Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1968

Grand Orator
Carl H. Allen
“A Challenge To Responsibility”

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, Grand Lodge Officers, Distinguished Guests, and my Brethren

What a pleasant custom has been established by my distinguished predecessors, that of using this opportunity to pay tribute to the Grand Master.

Even though this were not the custom, a heart full of gratitude and a deep feeling of admiration and personal affection would urge me to express for myself and every other officer our sincere appreciation to him.

Traveling with our Grand Master throughout the State in the service of our great Fraternity, we have come to know him as one guided by wisdom, understanding and a consuming desire to be of service to his Brethren in Freemasonry.

His charm, his eloquence, his delightful sense of humor, his friendliness and overabundant energy have joined together to form a very inspiring personality. Nor is this high regard restricted to his officers. All of us have witnessed on many occasions demonstrations of similar affection by many members and non-members of our Fraternity.

The principal obligation placed upon the Grand Orator is to deliver at each Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge an address upon matters appertaining to the Craft. Over the years this final and supreme effort by the Orator has come to be termed an oration-a Grand Oration, if you please. This is so, I suppose, because of the polished rhetorical style and studied methods of delivery employed by most of the previous Grand Orators. In going over most of them I learned that their excellence was received by the Brethren with a standing ovation. Reflecting upon my own shortcomings, you will understand why I implore you to extend your most friendly and fraternal charity and forbearance. In return, therefore, I promise to be mercifully brief, for I remember the old admonition: "No souls are saved after the first twenty minutes." And should you at the conclusion of my effort arise and applaud, I will understand that you are only following a great custom.

In directing my remarks to matters appertaining to the Craft, there are many things to which we should give our attention, such as those resolutions received and referred to committees which have for their purpose the liberalization of some of our long standing but outdated regulations in an effort to move along with the changing times. Or, we could discuss means of increasing our steadily decreasing membership, achieving quantity while still retaining quality. Or, we could talk about our youth organizations and how to get closer to them in order to convince them that we do care about them and that we are concerned with their welfare and their future.

While these matters are important, there are more pressing ones which require our attention not only as Masons, but as citizens of this great country. The evident deterioration of public morality and the decline of patriotism in our land has caused acute and anguished apprehension among those of us who realize that our strength and power as a free people come from respecting individual dignity, human rights and equal justice under the law.

At no time in history has it been so important for us to be good Americans first and Masons second. Recall to your memory, if you will, that part of the charge in the Entered Apprentice Degree, "As a citizen you are enjoined to be exemplary in the discharge of your civil duties, by never proposing, or countenancing any act which may have a tendency to subvert the peace and good order of society: by paying due obedience to the laws under whose protection you live; and by never losing sight of the allegiance due to your country." From his first step over the Lodge threshold a Mason is taught reverence, patriotism, good citizenship, respect for law, regard for the rights of his fellow man and tolerance for his weaknesses, with an ever readiness

to assist the downtrodden and to relieve the desolate. These lessons, by degrees, continue throughout his Masonic career, regardless of how far he may go in his quest for light.

During the ages past Freemasons have demonstrated their willingness to sacrifice their worldly possessions, their homes, their families and their very lives for the establishment and preservation of liberty and the American way of life. Each of us can recall the parts played by George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Paul Revere, John Hancock, John Marshall and others in creating this great nation. Who can doubt that they were in fact greatly influenced by the principal tenets of our Order -brotherly love, relief, and truth-as well as the cardinal virtues-fortitude, temperance, prudence and justice. We are justly proud of their performances, but this pride should serve to remind us that not only is there an indestructible bond between the establishment of our way of life and Freemasonry, but that it also is our duty to perpetuate that way of life. From these brave Masonic forebears we inherited our ideals in government and religion. After nearly two hundred years many changes have taken place in the life, habits, and thinking of the 200 million people who now live in America. Those ideals are still the same today. They have not altered, nor can they change. They are timeless. They shall last forever.

Will the Masons of this age hold fast to these ideals? How we respond to this question may very well decide the future of this country as we know it.

These are days of great challenges which cannot be met with a mediocrity generated by apathetic attitudes. In the face of challenge each individual must contribute his highest degree of excellence to the encounter. Historically, our greatest successes have been achieved in the face of challenge, and the requirement for victory has always been an abundant display of faith, courage, determination and industry. If we, as Masons and citizens of a free nation, decline the challenges of a world where selfishness, demoralization and Godlessness are increasing, then we are unworthy of the heritage which is ours. If we build with a strong faith and determination we will be able to face and engage all adversity and emerge stronger than before. Masons must realize their responsibility. Masons are builders, not destroyers. In the Manual of Ceremonies for Grand Lodge we find the following: "Operative craftsmen hewed, squared and laid the stones which formed the noble structures of antiquity and the beautiful cathedrals of the Middle Ages. Their creations were more than mere piles of bricks and granite. They were symbols of man's persistent desire to establish order and harmony in the building of civilization. They were the visible and tangible evidence of man's yearning for the infinite."

Many of us have demonstrated the allegiance to our country by serving in its armed forces or by contributing in some other way, but our responsibility of being exemplary in the discharge of our civil duties does not stop there. A special duty rests upon you and me, as adults and Masons, who still retain a belief in God and the moral order, to influence the lives of others, particularly the alienated youth of this tormented age. Those young people who. whether it be true or false, feel that we, their elders, are at least in part to blame for their present plight. If in no other way, we can do this by setting a good example for them.

If you have visited our Home for Children at Covina, you probably have seen posted on the bulletin board of the residence halls A Bill of Rights and alongside it a corresponding Bill of Responsibilities. Although each of the rights and responsibilities is worthy of remembrance and emulation, I take time only to remind you of one right,' the right to have a good example set by adults," and the corresponding responsibility, "to set a good example so that I may enjoy myself and influence others. "

What a splendid way to point up the double-edged nature of good citizenship. That going along hand in hand with each of our individual rights as citizens is a corresponding responsibility to our fellow citizens. Some of the trouble with our young people of today-and, yes, even some of our adults-is that in their quest for freedom or liberty they have forgotten, if they were ever told, that in our complex society there must be some modifications and limitations upon personal freedom and that their freedom stops where the other fellow's freedom begins.

George Washington, in a letter to Congress urging adoption of the Constitution, wrote: "Individuals entering into society must give up a share of liberty to preserve the rest. The magnitude of the sacrifice must depend as well on the situation and the circumstances as on the object to be obtained."

In the concept of common law, freedom is a thing as native to man as man. Coupled with freedom is a controlling moral sense that inspires personal responsibility to fulfill man's

obligations to himself, his fellow men and to God. What disastrous results follow when the two are divorced. The demand for freedom in the case of many of these young men and women arises from a compulsion born, in turn, of a feeling of personal responsibility to eliminate what they believe to be the evils of contemporary society.

It has been said that America is fighting two wars, one in Vietnam, the other at home. Perhaps we can afford to lose the one in Vietnam but the one at home, that battle for the minds of our young people, must be won at all costs. Somehow we will have to teach them that the place to decide controversies, guilt or innocence, is in a court of law, not on car bumpers, coat lapels or in the streets. They must learn to take the law into their hearts and not their hands.

To say that we live in an age of change is totally inadequate. We live in an age of revolution, in an age when, as the Council of Latin American Bishops stated less than three months ago, "The alternatives are not the status quo and change. Rather, they are violent change and pacific change." True, the changes have been so radical and so swift as to bewilder even those of the stoutest heart. Yet it should not be forgotten that change is a law of life. For as someone remarked. "In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often."

Today's challenge to our Fraternity is to apply more completely to its principles-that duty we owe to God: that loyalty we owe to our country: that fellowship: that brotherhood we owe to our neighbor. Brotherhood exalts society, disarms feuds and sectional hatreds, cements republics and produces international comity.

If brotherhood can and it does bring peace, harmony and decorum to a Lodge, can it not be a great factor in producing universal peace? If, therefore, the Masonic Fraternity is to fulfill its high mission as the great exponent of brotherhood, every Mason must be not only a law abiding citizen but he must also cast his influence on the side of law and order- not the law and order of a Nazi or Fascist era, but that brand of law and order which is coupled with justice.

When I say law and order, I mean just that-the maintenance of lawful behavior and the public safety everywhere and not anti-Negro as the racial bigot interprets it. Our future survival has a basic dependence upon our individual conduct. It poses for each of us: How may I contribute to the perpetuation of our American way of life?

On July 4, 1894, during the dedication of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument at Cleveland, Ohio, President William McKinley is speaking: "We are the freest government on the face of the earth. Our strength rests in our patriotism. Anarchy flees before patriotism. Peace and order, and security and liberty are safe as long as love of country burns in the heart of the people. It should not be forgotten, however, that liberty does not mean lawlessness. Liberty to make our own laws does not give us license to break them. Liberty to make our own laws commands a duty to observe them ourselves and enforce obedience among all others within their jurisdiction. Liberty, my fellow citizens, is responsibility, and responsibility is duty, and that duty is to preserve the exceptional liberty we enjoy within the law, and for the law and by the law." And then he finished with these words: "God bless every undertaking which revives patriotism and rebukes the indifferent and lawless."

A columnist might sum it up this way: Patriotism should be a heart stimulant and not a mouthwash.

On a much earlier occasion, July 4, 1802, ninety-two years before President McKinley's speech, Daniel Webster had this to say: "To preserve the government we must also preserve a correct and energetic tone of morals. After all that can be said, the truth is that liberty consists more in the habits of the people than in anything else. When the public mind becomes vitiated and depraved, every attempt to preserve it is vain. Laws are then a nullity, and constitutions waste paper. There are always men wicked enough to go to any length in the pursuit of power if they can find others wicked enough to support them. They regard not paper and parchment. Can you stop the progress of a usurper by opposing to him the laws of his country? Then you may check the careering winds or stay the lightning with a song. No. Ambitious men must be restrained by the public morality. When they rise up to do evil, they must find themselves standing alone. Morality rests on religion. If you destroy the foundation, the superstructure must fall. In a world of error, of temptation, of seduction; in a world where crimes often triumph, and virtue is scourged with scorpions-in such a world, certainly, the hope of a hereafter is necessary to cheer and to animate. Leave us, then, the consolations of religion. Leave to man, to frail and feeble

man, the comfort of knowing that when he gratifies his immortal soul with deeds of justice, of kindness and of mercy, he is rescuing his happiness from final dissolution and laying it up in heaven."

An age in the world's history has withered and died before our eyes and a new age is struggling to be born, the tone and direction of which no man can tell and, whether we like it or not, we are part of this new age. To remain stationary is to lose ground. To repose is to fail. All of us, therefore, whatever our age or station in life, must increase our efforts so that we will not remain stationary, nor will we repose while a world on the march passes us by. It is your duty, as it is mine, to quicken our pace, to see that the eternally true values in our civilization, those traditions that deserve to endure, are not swept away by the torrent that now engulfs us all. No one of us can guarantee that his efforts will be successful but every man can. at least, remove the cause for rebuke that he did not try. And if, in trying, we expose certain imperfections, what matter, for nothing would be done at all if a man waited until he could do it so well that no one could find fault with it.

One of the most reliable standards by which our efforts may be measured is the steadiness and persistence by which we cling to what we believe to be right, the success we achieve in being true to ourselves, for the familiar advice of Polonius has lost nothing of its forcefulness for having so frequently been quoted-"To thine own self be true and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."