

In Defense of Appendant Organizations; Settling the Competition with the Lodges

Bro. William Boyd, PM, SW
Valley-Hi Lodge #1407, San Antonio, TX
Helotes Lodge #1429, Helotes, TX
Somerset Lodge #1205, Somerset, TX

((This paper was read on the “Whence Came You” Podcast on October 5, 2020))

Who will speak openly in defense of appendant organizations? Who will justify organizations that lure our active brothers from our lodges when our lodges are in need of attention and assistance? This is a common charge I hear against appendant organizations and I will make the case in defense of these masonic organizations.

Let me be up front with one point; I do not like the term “appendant bodies” as we use it today. The term appendant connotes appendages that hang off the main body and may or may not be crucial to the survival of the host. In contemporary use, we include York Rite, Scottish Rite, and the Orders of the Knights Templar in this catch-all term and it is this usage to which I object.

I would prefer to refer to the blue lodges, Scottish Rite, York Rite, and Order of Knights Templar as the masonic bodies, and all of the other organizations as exactly that – masonic organizations. I think this properly delineates their roles and positions relative to the main body of masonry. Now, armed with the filter through which I view this matter, it’s on to the point of this discussion.

We each arrived at the west gate with varying levels of knowledge of what laid beyond. It was our choice, we were the ones in search and we alone made the decision to knock upon the door. We were curious, and we were exhilarated by the possibilities that waited. Once we entered, we discovered we had not arrived at a destination; rather we were at the beginning of a journey, our journey of our own self-discovery and improvement.

We absorbed the lessons the blue lodges provide and these are lessons filled with hints and clues to more doors and more lessons beyond. If we paid very close attention, the lessons provided through the third degree told us explicitly the masonic story continued beyond what we would be able to experience in our blue lodge.

Once we completed our lessons from those first three foundational degrees, we found ourselves at the very first fork in the road of our individual journeys. Some of us found our masonic hearts and souls in lodge – instructing, conferring degrees, going through the line, and administering to the brethren. Others of us, however, were searching for something else; more of the story, the meaning behind the story, and how we might apply our newly-acquired knowledge to our lives in an increasingly complex and fast-paced society.

We learned there are other, additional masonic bodies that provide additional lessons and build upon what we'd learned in our blue lodge; more pieces of the mosaic. For a growing number of men arriving at our west gate today, the story and the associated lessons are basis of their journeys from the very first lesson experienced by way of the first degree, all the way through to the final lesson offered through the several masonic bodies.

It is an undeniable desire of many brothers to gather more of the story, adding pieces to the masonic mosaic as they are drawn along the path that eventually takes them to and through the remaining masonic bodies. It is how brothers meet new brothers and expand their masonic network and universe as they go. This, my brothers, is the essence of traveling.

The York Rite, the Scottish Rite, and the Orders of the Knights Templar provide those necessary lessons that complete the masonic mosaic that we represent through “the story”. It is through this cumulative, allegorical story that we learn, understand, and relate our lessons. My brethren, the only way to receive those lessons is through the degree work offered by those masonic bodies.

This brings me to a question at the heart of the debate over the role of the masonic bodies and masonic organizations: “is masonry about the blue lodge, or is it about the mason”? This question is not without controversy or emotion, but the answer I most embrace helps us properly place “appendant bodies” within the fraternity.

If masonry itself, as a fraternal organization, is about the blue lodge, it then is about the construction and maintenance of the basic infrastructure we provide to induct new masons and inculcate the three essential masonic lessons. We invest much of our time, labor, and love in this effort because we understand the unquestionable need of a functioning west gate. It is our home; it is where we and our worthy brothers enter into the craft. It is, in fact, our first unifying experience where we meet our new brothers upon the level.

If, on the other hand, masonry is about the mason, it then is about the story and the mason's journey. It is about the ways and means for the mason to receive the lessons and effect changes in his life and philosophy as he assembles his masonic mosaic. It is about the personal and fraternal connections the mason makes along the way; continually growing and nurturing

his personal masonic universe and knowledge. Finally, it is about the mason's relationship with his creator and with mankind; his role, his responsibilities, and his fidelity.

I submit to you that the answer *must* be that it is about both and that the two philosophies are inseparable. While our blue lodges are our common bond within and across the fraternity, they are indispensable in the life and continuation of freemasonry itself! And the mason, through his journey is indispensable in growing and nurturing the fraternity through gaining and sharing knowledge, exhibiting his passions, and exciting the imagination of his brothers.

Within the natural order of our fraternity, we have brethren who find their masonic soul and home within the blue lodge and may not fully understand why some brothers have a natural urge to travel. We also have brethren with that innate curiosity that leads them to travel and may not understand why other brothers are satisfied by their love of their lodge and the rewards that blue lodge has to offer. Here, then, is the root of a perceived competition between our lodges and the other masonic bodies.

Because neither of these beliefs or preferences is wrong, nor is one more correct than the other, our charge must be to marry these philosophical approaches to the ultimate benefit all of masonry!

We see, and have seen that when a brother's thirst for masonic substance goes unfulfilled, they eventually wander off in pursuit of satisfaction. It is how the lodges react and address these cases that determine the effect on the lodges. Those who choose to travel and whose increased knowledge and additional experiences are put to work in the lodge are likely to feel immediate value and experience tangible benefits from their journey and from the application of their new lessons.

However, those who travel and do not find a way to apply their knowledge and experiences within a blue lodge are likely to increase their participation in other masonic bodies while reducing their participation in their lodges.

I would offer this simple but significant example; some brothers who have experienced the York Rite and/or Scottish Rite degrees are often eager to explain and discuss the esoteric meaning of the three blue lodge degrees with candidates, increasing their appreciation for their lessons and exciting their passion for learning. Brothers bringing this type of experience to lodge, along with a passion for learning and sharing information, provide the lodge with potential mentors to excite new masons and stimulate curiosity among the lodge members. Lodges stand to reap great rewards by engaging their traveling brothers and fitting their talents into the critical work of the lodges. But, and this is important, it is also true that you may not know what a traveling brother may have or want to contribute, or even the length of his cable tow until you ask!

After much thought on this matter, I submit that we do not really have a question of whether appendant bodies harm the lodges or whether there should or should not be appendant organizations. I propose that what we do have is a challenge to acknowledge and effectively manage the equities between the brethren, the lodges, and the masonic bodies to share the benefits that each contributes to masonry. We need the full corpus of masonry going forward, as one fraternity with several distinct bodies which complement each other with lessons, knowledge, opportunities, and rewards for the brothers who choose to travel. It is up to each mason how he applies his knowledge, tools, and time and it is up to the lodges to effectively utilize the knowledge, tools, and time that traveling brothers have to offer. If we resolve the perceived competition between lodges and the other masonic bodies we will, at the same, time strengthen the corpus of masonry even as we are challenged by an unpredictable future.

Be safe my brethren and remember, always reach beyond your grasp!

I remain sincerely and fraternally yours,

Bro. William Boyd