

Causes of Waning Interest

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If we are to conduct a study along the lines of membership and attendance of every individual Masonic Lodge in this jurisdiction, we shall find that both can be represented by a very irregular graph, at times going up, at times going down. When conditions are favorable and attractive, membership and attendance tend to rise and when conditions are unfavorable, the opposite occurs. There are Lodges which some years ago were teeming in attendance, but today they can hardly meet for lack of quorum. On the other hand, a few years ago, there were Lodges which could hardly meet due to poor attendance, but today they are very active and may be said to be the pride of the Fraternity. But will this be permanent? Experience has taught us that they are temporary and "seasonal". Many reasons for these may be cited. For the present, I propose to dwell on the negative side of the issue by enumerating a few reasons why interest in Masonry is declining among many members of the Craft, all of which, however, can still be remedied if only the brethren will govern themselves accordingly — as they should. No amount of effort from the brethren, no amount of power (except Divine power) can solve the problem of waning interest in Masonry among the brethren, unless they themselves come to realize their shortcomings, remember their OBs towards their Lodges and towards their brethren. Some of the outstanding reasons why a considerable number of brethren became inactive, lost interest in attending Lodge meetings and risked suspension for non-payment of dues may be cited, thus:

1. *Some members of the Craft, when they grow up in stature in public life or in public office, become unapproachable, particularly to ordinary members.* In more appropriate terms, they cease to be on the level. This, to a great extent, causes disappointment among sensitive members, who come to believe that in Masonry, although a universal institution and founded under the theory of the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God, class distinctions exist which separate the elite from the non-elite. The non-elite feel that they are only remembered when a crowd is needed, when a count is to be made and when their support is needed for certain objectives to glorify the elite members in their quest for more glories and personal edification and self-aggrandizement.

2. *Moral cowardice among some members who fear persecution by church leaders.* This is exemplified by a few politicians, who are afraid to lose votes because of religious ire and persecution. Some are even afraid of the very thought of the refusal of the local Parish Priest to bury them in the Catholic cemetery when they die, and thus be separated from the remains of the members of their families. As a consequence, they sacrifice and give up their Masonic beliefs and convictions, for the peace of mind of the members of their families and of their own. Casual observations made in the homes of the brethren show, that less than fifty per cent of the members of the Craft, hang their Masonic Diplomas in conspicuous places of their homes. They

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are either still rolled and kept inside their lockers or displayed only in their private rooms where no visitors will take notice of them. The reason is obvious, to hide them from the view of people who may ridicule and criticize his being a member of the Masonic Fraternity. Is this not moral cowardice, hiding their identities instead of being proud of it, ready to be counted, and above all to defend it against its enemies. While there is yet time, it will be for the benefit of the Order and of these types of members themselves, that they should at once choose the way they want to travel — stick with us or stray from us for good. After all, the Craft needs only members with sincere Masonic feelings in their hearts and a firm belief in their convictions, not those who easily bend to pressure and harassment by evil forces tending to undermine our institution.

3. *Lack of positive and effective leadership among some Lodge officers:* They only meet with the brethren inside the tyled Lodge and nowhere else. They should go out of their way and far, to effect fraternal contact with the brethren outside the Lodge. They should be the cohesive force to bind and unite the brethren. The brethren look upon their officers for proper guidance as well as for brotherly love all the time. When the officers neglect these, it becomes difficult to maintain harmony, unity and zeal in the Fraternity. The brethren expect of their officers extra efforts, extra sacrifices, if only to produce results that will promote the best interest of the Order.

4. *Lack of sincerity among many brethren in joining the Fraternity:* Some join for curiosity, while some for convenience, and still some for mercenary motives. This can be traced since the early days of Masonry in the Philippines. When the late President Manuel L. Quezon was very

active in Masonry during his days, many influential men joined the Fraternity to court his favor for good positions in the government. When he died many Masons taded away from the Fraternity. Look for a government office today whose head is an active Mason. Sooner or later you will see many of his subordinates join Masonry. Then when the same head of the office comes down from his chair, many of his subordinates who joined the Fraternity because of his being in a high position, become inactive one after the other. Some people only join the Fraternity because they are planning to travel or study abroad, in order to enjoy the care and protection of all Mason withersoever dispersed. When they return home after enjoying their travels, they do not even make it a point to report to the Lodge or to attend its meetings. Such is the motive of some of our members, although fortunately, they are but few in number. For a fact, they are merely members of the Lodge, but not Masons in the strict definition of the word, in their hearts or in their spirits.

5. *Majority of the brethren find the Lodge too monotonous for them when not given assignments and have nothing to do inside the Lodge.* They feel that they are not important when they do not participate in the floor work. Some brethren are in the habit of monopolizing the work to the neglect of others. What is more disconcerting is the fact that some brethren think that they are the only ones in sole possession of the knowledge of Masonry and the rituals. The habit of correcting others during ceremonies, causes embarrassment and confusion on the part of the corrected brother. While it is necessary that a brother be helped when he needs it, in the course of the ritual, it should only be given when he asks for it and should be in whispers inaudible to the candidate. Everybody should be en-

couraged to study and participate in Lodge work, if interest in the Fraternity is to be preserved and maintained and attendance improved.

6. *Lack of punctuality*: Many members become impatient and disgusted when the Lodge cannot meet on time due to late comers and poor attendance. We should realize and consider the fact that most of the members of the Craft are busy people and time is very valuable to them. By the irregularity of some in coming to the Lodge, the entire Lodge suffers, some members lose their zeal and interest in utter disgust. This can be corrected, easily, if the brethren will only remember that punctuality is not only a virtue, but also a Masonic duty towards his brethren and to the Lodge of which he is a member.

7. *Un-Masonic conduct of some brethren outside the Lodge*: The fraternity is replete with records of un-Masonic conduct committed by some brethren. Immorality of some members, *even among those whom the OB specifically forbids*, are committed many a time. Some have been accused of un-Masonic conduct, some are just tolerated, some are just forgotten and written on the four winds of heaven. The effect to the Fraternity is fatal and the damage incalculable. Drunkenness, excessive gambling and abuse of fraternal confidence are common Masonic offenses — all leading towards the derogation of this ancient and honorable Fraternity. If we do not guard against these un-Masonic actions by some members of the Craft, we will some day, and soon perhaps, find ourselves not only dwindling in number, but also ridiculed by the public.

8. *Lack of proper decorum among some brethren inside the Lodge*: They make the Lodge a place to practice their oratorical prowess, like politicians, to the annoyance of the more

sensible and seasoned members. The Lodge should not be the place for bombastic speeches and grandstand play. Some even make it a place to chat and make jokes, even when the Lodge is at labor. They forget the fact that solemnity which is one of the ancient customs and usages of the Craft, should be observed and maintained in all our ceremonies.

9. *Many members, when they reach the higher degrees and become affiliated with appendant bodies, lose interest in the Blue Lodge, to devote most of their time to the higher bodies*. This should not be the case, because the moment the foundation of an edifice is shaken the entire structure will collapse.

10. *Some members expect too much from both the Lodge and the brethren in the way of material assistance, and failing to obtain what they want, lose interest and fade away*. Thus, a brother trying to have his child admitted in our Masonic Hospital, but failed because of a contagious illness with which the child is afflicted, got disappointed and lost interest in Masonry. A brother who failed to obtain a promotion under his Chief, who is also a brother, got disappointed and lost faith in the sincerity of many brethren. A contractor brother, who failed to have his voucher passed in audit by the Auditor who is also a brother, because of some auditing requirements which must first be complied with, blamed Masonry for not getting what he wanted. Of course the above-cited cases are unreasonable, bordering on un-Masonic conduct. We should always bear in mind that our critics do not distinguish between founded and unfounded innuendoes — all they are interested in is the downfall of Freemasonry. Brethren, let us face the facts squarely. Let us all combine our forces to promote interest in the Fraternity. △