

Presentation for Tabula Rasa Lodge = Rewriting the Fellowcraft degree.

Opening

During Grand Lodge this year I had a chance to spend some quality time with WB Larry Jacobsen whom is also on the Education Committee. We were discussing the topic of this years breakfast which was "Is Masonry Still Relevant?" We were talking about how the discussion would go and what arguments could be used both for and against. As is often the case with Larry and I, we drifted off topic and began to really look at the basis for the Fellowcraft degree. (In the interest of fairness, I have to reveal that both Larry and I find the FC degree to be the most interesting!)

Larry pointed out two very interesting things about the FC degree. His main premise was that the information chosen for the second section lecture was relevant during the 17th century to be called an intelligent man. Science was still a fledgling subject and schooling certainly was not universal. He pointed out that the 5 orders of architecture portion was nearly a word for word lift from Vitruvius's Book (Book title here). The 7 Liberal arts were also chosen to stay in line with a classic Greek liberal education and would be subjects that most men might never contemplate in their lives. The section on the human senses which may have been "new" in those days, has little to offer to today.

In the end, we thought that it might be worthwhile to try to imagine what would be important i.e. relevant; to teach if one was to rewrite the second section lecture today. After-all, as Larry pointed out: "...this stuff didn't come down to us on stone tablets."

To that end, I did some thought experiments (nice way to say day dreaming) and offer up the following ideas. To be sure, these show only my biases, the stage I am at as a man and a Mason. They are offered for your examination and as a springboard for your own thoughts.

Body = The New Orders and Arts!

The 5 Orders of Philosophy

The unexamined life is not worth living according to Plato and I have to agree. Like it or not we live in a society dominated by Western thoughts and traditions. I feel it' important to know our roots. It also makes the must of the rest of ritual make more sense if you have a grounding in Philosophy. So here they are:

1. History of Philosophy
 - a. The major players
 - b. The major schools and thoughts that built our society
 - c. The major / basic concepts of philosophy

2. Ontology = What exists? The nature of existence (get better definition)
3. Epistemology = The nature of knowledge and what can we know? (definition better)
4. Metaphysics = The BIG questions; why are we here? What is our purpose?
5. World Philosophy = Asian, Native American, etc.

I'm not sure this is the final or even the best list. Just one I propose for thought. So much of our basic society is based on the great philosophers that it seems like a key subject to me. Additionally, much of the intent and even the text of the ritual "borrows" from these rich traditions.

The Seven Liberal Arts

This one gave me a lot of trouble. Having had a very limited formal education but having spent hours and hours reading and learning in an attempt to overcome that fact, I found it hard to focus on just seven. I kept looking back at the original seven and felt that they were still somewhat relevant and perhaps just needed to be updated. What are really the key "arts" a man should know for this stage of his life? Ask 100 people, get 100 answers. Nonetheless, here is my list:

1. World Religions = More so today than any time in the past, we live in a world of differing views. And these views are no longer just academic but affect our lives in many ways. While in 17th century England it would have been very unusual to live next to or work with a Muslim, for example, it is very common today. Understanding the differences and similarities of the major world religions is key to living in today's world.
2. Communication = In the original seven Rhetoric was seen as essential. If we use this term in the pure or Greek sense then it is still relevant. A man needs to understand how to communicate but not just in a convincing manner but in a variety of situations that never occurred to the ancient Greeks or to Preston. So communication can take in public speaking, interpersonal relations and more.
3. Critical Thinking = This is an update of Logic. While classical logic is still very useful, making it relevant to today's man is a bit more difficult. However, the skill of critical thinking is sorely lacking in today's society. We see daily in our home towns, our leaders and ourselves the consequences of poor critical thinking. Learning how to make the right decisions, have a firm set of beliefs and being able to compare incoming information for the truth is one of the most important tasks of today's man. Socrates did not have to contend with 5th Ave. Marketeers!
4. Ethics = All one has to do is read the daily newspaper to see that this is a subject that apparently has become one of the "lost" arts. Enron, politics, the family. Everywhere, in all aspects of life, our ethics are tested and retested. Understanding what eth-

ics are and how to use them in your life will go a long ways towards changing our society for the better.

5. Geometry = Had to leave this one alone as it is the basis for the allegories of our ritual. By studying the 5 orders of philosophy, one will naturally see why and how Geometry was chosen.

6. The Arts = While the study of music certainly tied in with the mathematical bent of the ritual, a study of all the forms of art will make one better rounded and more flexible in living in today's multi cultural world.

The arts would cover:

- a. Music
- b. Visual arts
- c. Literature

7. Science = Various studies have shown that the US has the lowest understand of basic science among the industrialized nations. This lack of a grasp of basic science leads to being easily defrauded not only with "miracle products" but with "miracle" beliefs as well. A firm grasp of science along with keeping up to date with basic discovery and thought will not only keep the mind growing but help keep one grounded in the other 6 arts.

Finish = Call to Action

Part of the growth process of any Mason should be thinking about the things we learn in ritual within the context of their own knowledge. This list represents the outcome of a fun thought experiment to be sure, but it also is a gauge of where I am as a person and as a Mason

So I issue this challenge. Take a piece of paper and pen and sit down with a cup of your favorite beverage and make up your own new list of Arts and Orders. I think you'll find it to be both entertaining and very instructive.