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Challenge of the Three Plagues: Part 1 SK John Lawson, Grand Historian

2020 has asked us to stop and contemplate our everyday behaviors, many of which we have taken for granted; small things, changes in habit that we have grown to do instinctively. Good or bad, they have become the habits and actions of our lives. COVID 19 caught us by surprise, has shown us some vulnerabilities, and asked us to change some of those habits that are most risky like washing our hands, wearing a face cover and staying a safe distant from one another. They are simple requests but regardless of how easy they may be, we find ourselves falling back into those old habits that we know would not be good for us regardless of the severe warnings of a world-changing pandemic. We argue about how it happened and what to do about it, but this plague of historic proportions doesn't care about our opinion and continues to test us on every front.

It is not difficult for me to see the pandemic as a parable of the plague that came upon Masonry in 1960. You may say, "What plague?" No one knows they are at the pinnacle of their existence at the time of infection by a life-destroying virus of this kind. It takes many years of statistics and perspective with a variety of interpretations to determine when things changed and more importantly *why*. We are living with those reasons since that 1959 peak of almost 5 million masons. In the United States alone, we are now a smaller band of perhaps 1.1 million today. We can extrapolate statistics to our very demise if the statistical reductions hold their curve. It shows that we will cease to exist by 2030.

During the dark ages, and around 1,000A.D., the world was

suffering a different kind of plague, a plague of fear, superstition, and ignorance. One in which Church and State had combined and that toxic blend reigned supreme. It was truly the darkest of our time. But in that darkness existed men of great light and vision, that had explored the greater world and been exposed to many other points of light: the Gnostic, Coptic, Essene, Druze as well as other Christian sects, along with larger societies like the Bogomils, the Cathars, Albigenian and Waldensian societies, all across the European continent exposed the Templars to new views of God.

The knights who had first been filled with great piety and love for the church were confronted with a decision to protect and defend those who were living in peace, yet failed to recant their own beliefs for those of the church/state. The Fox's "Book of Martyrs" tells the tale all too well but as we view the wholesale plague of hatred across Europe there were knights who fought to protect the freedom of beliefs of these fringe societies that refused the heavy foot of the Roman church and the Templars paid a heavy price defending them. Imagine the choice before these knights who had been exposed to a greater light of truth than the corruption that existed in Rome. This was the true test of great men who would now have to choose between compliance or upholding and protecting truth at all cost.

Even after Jacques DeMolay's murder and the disbanding of the Templar Order from public in 1314, the ships left LaRochelle and as accounted by Albert Pike in the 1871 edition of *Morals and Dogma*: "... In the gloom of his prison, the Grand Master created four Metropolitan Lodges, at Naples for the east, at Edinburgh for the West, at Stockholm for the North and at Paris for the South. The initials of his name J.B.M., found in the same order in the first 3 degrees are but one in the many internal and cogent proofs that such was the origin of Free-masonry."

Never did it occur to the Grand Master to give up and fade into history. He spread the Templars across the darkness of Europe and began again knowing that the light of Truth could never resign itself and would live on even to our own time.