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First servant of his Lodge

In the constitution of the Grand Lodge Alpina of Switzerland, the Master in the Chair is listed as "the responsible leader and representative of the Lodge". These concise words, as befits a constitution, describe the office of a true decathlete. The Master in the Chair is not only responsible for organisational matters: he is also responsible in a spiritual way and as *primus inter pares* in a special situation.

The Master in the Chair has already been described as the "spiritual mentor" and the "active soul" of the Lodge. He is expected to mediate and make peace in conflicts, preside over funeral services, initiate new Brethren and conduct promotions and advancements.

"In full knowledge of what is right and dutiful".

He has also responsibilities towards the widows of Lodge members. He presides over the College of Officers and prepares the annual programme of his lodge. All this is usually for two or three years. Depending on the statutes of the Lodge, a second term of office is also possible.

His insignia is the square. Together with the 'Volume of Sacred Law' and the Compasses, it forms the Three Great Lights. Robert Julius Fischer (1829-1905), a committed Mason, described it as a "symbol of conscientiousness"... "which orders and judges human actions according to the law of rectitude, i.e. according to law, justice and humanity (...). It is applied to human actions so that they may be recognised as free from self-interest, driven by inner urge, without external compulsion, in full knowledge of what is right and dutiful."

*Primus inter pares*

The Master in the Chair has a role that has been democratically entrusted to him and which he has to fulfil. Conflicts may well arise in the process. He is supposed to meet his Brethren as an equal, he is supposed to be with them, but at the same time it is his responsibility to lead them. He is on his raised seat during the temple work. For certain central actions, he descends from this and literally goes down to the level of his Brethren.

This constellation, which we know similarly from the profane world, has to be endured, and this in turn has to do with the leadership of one's own person. Closeness and distance have to be brought into balance, the concept of brotherhood has to be reconsidered, indeed, hard decisions have to be made. The office can expose the holder. If we follow Wolfgang Scherpe, the term "Master in the Chair" dates back to older times, when the head of a lodge was the only one to sit while his Brethren stood. Dignity and burden go hand in hand. The Master in the Chair does well to build up a solid network with his officials, but also with the Past Masters.

A temporary office

The office of Master in the Chair is temporary. He has his predecessors, and other Brethren will follow him. This constellation is demanding. Even if his office is temporary, he should be committed to it as the first servant of his Lodge, from tackling it from the first hour to letting it go when he hands over the gavel. The moment when the Master in the Chair and the Officers hand over their collars and the new ones receive them illustrate this in a dramatic way.

In this context, there has been talk of the principle "*Servir et disparaître*": "Serve, and then disappear". T. M.

Authenticity, credibility and serenity

"Called to the first place of this Lodge by the confidence of my Brethren...". Thus begins the vow I made as the new Master in the Chair of *Libertas et Fraternitas* at my installation to the representative sent by the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge Alpina of Switzerland, but above all to the Brethren of my Lodge. It went through my mind that I had to irrevocably fulfil this unreserved and unconditional trust and the great expectations of my Brethren that went with it, and that I had to lead our beloved Lodge as *primus inter pares*, as first among equals - what a great task! After one year in office, I would list authenticity, credibility and a certain degree of composure as three of the most important prerequisites. From a self-critical point of view, I probably still need to practise the latter. For me personally, the office is fulfilling and I see it as serving my Lodge and above all my Brethren. However, the Master of the Chair is not the Lodge - the Lodge is made up of all the Brothers, each and every one! And so everyone must contribute

to the work and prosperity of the Lodge, for only together are we strong, and that on all levels. In my opinion, the most important things in a Lodge are mutual acceptance, trust, sincerity and, above all, fraternal solidarity. Finally, the preservation of the Masonic traditions, but especially the cultivation of our lodge history, the lodge traditions and our closely connected lodge identity is very important to me. This, however, always under the premise that "tradition is not keeping the ashes, but passing on the flame".

Br. Martin Schmäh, Master in the Chair of the Lodge Libertas et Fraternitas No. 37 in the Orient of Zurich

"I was concerned with the uniformity of the process".

At the beginning of my tenure, I was faced with the task of unifying our rituals. From history, there were rituals where wisdom resided with the II Superior and beauty with the Master of the Chair - and vice versa. Already as Master of Ceremonies I observed that this led to irritation among the officials and thus also to a certain hecticness before the ritual. One of the first things I did was to unify the situation so that Wisdom was with the 'Junior Warden', Beauty with the Master of the Chair and Strength with the 'Senior Warden'. The derivation of which lesser light stands with which official and the symbolic content influenced by this is not to be discussed here, personally I can derive some content from both constellations. My concern was the uniform procedure. However, it became clear to me from conversations that this change was not so easy for every Brother, indeed that it was connected with the personal definition of the meaning and purpose of life. Today, I would bring up such issues again for discussion, even if it was only for the sake of unification. I had also introduced a candle ritual. Before a working, I circulated a burning white candle. The Brother holding the candle could say what was on his mind or silently pass the candle to the next Brother. This was my way of getting us in the mood for the work ahead. Unfortunately, over time I dropped this ritual, which I would no longer do today. For me, the time as Master in the Chair was a period of life I would not want to miss, even though I was glad when I was allowed to put the first hammer into the hands of my successor.

Br. Bruno Meile, former Chair Master of the Lodge Bauplan im Orient St. Gallen

The leadership of a Lodge in Corona times

"The Master in the Chair is not only President, he is much more; above all, namely, the faithful leader and the Father of the Lodge." These were the words given to me by the MW GM Br. D. Juilland at my installation in January 2020. I have tried to live up to this claim as "pater familias" of Roman law. In doing so, duty and straightforwardness were particularly important to me, combined with tolerance and brotherly love. We were able to work regularly until March 2020. The Corona crisis, shutdown and restricted mobility represented a new kind of break. We were temporarily deprived of our Lodge as a "place ... to unite in faithful friendship people who would otherwise have remained strangers to each other" (Charges). Monthly virtual lodge officer meetings to determine the next steps were very helpful. During these phases, we aimed to provide as much normality as possible with virtual short discussions. In addition, I tried to ensure the level of information and promote cohesion with circulars. We avoided virtual rituals. About one third of the Brethren took part in the virtual meetings; this medium was only accepted to a limited extent. As a smaller lodge, we were able to hold rituals while other lodges were closed, despite numerical limitations. In addition, at times we switched to larger premises in order to maintain safety distances. A summer St. John's meeting was moved to July, and the Christmas meal with the sisters was held in the spring. Overall, there were more events for 2020 and 2021.

Br. Uli Daum, Lodge St. Johann am Rhein in Orient Schaffhausen

"Short and intensive"

In our Lodge, regular meetings are scheduled only every two months, on a Saturday. These last the whole day: ritual rehearsal, lunch, ritual in several degrees, dinner. Our Brethren get together outside the regular meetings for BBQs, whisky tastings or outings. In total, we have a similar number of contact hours as stationary lodges, only distributed differently. As Master in the Chair it is my duty to be present at all appointments, so this year most weekends and most holidays are taken up by Freemasonry. As we

usually elect a new Master in the Chair every year, the office of Master in the Chair is short and intense, and I can already draw on the experience of three Past Masters, despite it being only our fourth lodge birthday. I see myself as *primus inter pares* in the sense of Lessing's view of Freemasonry: "How if it were the Freemasons who had made it their business to draw together again as closely as possible those divisions by which men have become such strangers to one another?" This approach is common. However, this includes the virtual occasions, which do not have the same value as face-to-face meetings. Lodge life has therefore suffered, and I am consequently trying to counteract this for the rest of my time in office.

I try to set an example to my Brethren as Master in the Chair . The art is not to slide into arbitrariness, to set the direction, to hold the reins and keep the dogmatic in check. A travelling lodge means mobility and logistics. Our Brethren live all over German-speaking Switzerland, and some of them travel more than 150 km one-way to the meeting. Our complete lodge equipment, including the temple and the whisky bar, can be dismantled and transported. All this must then come together in one place on a Saturday, ideally complete. We are currently discussing, for example, the purchase of a car trailer to save the Brethren having to unload the boot of their car into the garage at home.

Br. Thorsten Doerfler, Rosslyn Travelling Lodge