

## **Masonic Titles: Their Use And Misuse**

By

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As I commenced preparing this paper, no title was thought of or assigned. It was my thinking that perhaps a fitting one would become evident as time, research, thoughts and words came more readily to mind and were set forth herein.

At the outset let me state it is a great privilege you have accorded me in permitting the presentation of this paper. I had a small part in the formation of this Lodge and before application was made to the Grand Master to permit its organization as a Lodge Under Dispensation, it became necessary to obtain, among other things, the permission of the Brother whose name would be assigned. How did he wish it shown? Doug Smith Lodge, A.D. Smith, Jr. Lodge, Alfred Douglas Smith? When I posed that question to Brother Smith he replied [and while these may not be the exact words, their content is close to the original], "I've been A. Douglas Smith, Jr. for the majority of my Masonic career and in business. That is how I would prefer you name the Lodge." That was the information needed so I replied, "A. Douglas Smith, Jr. Research Lodge." That brought for a loud NO. "A. Douglas Smith, Jr. Lodge of Research, and when numbered I'd like it to be 1949, the year in which I was privileged to serve as Grand Master for the time being. There are any number of Research Lodges; I'd prefer one bearing my name to be a Lodge of Research. There is a difference, you know."

Our namesake did not wish to be part of a Lodge steeped in pomp and circumstance, ceremony, ritualistic perfection. His great desire was to see this Lodge develop to a high state with members whose acquired knowledge about Freemasonry was far above and beyond that of the ritual. His one wish was that its members would be of a stripe that would go forth and teach others who were Masons in name only and change them from member to Master Mason. I shall always cherish the memory of those hours spent with my friend and Brother, our Lodge namesake. I delighted to listen attentively as he spoke and soak in Masonic knowledge in like manner as a dry and thirsty sponge. Brother Doug

was one willing to share his knowledge with any Mason, whomsoever, willing to listen.

In the early years of this Lodge of Research, when it was in its stage of learning to stand, then walk before it commenced to run, one of the first things told to those who were then to be its charter members was — it now becomes one of your duties and responsibilities to prepare a Masonic-related research paper and present it to this body. It may be long, it may be short, but it must be the result of your individual effort. It may be simple, it need not sound scholarly, it will receive a mark neither good nor bad, and you will always be applauded for it. It shall receive no criticism although you may be asked questions to support what you have produced and discussion will oft times follow. All were informed that none of this is done to wound their feelings or make them feel ridiculous in the eyes of their brethren. [Now that is a phrase familiar to each of us.] Such is the nature of research and the presentation of its product.

When our Master inquired as to who would prepare a paper for this upcoming meeting now at hand, silence reigned supreme. No one indicated a willingness to expend some effort for our edification and attention. Why was this? I do not pretend to know that answer. So I have volunteered, and here you are. A primary reason for my having volunteered was, I think, concern upon hearing someone in another Masonic-related body, I will not name the good Brother, remark to the effect that we should get rid of the "dead wood" and bring in new blood. That Brother's statement seemed to demonstrate a lack of knowledge about just how much those in that "dead wood" category had in years previous contributed liberally for our benefit as well as that of the Craft in general. I trust we shall not hear such remarks in this Lodge any time soon. Let us **not** attempt to weed out anyone or point finger at non-producers who have entered the sunset years of life. Such is indeed unbecoming at the very least. There are better and more appropriate ways to discreetly handle any matter such as this, and that is

to dig in and do a bit of research yourself. After all, research is a part of the name of this Lodge, the very reason and purpose for its being. As is often the case, when one is researching he moves from one subject to another before finally arriving at a title for his presentation. Any one of the several subjects which shall surface in what I say today could turn into a research paper, but at the moment I have deliberately chosen to lump them all together into one, amalgamated as it may be.

Not too very long ago, and so help me I've searched high and low but cannot find it, I read a statement with words similar to these: "Many famous Masons state that there are more anti-Masons in our lodges than without them." True or false, I know not, but I am beginning to lean toward the true side of such thinking. We have members of our beloved Freemasonry today who desire to change it, to turn it into something more like the Rotary Club, or the Kiwanis, or the like. If that doesn't smack of anti-Masonry, I can't think of a better name. There are Freemasons today who desire change for the sake of change and would introduce innovations. They would, for example, admit into the Shrine those who **are not** Masons.

A few months ago, I was engaged in a discussion on one of the Masonic Forums in the world of cyberspace, and responding to such a pronouncement I tendered this bit of information: "At the Seminar School of Instruction held in Houston, Texas on March 27-28, 1967 with our own, then local, Orville F. Rush as Imperial Potentate, Shrine Law was one subject broached and a portion of that printed report made on its page 58 follows: Quote ....in beginning a discussion of Shrine law, it must be observed, at the outset, that the Shrine is not a Masonic Order. It is an organization of Masons, an allied or appendant order, and as such its members are subject to the Masonic Law and to the lawful orders and edicts of Grand Lodges and Grand Masters' .....Unquote. The Shrine is an Incorporated body, Lodges are not.

During the course of the banter which followed, one brother asked: "If the Shrine is not a Masonic group and is in no way related to Freemasonry, then why is it open only to Masons? [and....] What about those guys who keep using the term 'Shrine Masons'?" Another, a sitting Master in an unnamed lodge, posed this question: "Should the Shrine be **forced** to

continue along the path that Masonry has so **unfortunately** chosen?" To this last remark, another stated flatly that "he deserves credit for supporting innovation and change." Perhaps from these last remarks you can see how it is that I am beginning to believe there are in fact anti-Masons in our midst. I don't mean in this very room — I'm referring to Masonic membership at large.

I subscribe and hold fast to the proposition that **every one** who has been so fortunate as to have been elected, installed and served in the office of Master of a lodge is bound forever by all those "you agree, you promise (and) you submit" to those ancient charges and regulations enumerated by the Installing Officer, which pointed out the duties of a Master to which each has answered "I do" or "Yes" during that ceremony. It wasn't just for that particular time, and the agreement did not cease when the Master's successor had been installed. In my mind, the professed agreement remains as binding as the obligations we each took upon ourselves at the altar when we received the degrees conferred in the Symbolic Lodge. If those obligations were meaningless, then too were the assents of a Master to maintain and support the ancient charges and regulations of Freemasonry.

Now back to that Master who deserved "credit for supporting innovation and change." Could it be possible that he was so anxious to assume the Oriental Chair that no serious attention was being paid as the Installing Officer named off those ancient charges and regulations? And did he assent to them with his fingers crossed behind his back? No one knows for certain. But I drew particular attention to Number 11 in our Virginia ceremony.

"11. You admit that it is not in the power of any man, or body of men, to make innovations in the body of Masonry." With the exception that our word "admit" has replaced the word "agree," it is precisely as set forth on page 114 of Thomas Smith Webb's Monitor which was published in 1797. Henry Wilson Coil on page 358 of his Masonic Encyclopedia, 1995 revised edition, has included these additional words following Masonry: "without the Consent first obtained from the Annual Grand Lodge." On June 24, 1723, that wording having been presented to Grand Lodge in England for approval, it was moved and carried as just stated and has continued in effect to this time.

I experienced an obligation to speak out with the courage of my convictions. And I drew attention to the concluding statement which follows the 15 agree, promise and submit declarations: “These are the regulations of Free and Accepted Masons. Do you submit to, and promise to support them, as Masters have done in all ages before you?” To which the newly installed Master answers, “Yes” or “I do.”

By agreeing to the “no innovations in the body of Masonry,” a Master is forever bound to keep and preserve that and all of the agrees, promises and admits to which he subscribed while being installed. That does not mean so-called innovations and changes never occur — it means that for such to happen, approval of the Grand Lodge in Annual Communication must be first obtained. During recess of that body, the Grand Master is the Grand Lodge, and while he is charged to administer laws but may not change or make new ones, he may issue Edicts and render Decisions, which, in order to retain their effect beyond his term in office, must be **reported to and approved** by the Grand Lodge when next in session. It means, further, that I as an individual, or my lodge as a body of men, is prohibited from entering innovations of our own accord into the body of Masonry.

All the suggested changes and gimmicks proposed by those dreaming up innovations brought to mind words written by a great Mason, now deceased, the Most Worshipful Dwight L. Smith, Past Grand Master and at the time they were written the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Indiana. He had enumerated ten prescriptions so often heard and said that in order to be workable they must meet his acid test. To him the acid test always must be, “does the prescription comply with the fundamental usages, customs, philosophy and purpose of Ancient Craft Freemasonry, or would it necessitate a change in the character of our Craft which would make it something other than Freemasonry?” Those words uttered nearly thirty years ago are as true today as they were then, and you may find them on page 3 of his booklet *Why This Confusion In The Temple* available from the Masonic Service Association.

Now to the reason for Shrine membership having the requirement that each petitioner be a Master Mason who has further traversed either the Scottish Rite or Royal Arch Chapter and Commandery routes. “Why

is it open only to Masons?” Because it was organized by Freemasons in New York City, September 25, 1872, based on a legendary Mohammedan Mystic Shrine, said to have had its origin in A.D. 656 and they, the organizers, **chose and specifically stated** that it should be for Freemasons only. Its slogan is “Mirth is King,” and, the “Fool’s Prayer” furnishes its creed and doctrine. It is not a degree and, the knowledgeable Shrine or Shriner-himself will agree **it is not** Masonic. Origin of the term “Shrine Mason” remains to me a mystery still to be discovered. Better to just say “I am a Shriner.”

Now on to another subject: Masonic titles — their use and mis-use.

When various brethren have been asked to introduce themselves, have you not heard one respond “Worshipful John Doe, Worshipful Master of XYZ Lodge.”? Or have you not heard him introduced as such? What is wrong with this? He is **not** Worshipful Master, but rather, and correctly **Master**. That is the name of the office to which he has been elected and installed. “Worshipful” (or “Worshipful Sir”) is the title bestowed upon him at that time. Yes, there is not one among us who does not make that particular mistake. It even appears in written pamphlets and materials produced by our Grand Lodge. And in our Methodical Digest! Masters refer to themselves in their bulletins or trestleboards as Worshipful Master. Codified laws in our Methodical Digest contain those words because of the manner in which each section was prepared or revised, submitted and approved **without correction**. Still, that does not of itself make it a proper title. The easiest way to remember its proper name is to recall that the three stationed officers in a lodge are Master, Senior and Junior Wardens. Look in any Presentation Volume to find perpetuation of the erroneous title. Consult the Manual of Ceremonies — same double standard —Worshipful Master in some places, Master in the majority of others. During the Installation Ceremony he is called the Master-elect, Master of a Lodge, Master of this Lodge, Master.

You should not refer to the DDGM as “Right Worshipful District Deputy Grand Master Robert Lewis Jones.” You should not refer to the Grand Master as “Most Worshipful Grand Master John Paul Jones.” Section 1.37 of our Virginia Methodical

Digest requires the Grand Secretary to thrice proclaim aloud, after the results of the ballot are known, that [whatever is his name] has been elected for the ensuing year as **Grand Master of Masons in Virginia**. So you see, he is not Grand Master of Virginia and not Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Virginia; he is “Grand Master of Masons in Virginia,” period.

You should never say “Worshipful Albert Lee Curtis, Past Master in 1986.” Forget the “Past” — at that time he was **the Master** and acquired the Past after his successor had been elected and installed. The same applies to a DDGM — he was not a PDDGM in 1976 — the “Past” should never be used. And on to PGM — he was not PGM in 1982 — the “Past” has no use during the year he was incumbent as Grand Master in 1982. It appears nothing has or is being done to correct these obvious errors so they continue to be perpetuated. All this notwithstanding, remember that above all other things in all of Freemasonry, there is no more noble, lofty or higher title than that of **Brother**, and no worthy Freemason should ever be offended by being so addressed.

“Go to school — ritual school — learn a part — learn a lecture — be tested and obtain your certificate” — and on, and on. My good and dear, now departed friend and brother, Allen Earle Roberts, has said many times that in all Grand Jurisdictions millions of dollars are spent annually on teaching and learning the ritual, while only “pennies” are spent on Masonic Education. That may sound ridiculous, but it is indeed true!

It does not behoove those who teach ritual to correct errors in the use of Masonic titles. That is a part of the teachings which fall within the purview of the Committee on Masonic Education, its members, its District Education Officers and Lodge Education Officers. Theirs is, or should be, the task of building a firm and solid superstructure upon the very beautiful, necessary and solid foundation set in place by the ritualists.

I have now decided that “Use and Mis-use of Masonic Titles” shall be the title for this paper. A sort of “the last shall be first and the first shall be last” approach. I hope this does above all things show how easy it would be for any Brother in this room to sit down, commence setting his thoughts on

paper, and in due course put it into some semblance that could classify it as a Masonic paper. All that is needed to commence is a word, thought, phrase, action or experience which has impressed you and your route to producing a paper is assured.

Thank you, my brethren, for your attention.