 'Man masters nature not by force but by understanding' is a quotation attributed to Jacob Bronowski. The concept of Gaea—that Nature is the planet and all of its systems, the biological and the physical, operating as one vast, inter-dependent web—demands understanding. Humans are just one small strand in that web. These strands interact in a dynamic and evolutionary way with each other; that much at least we are now beginning to know.

This concept of nature being something 'out there' is largely what is amiss with our attitude, and has its roots in the phenomenal ability of humans to acquire knowledge. It is an acquisition which is invariably accompanied by the arrogance that knowledge is synonymous with understanding, an arrogance which distances most humans from a true understanding of that knowledge.

We can see the accumulated legacy of that arrogance today: governments focused on short-term electoral survival; corporations focused on short-term share price gains, the yardstick by which their executives are

17 Lane, Jim ed: 'Biofuels Digest—Meat vs Fuel: Grain use in the US and China 1995-2008', April 2008 online at www.biofuelsdigest.com/MeatvsFuel.pdf, pp 9–10.

18 Zeitgeist Films: *The Corporation*, 2 DVD set, ASIN B0007DBJM8.

19 Bakan, J: *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, Free Press; US edn (2004) ISBN 978-0743247443.

judged; ‘green’ movements which are one-eyed and bloody-minded; and individuals who are apathetic. All are bound by a common thread of self-interest.

Very few of us have a vision of the future. Some of us are aware of the possible consequences of our actions. Those with the power to influence and direct humans choose not to do so for the greater good but for self-interest. When confronted with growing evidence that the planet’s ecosystems may be in trouble, they prefer to articulate a mantra that progress is the panacea for all our ills; or adopt ostrich-like attitudes in the hope that, in the fullness of political time, a diversion will occur. They usually do: war, natural disasters, terrorism—they are always welcome. O wonderful diversions!

Technology as an alternative

Is progress the panacea? Envision this fictional future: massive cities encircling the globe, housing the ever-growing human race, cities where disease is unknown, where all basic needs are met, where all products are synthesised from their constituent molecules, including the water we drink and the air we breathe. Such a future is not beyond the realms of possibility. It is only a matter of time before humans acquire the knowledge which will turn possibility into probability and, in turn, into fact.

Will nature afford humankind that time? In denial, we hold fast to the belief that humans will arise, phoenix like, from the ashes of any apocalypse. The record of extinctions does not lend credence to that view.

If we had any collective sense, we would take the worst possible view and work from that premise, leave aside the possible external agents of extinction—errant asteroids and the like—and consider *us* as the agents of our own extinction. Nature is a vast array of dynamically linked components. As a tree will shed a diseased branch to protect itself, so may nature shed humankind to ensure its own survival—Nature ridding itself of its human cancer.

Tipping the scales

Is this mere doomsaying? ‘Why do societies destroy the environment around them when they know their actions will ultimately destroy them too?’ So asks author Jared Diamond, professor of geography and physiology at the University of California, Los Angeles, in *Collapse*.²⁰

After all, nature seems to tolerate the indiscretions of humans: the destruction of forests, the pollution of air and water, the extinction of other species, and so on. What if it is not tolerance? It may well be nothing more than a fine balance between viability and catastrophe. It may be a balance which permits the indiscretions to accumulate imperceptibly, until just one more indiscretion tips the scales the wrong way and we consign ourselves to oblivion.

What if humankind is just a few indiscretions removed from catastrophe? The point is that we just do not know.

We need to know; we need to understand; and we need to change. Our very survival depends upon it. It may already be too late. Fortunately, optimism is still a human trait—not the apathetic attitudes that are often mistaken for optimism, but the optimism that gives rise to action, the optimism that infects groups, leading to a groundswell of opinion that is invariably a precursor to change.

Needing nature is not an emotional, ‘tree-hugging’ thing. Tree-hugging has its place, but it’s not going to get us to where we need to be. Needing nature needs to be an act of will—an act of will by governments, corporations, interest groups, and individuals.

Transformation

To get to where we need to be will not be easy. It will require governments, corporations and interest groups to abandon vested self-interest; to abandon apathy and embrace cooperation and harmony. It will take outstanding leadership and massive effort to leave behind the centuries-old and universal attitude of complacency, enshrined in Australia by the saying, ‘She’ll be right, mate’.

Once we have the powerbrokers on board, we can then turn our attention towards engaging the disinterested individuals. That will prove far easier, as most people prefer to be led.

Let us take that optimism and that will, and use it to evolve into the species we are capable of being. We need to take action—simultaneously—on a number of fronts.

One front is to redefine progress, to take it from the mere advancement and undisciplined application of knowledge to the wise application of knowledge. One way of defining wisdom is that the application of

20 Diamond, Jared: *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, (2005), ISBN 0-14-303655-6.

knowledge should serve only the greater good of humankind—no more the use and abuse of knowledge to furnish weapons of mass destruction.

A second front would see the diversion of resources into research to try and accelerate our understanding of the dynamics of the planet's systems. We need to be able to model scenarios and predict outcomes with a reasonable degree of accuracy before embarking on any ventures which have ecological implications.

Then there are the poor and dispossessed. We cannot engage them if they are focused on survival. We have to distribute wealth so that their basic needs are met. We have to achieve that distribution not through charity but through education and reward for effort. That means creating the opportunities and the returns, and doing it in such a way that we do not foster greed or ecological vandalism.

Finally, we need to actively put an end to blatant ecological abuse and unsustainable resource use. We have been only too willing to act aggressively against other nations on the dubious grounds that these nations possess weapons of mass destruction; or are engaged in the manufacture of certain classes of addictive drugs and so on. What more frightening weapon of mass destruction is there than our own extinction? Yet we do nothing about it.

Nature and Freemasonry—*green*Masonry

Why does Freemasonry need to engage itself in this? Let us turn this around. What is the legacy of Freemasonry? What are the monuments to its achievements? Is it the legacy of the achievements of individual Masons in Masonry; or of individual Lodges; or of the many Grand Lodges? The Masonic achievements of an individual reflect well on his Lodge. Similarly the collective achievements of a Lodge reflect well on its Grand Lodge. The achievements of a Grand Lodge reflect well on Freemasonry.

In many ways in today's age, the good that Freemasonry achieves is through a continuation of old initiatives, chiefly benevolence and charity. There is nothing *new* in Freemasonry; it is firmly rooted in its traditions. But let us not forget that speculative Freemasonry had its genesis in the eighteenth century, at a time when Western Society was quite different to what it is now.

One of the basic aims of Freemasonry was that all men, whether upper or lower class, met upon the level in the lodge. Given the very rigid class distinctions in 18th century society, this concept was truly unique and came from the very history of the fraternity. Noblemen asked to join lodges of skilled labourers who worked with their hands for a living, not the other way around. It was the exact opposite of the way elitism usually worked.

Upper and lower classes and country and city folk were now meeting together and sitting side-by-side. The concepts of politeness, manners, social graces, better speech, and the value of intellect started to rub off on men who'd never given it much thought before. This was the origin of the notion that Freemasonry's purpose was to take good men and make them better. The concept of gentility began to grow and spread. It was one thing to be tolerant of a man's views if you knew him well, but it was an enormous change to extend that tolerance to men you'd never met before. As James Anderson stated in the Book of Constitutions, 'Masonry becomes the Centre of Union, and the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must have remain'd at a perpetual Distance.'²¹

We know that the values of Freemasonry inspired many people to become agents of change and must have contributed to the revolutionary thinking of a number of individuals who wrought change in Society. Freemasonry was *avant-garde* then, and should continue to be so now. It was, perhaps, the forerunner of modern representative democracy. It was risk accepting. Is Freemasonry now risk averse? Where is Freemasonry now in terms of thought leadership?

We all dig ourselves into positions from time to time, and then defend them as a fortress, as we would a fortress, and the best leaders are ones that know when to change, and when to move into the future.²²

Has Freemasonry dug itself into a corner?

An idea propounded by Jeffrey Marshall and reproduced in *Harashim*,²³ is that Freemasonry is a meme. He gave two definitions of the term:

21 Hodapp, C: *Freemasonry for Dummies*, p33, Wiley 2005, ISBN 0-7645-9796-5.

22 Al Gore in an interview with Andrew Denton on 'Enough Rope', ABC TV 11 September 2006.

23 Pope, Tony ed: *Harashim* (ANZMRC quarterly newsletter), #17, January 2001, pp11–12.

- A meme is an idea, behaviour, style or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture.²⁴
- Memes are the basic building blocks of our minds and culture, in the same way that genes are the basic building blocks of biological life.²⁵

Marshall went on to state that ‘a meme is an idea that propagates from person to person, and may—depending upon the properties of the meme—shape a society’; and that ‘Successful memes possess fidelity, fecundity and longevity’. He went on to define fidelity as ‘the message, throughout the generations of copies, remains true or nearly true to the original source’; fecundity as ‘the message spreads widely and rapidly’; and longevity as ‘the message remains in the cultural mind-set for a long time, continuing to influence and, I think, be influenced by, the culture’. Using these building blocks, Marshall went on to expound why he considers Freemasonry to be a meme.

The meme theme is a very powerful proposition and resonates strongly with me. *greenMasonry* can be a meme. It has the power to influence and be influenced by the cultures it is embedded in. *greenMasonry* pushes the boundaries of the basic tenets of Freemasonry. How can we better convey Brotherly Love than by caring for the environment in which we all share, and by doing all we can, by legitimate means, to ensure that our voices are heard. Relief needs to be more than that which it is now taken to be, that of charity. The definition of ‘relief’ as ‘help and assistance given, to those in poverty or need’²⁶ can surely encompass the poverty and need that stem from environmental damage—not only treating the symptoms but also looking beyond the symptoms to eradicate the cause. The essence of Truth is ‘being in accordance with the actual state of things’.²⁷

We are all afraid for our confidence, for the future, for the world. That is the nature of the human imagination. Yet every man, every civilisation, has gone forward because of its engagement with what it has set itself to do.

So said Jacob Bronowski. So let us set for ourselves a Second Age of Enlightenment in Freemasonry. By expanding its tenets to include the fundamental issues facing humanity now, Freemasonry can attract the forward-thinking philosophers, artists, scientists and scholars of today, and rekindle the fires that were the hallmark of Freemasonry in that first Age of Enlightenment.

A Cautionary Note

It was with interest that my attention was drawn to a paper entitled ‘The Middle Path’ by Kristopher Stevens.²⁸ The following passage was particularly interesting:

In addition to this challenge, another threat to the status quo is arising in North America, the formation of the Grand Orient of the United States of America (GOUSA),²⁹ allied with the Grand Orient of France. This masculine obedience has established amity with mixed-gender and feminine obediences and has, with its clearly defined principles, begun to address the concerns and disillusionment held by some ex and current members of ‘mainstream’ Freemasonry:

Our cause is the intellectual, spiritual and social advancement of humanity. To accomplish these aims we have established the following guiding principles for Free-Masonry:

1. We believe in the freedom of conscience of all people, and that it is an essential component of liberty, equality and fraternity.
 2. We believe in and support the separation of religion and government, and promote religious and spiritual tolerance among all people.
 3. We believe in and support the freedom of the press as a necessary component of maintaining the inalienable rights of all human beings, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
 4. We believe in and support the need for higher education and life-long learning.
 5. We believe in and support an impartial judiciary system as essential to guaranteeing the preservation of human rights.
 6. We believe in and support the arts and sciences as essential elements in the progress and evolution of humanity.
 7. We believe in and support efforts that work towards global environmental and ecological sustainability as essential to the survival of the human species.
- (GOUSA, 2007)

24 ‘The Power of Memes’ in *Scientific American*, October 2000.

25 <http://www.memecentral.com>

26 *Macquarie Dictionary*, rev edn 1985.

27 *ibid.*

28 Stevens, K: ‘The Middle Path—Finding the Centre of a Circle’, p4, paper submitted to Heritage Lodge of Research #730 GRC, Ontario, Canada, March 2008.

29 The Grand Orient of the United States of America can be found at www.grandorientusa.org.

Unlike the author, I do not see this as a ‘threat’, as I hold to the view that the greater good of humanity must take precedence over all else. The author’s paper is arguing a particular case and his ‘threat’ must be seen in that context. I do not see it as a ‘leadership’ contest either. Leadership needs to come from all facets of society and all facets of Freemasonry—whether in amity or not.

Conclusion

*green*Masonry is not a political concept. Our survival as a species transcends politics. *green*Masonry is not an ideological concept. It transcends ideologies. *green*Masonry is. That is it—no tags, no labels—just ‘is’.

In a paper to the Cornerstone Society, the Pro Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England stated:³⁰

We are all brothers on this same journey, a journey leading to self knowledge and ultimately perfection. The American poet, Emerson, described it as a journey of ‘ascending effort’. And as we climb higher on the path we are helped by those brethren who are ahead of us and in turn encourage those who are behind. Freemasonry is a system without dogma or doctrine which signposts, through the interpretation of its symbols, the journey we must all make. It is a template for the evolution of human consciousness and as such is a progressive science of becoming – becoming something greater than we are now. It has various set stages for our development. A high moral code of ethical behaviour is the essential condition on which our journey is founded, and that includes the need to be in control of our emotions, our passions and desires. This is followed by the importance of education and the training of our reason and intellect as a force for good in the world. When these conditions are fulfilled and we are truly centred as human beings, our hearts open to the great potential which is at once the birthright and destiny of the human race. For as we climb higher we become wiser and can see further and more clearly what is the purpose of our life, and what the Great Architect has planned for us. That is the great mystery of Freemasonry which all of us are destined to rediscover.

*green*Masonry is all of the foregoing. What better organisation is there to be at the forefront for change than Freemasonry, spread as it is over the surface of this planet. The choices are simple for Freemasonry. The choices are few for humanity. choose nature; or choose an epitaph.

Epitaph

We humans need to transform ourselves from a factional, squabbling, self-interested and self-aggrandising rabble to being a cohesive, nurturing collective. Some are taking small steps now. To achieve transformation, we need to start taking many more small steps, now, and deliver the withered orange tree from beholding itself fruitless.

I once wrote an epitaph for the human race:³¹

*Unremembered now –
Once did we humans live, where
rats and roaches rule.*

I wrote it in the fervent hope that it would never come true and that—when the nuclear fires which fuel our solar system are eventually extinguished—we will have weaned ourselves from our dependence on Mother Earth and will have scattered our seed amongst that glittering diadem of stars which crowns the heavens.

How terrible; how wasteful; how utterly devoid of hope is the alternative.

30 Lord Northampton: ‘Whither Directing our Course’, p5, The Cornerstone Society, www.cornerstonesociety.com.

31 A reaction to an article I read in 2003 on the destruction of the Amazon rainforest.