

## INCIVILITY IS FREEMASONRY TO BLAME

### INTRODUCTION

The most obstinate task in discussing civility is not to be drawn into the process of incivility. The purpose of this paper is to promote broader thought and discussion regarding civility in our Craft.

Mackay in the lexicon of Freemasonry says the expression being on the level refers to all men in the lodge being equal in the site of God. Being on the level does not mean in the structure of Freemasonry all men are equal in their role and function. On the level means the comprehension, attachment, and narrative of all Freemasons on all subjects have equal value and all Brethren have equal significance to the Craft notwithstanding their position within the structure. MacKay's orientation? Act uncivilly to a Brother and a Freemason is no longer on the level.

Utilizing a research focus this paper explores the norms of civility within Freemasonry and where these norms originated. The nature of the Profane and the Freemason along with the causes of incivility form this paper's substance.

This paper concludes;

1. There is no numerical research evidence indicating incivility within our lodges is prevalent. There is however behavioral anecdotal evidence that advocates incivility survives.
2. Where incivility exists the cause may be the differences between the cultural norms of Freemasonry and the evolving norms of civility within our society.
3. There is the possibility as Brethren we have abandoned the essential Masonic norms for interpreting civility.
4. Freemasonry has no blame. Brethren may recognize their role in uncivil behavior.
5. Know thyself a corner stone of Masonic teaching is still relevant as a basis of Masonic Behavior.

### THE NATURE OF CIVILITY?

Civility is a favored topic within current discussions of Freemasonry. Masonic authors imply they are exposing conduct exceptional to our contemporary Craft. However, discussion of incivility in Freemasonry stretches back to 1735. In his article "A Discourse on Good Behavior for the Guidance of the Members of the Craft" Brother Martin Clare says, "Civility lies deeper than the outside, and is that general good will, that decent regard and personal esteem for every man which makes us cautious of showing contempt, disrespect and neglect".

There are 28 nouns having the same connotation as civility and at least 40 words that can act as a synonym. There are 138 words related to incivility. You can find many of these words or their derivatives, within Andersons Constitution. Chivalry a synonym for civility has a particular interest for Brethren. According to Chivalry Today, a group who research chivalric behavior

and provide historic education for the era of chivalry, Chivalry is not a mandate from the powerful to the downtrodden, nor a directive from the chosen unto the masses. Chivalry is a set of limitations which the strong place upon themselves with the realization setting a good example sends a message far more powerfully than any words on paper. Masonic Civility or chivalry is a set of behavioral limitations outlined in our Constitution, lessons and ritual by which we are to be examples of civil conduct for our Brethren and society.

A current area of research is virtue ethics. Virtue ethics is the field of study emphasizing the virtues, or moral character, in contrast to the approaches underscoring duties and rules or consequences of actions. Michael Brannigan of the college of St Rose in NY says “ethics fundamentally deals with how we treat others on a daily basis. Indeed, our small acts of civility and incivility constitute the heart of morality” Hester and Killian in “The Moral Foundations of Ethical Leadership” state civility as moral behavior is required in all situations even when those situations are inconvenient or impinge on the participants wants or beliefs. Along with utilizing respect and care civility include; avoiding harm, building trust, reducing stress, listening to others regardless of their point of view, engaging all in meaningful work and providing an environment where everyone can do their best. Hester and Kilian’s approach is reflected by Steven K. Robinson, in his work “So You’re Going To Be Worshipful Master” when he speaks of leadership in the lodge. He says leaders must be adaptable and encourage Brethren to be adaptable to what is best for the Lodge. The leader encourages Brethren to take responsibility for their actions. He must put the Lodge and Brethren first while preserving the dignity, courtesy and privilege of the East. He must separate the wheat from the chaff when receiving advice and counsel. He must ensure all Brethren are spoken to with respect, have their opinion listened to and have their work seen in a positive light

Civility is a set of cultural norms which we follow when dealing with each other. These cultural norms can change over the years as a culture evolves. What may be civility to some may be seen as being offensive by others. Eating with one’s fingers at a banquet in North America would demonstrate the individual had no manners. In India, you are expected to eat your rice and curry by hand. If you cut your potatoes with a knife in Germany, you will insult your hostess.

Since civility is culturally based and may also be generationally based civil behavior over time is difficult to define. However, the causes of uncivil behavior have been well documented.

The literature of psychology and social psychology provides understanding into the causes of uncivil behavior. The literature suggests the locus for incivility is found within the psycho emotional makeup of the individual as well as within the structure of the organization. The unmet needs of the individual, the competing interests of individuals, different personality styles, poor communication skills, and differences in perception, priorities and expectations are all basis for uncivil behavior. In the organization incivility derives from organizational politics, gossip, hierarchical issues involving status, organizational roles and organizational change.

Brethren may not see their uncivil behavior as being ingrained in their nature. They are not aware of the psycho-emotional drivers within themselves or how the organizational functions to which they give loyalty create incivility. The association between uncivil behavior and the nature of a man has value for our exploration.

## THE NATURE OF THE PROFANE

Clare in his 1735 article says the outward Demeanor of the Brother demonstrates the inward civility of the Mind.

There has been continuous academic debate since Aristotle concerning whether the nature of man exists. For the purpose of this paper the nature of man is accepted. Changing this nature by making good men better is the premise on which Freemasonry rests its motivation.

Plutarch, Hume, de Montaigne, and Nietzsche posit the root of behavior is the nature of man. Liberal theologians in the early 20th century described human nature as "basically good", needing only "proper training and education". Richard Dawkins says there is a selfish gene and "this gene selfishness will usually give rise to selfishness in individual behavior". Sociologist William Sumner enumerates "the vices and passions of human nature" as "cupidity, lust, vindictiveness, ambition, and vanity". Sumner finds such human nature to be universal: in all people, in all places, and in all stations in society. Psychiatrist Thomas Harris observes "sin, or badness, or evil, or 'human nature', whatever we call the flaw in our species, is apparent in every person". Harris calls this characteristic "intrinsic badness".

These scholars advise a man's nature can be judged by his behavior. Masonic ritual echoes this perspective. Andersons Constitution poses a similar proposition.

The society within which Andersons Constitution was composed is mirrored in the lessons of our first degree. The culture in England in the 1700's when Andersons Constitution is thought to have been written, was one of Classes and Castes. A society of the included and excluded. People drank excessively, gambled heavily and fought duels. Moralists worried about the rise in sexual promiscuity and a decline in family values. They preached on the need for women to resist men inflamed by libertine principles and pornographic literature and the need for women to remain virgins until marriage. Prostitution was rampant. Crime was increasing with the advancing economy.

Religious pluralism had been legalized, but the Blasphemy Act of 1698 had made renunciation of the Trinity punishable by imprisonment. Denying Christianity as the truth or rejecting the authority of the Scriptures was also illegal.

It is self-evident why Andersons Constitution refers to obeying the moral law, never being a stupid Atheist or irreligious Libertine. The Lodge should be a place of conciliating true friendships between Brothers who culturally remain at a distance demonstrating the logic of the documents creator as he addresses the stratified society which was England. There was a struggle between the existing political structure rooted in the stratified society and the more liberal and labour classes. Logically Anderson speaks of the Brother being peaceable and not living as a rebel against the state. Anderson says the nature of a Profane is to be rude and inappropriate. To participate in foolish, unreasonable or out of place behavior. To use unbecoming language and language that does not flatter. Excesses of behavior are prevalent, and force is utilized to compel uncivil behavior. The use of language and actions causing individuals to feel deeply hurt, upset or angry are usual. Habitual greed and excess in all things are prevalent and drunkenness is expected.

Contemporary deliberation in Masonic literature advocating Masonic norms of civility will amend the incivility of the wider society positions the Profanes nature of today as not far removed from

the behavior of the Profane in the 1700's.

### THE NATURE OF A FREEMASON

To change the nature of a Profane is the forte of Freemasonry according to HL Haywood in his book "Great Teachings of Masonry". The writings of our adepts such as Mackay, Oliver, and Preston agree the central lesson of our legend of Hyrum Abiff is the changing of the nature of a man, into a masonic nature. This is the primary question where Freemasonry claims jurisdiction.

Civility and ethics are laid out in our first Degree. As the Profane takes his first step into the Lodge room, he enters into a new world. He leaves the darkness, destitution and helplessness of the profane world for the light and warmth of Freemasonry. This is the great meaning of the EA Degree. It is not an idle formality or simply an initiation, but a genuine experience. The beginning of a new career in which duties, rights and privileges are real. To become a Freemason is a solemn and serious undertaking. It is meant to change the course of a man's life and his behavior.

The apprentice begins to see the script of how best to live his life morally and ethically. He is told he must walk upright, in humble submission and trust in our Creator. He is exhorted to avoid excesses of all kinds and to practice the Golden Rule. We will tell him he is not to bring into the Lodge his passions or prejudices, lest that harmony, which is one of the chief concerns of Masonry, be destroyed.

Our first degree explains the nature of a Freemason is to govern his emotion, intellect, ambition, desires and ego. Discipline and Duty are a life style. To be virtuous is not a goal it is an imperative. He rests his opinions on foundations of fact not rumor and so protects himself and his Brothers from unfounded dispersions. He does not strive to master his Brother but seeks to master himself. He first sees the positive in himself and the positive in his Brother. He numbers in his attributes self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and faith.

Masonic nature is demonstrated by observing honor, generosity and courtesy. The Freemason sees the exaltation of the Divine in every man and possesses a fair and just judgement. He relieves suffering, comforts the person in distress and assists the destitute. He searches out knowledge. He does what is right because it is right. He is in sympathy with all mankind's beliefs.

### WHAT DOES THE ANECDOTE DATA TELL US ABOUT CIVILITY IN OUR CRAFT?

Anecdotal data is derived from the observations of our Brethren. In the case of the current topic it is incivility they experienced or viewed. Uncivil episodes form part of their memory. These events leave an indelible mark on the Brother. These incidents have fashioned part of their belief in the Craft and impact their behavior. Masonic literature submits incivility within the lodge is not as distinct as it is outside of the tiled lodge room.

Incivility surfaces in the behavior of a Freemason when Brethren filter what they hear through their own vision of the Craft and the lodge and what they should embody. Brethren will utilize polarized thinking and lock on a point of view only wishing to speak about this particular position. This black or white thinking blocks progress in the lodge and often these Brethren

become argumentative and obstructionist. Brethren will see a single incident in the lodge involving a Brother and generalize that incident to a Brother's behavior in all circumstances. This is particularly true when a Brother behaves in a way inconsistent with what the observer sees as appropriate based on their own dogmas. Brethren jump to conclusions founded on limited information or hear say. Brethren are involved in the "chicken little experience" in their mind Freemasonry is "going to hell in a hand basket". We see Brothers personalize a situation. A Brother perceives what is said as a personal attack on themselves or they personalize their attack on a Brother as they have no data by which to speak to the topic. We see brethren who need to control the situation. To be the heart of opinion and discussion. Brethren will use their own scale of fairness to judge their Brothers. Brothers blame Brothers for their own emotional pain particularly when this pain is grounded in responsibility for their own actions. Brethren use "should statements" about other Brethren or the Lodge based on their own understanding of history in the lodge. Brethren will use emotional reasoning in the discussion. If I feel this way about the situation my interpretation of the events that made me feel this way must be true. Brethren want other Brethren to change to suit them. A brother who believes he is always right continually puts other Brethren on trial to prove to himself he is accurate. Sub groups within the lodge become cheer leaders for positions which escalate incivility.

Brethren relate how they feel unwelcome in the Lodge as their contribution is discounted. Discounting is deliberately downplaying or ignoring the importance of another Brothers statement or work. Brethren who do not belong to the same concordant body, or a Brother who has not held a particular position in the Lodge or Brethren who cannot participate fully in lodge activities for whatever the reason are moved aside as their opinion is deemed not pertinent. Brothers speak of feeling bullied by Brethren leveraging the power of cliques to ostracize a Brother.

#### WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN WITHIN OUR CRAFT?

1. The nature of the uncivil man is the nature of the Profane of the 1700's with the behavior this nature propagates. The Profane participates in rude, inappropriate and foolish behavior, unreasonable or out of place conduct and language that does not flatter. Excesses of behavior are prevalent for this individual. He uses psychological and emotional force to compel uncivil behavior in others. Language and actions causing individuals to feel deeply hurt, upset or angry are part of his approach to people. Habitual greed and excess in all things is his focus.
2. Discussion of incivility in Freemasonry stretches back to 1735. This suggests we may have a long-term obstruction to civility in the Craft. Knowledgeable Master Masons seem to walk slowly to correct the errors and irregularities which breed incivilities in our Craft, ourselves and in our less informed Brothers
3. Freemasonry's expected beliefs and behavior are set out in our constitution and degrees. The explicit norms of civility along with moral and ethical guidelines at least since the Anderson Constitution have been constant.
4. The literature tells us a Freemason who participates in uncivil behavior does so because he is either ignorant of what constitutes civil behavior, or he chooses to behave in this way for his personal gain. We know Freemasonry is a bureaucracy and like all bureaucracies there are systemic factors which foster incivility.

5. Freemasons concerned with incivility within the Craft may simply be reacting to behavior which transgresses their personal definition of civility. They may also be reacting to changing cultural norms.
6. Anecdotal behavioral data signals there is uncivil behavior in the Craft. However, it may not be visible when the Lodge is tiled. It appears Brethren may be civil within a tiled lodge and then revert to incivility during festive boards, private conversation and activities outside of a tiled Lodge.
7. Our anecdotal data asks what causes us to give the impression we are afraid to put the self-interest of the Craft ahead of individual or bureaucratic gains.
8. The phrase "Know thy self" is an imbedded theme of our three degrees. "Know Thyself", is inscribed above the entranceway to the Temple of Apollo, home to the Oracle of Delphi. This phrase is above the door of each of the ancient Mystery Schools. According to Dr JB Mayer in Psychology Today people who know their own psycho-emotional self, evaluate others more accurately and therefore make more allowances for others' foibles.
9. Freemasonry defines for us what our nature is, and the civil behavior derived from that nature. A Freemason is not rude and never displays inappropriate behavior for the circumstances he finds himself in. He is not foolish or unreasonable. He does not use unbecoming language such as profanity. He utilizes language which flatters the Craft and his Brethren. He never behaves excessively and never uses emotional or psychological force to compel a Brother. He is honest, and his word can be trusted. His behavior and language are never offensive. He treats all individuals with respect. He practices well-bred social behavior. Thank you are the words he most uses. He keeps negative opinions to himself. He does not comment on a Brother's physical, emotional or psychological characteristics unless it's to compliment him. When a request is made a Freemason will do all he can to accommodate the request. Our masonic nature is to be courteous, decent, gentle, appropriate, refined, respectable, modest, humble and respectful.
10. Genuine civility within Freemasonry requires we seek to understand the views of those with whom we disagree so thoroughly and so empathetically that we can articulate their views in ways they would say, "Yes, you understand. That's just how I would say it." Furthermore, civility requires we try to bring others to an equal level of understanding about our views. In this way, through civility, we "achieve disagreement" in a respectful manner a task harder than it first appears. Civility is about communication, and for an act of communication to be civil, it must be ethical. Obviously, it's unethical to lie and deceive. But is it not an ethical flaw to refuse to listen when a Brother is attempting to tell us the truth as they see it? Can it also be said a lack of respect for a Brother represents an ethical failure? Does a lack of humility regarding the possibility we are wrong also encumber us from practicing civility? Being civil turns out to be an ethical quest.
11. Our Lessons, degrees, ritual and constitution tell us what the Masonic norms of civility are. We recognize they are consistent over time. When a Brother does not apply these standards, we have not encouraged him in a way that allows him to live Freemasonry.

12. If we react to uncivil behavior in an uncivil manner, we escalate incivility through our own actions, and we diminish the Craft.

13. The experience of this paper echoes the perspective of Brother Winston Churchill “The building of a Brother may have to be a slow and laborious task of years. To destroy a Brother can be the thoughtless act of a single day.” This paper also suggests paraphrasing Ralph Waldo Emerson the highest proof of civility in our Craft is when each of our actions are aimed at the greatest good for all our Brethren.

14. Civility is the minimum standard for how we should treat our Brothers. Applying what we are taught by our lessons, ritual, and constitution ensures we cannot behave other than with civility. Civility in Freemasonry is simply practicing what we Preach.