

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1977**

**Grand Orator  
Adrian Charles West  
“Courage . . Or Conformity?”**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Most Worshipful Past Grand Masters and Visiting Grand Masters of other Jurisdictions, Fellow Officers and Members of the Grand Lodge of California. Brethren All

I will forever be indebted to you for the honor and privilege you have granted me by allowing me to serve as the Grand Orator of the Grand Lodge of California for this past year. Especially I want to express my deepest and heartfelt appreciation to Most Worshipful Kermit Jacobson, not only for appointing me to this office, but more importantly-and here I am sure I can speak on behalf of all the Grand Lodge Officers who have served this year-may I express our gratitude and admiration for the truly inspirational leadership he has given us. He has led us, not with an iron gauntlet, but with a dignity, an integrity, a joyful self-giving dedication to purpose, and by a sincerity and warmth of brotherly love that combine to set him apart . . . and I say it very sincerely, Kermit . . . as the living embodiment of the highest ideals of our beloved Masonic Fraternity.

May I also express my gratitude to the numerous District Inspectors and to those six "stalwart and invincible linemen" of this Grand Lodge team, the Assistant Grand Lecturers, who have assisted so materially in providing me with local history and background information without whose help I could not possibly have given the numerous addresses at cornerstone ceremonies, Lodge dedications, and other events throughout the year. And to all of you, the Officers and Members of the constituent Lodges throughout this jurisdiction, my sincere thanks for the cordial reception and brotherly affection you have, without exception, extended to me from one end of the State to the other.

This has been a year in which my Masonic eyes have been opened to the greatness of Masonry in California and to the dedicated involvement and leadership of Masons in civic affairs throughout the State. My eyes have been opened to the constant and vital support that you, my Brethren, are giving to public education . . . a testimony before the world that Masonry has a keen sense of responsibility and loving concern for the youth of our land, and that Masonry is committed to an equal educational opportunity for all of the children of all of the people, without distinction or discrimination as regards their color of skin, ethnic background, or economic status. Yes, my Brethren, I shall ever be indebted to you for this year of enrichment you have afforded me. And on this, my final opportunity to address you as your Grand Orator, it is my fervent hope that the thoughts I now share with you may be constructive to the Grand Lodge of California and in some small way cause the flame of Masonry to burn brighter in your individual hearts and lives.

Volumes have been written on the meaning of Masonry, its message, its teachings, and the interpretation of its allegory. While I recognize the impossibility of adequately defining Masonry in a few sentences, never-the-less it is important to your understanding of what I wish to say today that I first attempt to state what I believe to be the very heart of Masonry.

Masonry is a sacred band of friends and Brothers wherein we are taught many great truths and important moral and spiritual lessons in order that we may divest our hearts and consciences of all the vices and superfluities of life, and thereby fit our minds as living stones for that spiritual building, that house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. Masonry's cause for existence is to provide challenge, encouragement, and strength toward enabling a man to achieve his highest and best according to the designs laid down upon the trestleboard for his life by the Supreme Grand Master of the Universe. Inseparably related to a man's personal development is his concern for the welfare of his family, his Brethren, his community, his Nation, and his concern for society the world around.

Recall with me the conclusion of the Third Degree when the Master of the Lodge extends congratulations to the newly raised Master Mason by saying:

"The eyes of the Fraternity are now upon you; be just, be faithful, be true, and convince the world by your acts that on becoming a Master Mason you have become a better man."

This is the essence of Masonry . . . to challenge men to changed lives, to inspire them to achieve their noblest and highest, and to motivate them to indeed become better men. I will grant you that there is much more to Masonry, but it is my firm conviction that if we fail to pre-eminently teach the great moral and spiritual truths within Masonry, and if we fail to inspire men and bring them closer to the Almighty God of the Universe, then our temples become hollow, echoing caverns, and our ritual becomes as resounding brass and tinkling cymbals! With this as our concept of Masonry, let us take a look at our Fraternity today.

There are those among us who see Masonry today as on a downhill slide, decreasing in number of members while the average age of members is increasing—a Fraternity that has past its zenith and is now waning. Closely akin are others among us who seem content to reminisce over past achievements of Masonry, proudly basking in the reflected glory of great Masonic history. They see their role in Masonry today as guardians of the past, "protecting" the Fraternity from change, obsessed with the preservation of the forms, the ritual, and regulations. To all of these Brethren let me emphatically say that self-preservation—mere survival—is not of itself sufficient justification for Masonry to continue.

Let me assure you that I do not lack reverence for the past. It is with gratitude and respect that I recall the heritage in which we stand, and it is indeed time that we rededicate ourselves to the great principles of Masonry that have withstood the ravages of barbarous attack. Let us, with grateful appreciation, honor those Brethren who have walked this pathway with distinction—great leaders of our Fraternity, a number of whom are here present today, whose zeal and dedicated service make it possible for us to gather here in this Annual Communication. During this past bicentennial year we have been reminded on numerous occasions of the vital part our Masonic forefathers have had in the formation and development of our beloved Country, founded on the principles we hold dear of equality, liberty, and justice for all. We should look well to the past, but not as shackles or restraints upon the present. Rather, the past is the ground floor, the second, and third stories of the edifice upon which we now continue to build the temple of Masonry to ever increasing heights. May we never be burdened down by the grandeur of the past; instead, may the past give us a perspective from which we can more clearly view the present and provide challenge and inspiration for the future.

As we recall the greatness of Masonry in past history, let us consider why we pay particular tribute to certain Masons of distinction. We honor those of our Brethren whose lives and deeds in the world exemplify the teachings of the Craft which they learn in the lodge room. Neither the man of lofty thoughts who remains in a closet nor the man of feverish activity who lacks clarity of purpose and inner direction are worthy of our acclaim. Recall in the Holy Writings, in the Epistle of James, we read: "Thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." As with faith, so it is with the principles of Masonry. It is the man whose faith and high ideals are evidenced in his actions who is deserving of our recognition. We honor George Washington because he was a man of high principles and lofty vision who also had the courage and strength to translate those inner convictions into a life of noble action. His life of leadership and his accomplishments for our Nation stand as irrefutable testimony to his beliefs. Let me suggest that a universal characteristic of all Masons of distinction is an unflinching fidelity to their innermost convictions and the courage to live in accord with those convictions, in word and in deed, without regard for public opinion, political pressures, or personal consequences.

What is the greatest threat to Masonry today? It is not members growing older nor declining Lodge memberships. The greatest threat to Masonry today is a lack of the courage to conduct our affairs within the lodge room and before the world in a manner consistent with the tenets and virtues we espouse to believe. Hence, I confront you with the question, "Courage . . . or Conformity?" Which will be the characteristic ascribed to us, to the Grand Lodge of California in 1977 and 1978, by future historians? Will we be remembered as men of courage or of complacent conformity?

Let me explain just what I mean by courage. I am speaking not so much of the courage needed to face physical danger from external threats, but rather of courage as the inner side of growth and maturity—the capacity to meet and conquer the anxiety which arises when facing the

unknown. Think of courage as that inner strength which enables a man to speak and act with firm conviction in accord with his beliefs, yet with humility and without rebellion. On the other hand, lack of courage is to compromise one's deepest convictions in order to conform to the situation of the moment, to give the appearance of concurrence with the opinions of another person or group. Let me hasten to assure you that I am in no way advocating a negativistic non-conformity or non-conformity for its own sake. A harmonious unity of thought is a desirable characteristic for all societies, especially for Masonry. I am simply saying that conformity at the expense of personal integrity is lack of courage.

Courage is required all along the pathway of growth and development. For the youth, courage is required to break from the ties of the infantile past. For the man of more seasoned years, it takes courage to break from the old and familiar in order that the new can be born. The crest of courage in this age of conformity is the integrity to stand true to one's own convictions, not defiantly or in the posture of rebellion, but simply and steadfastly because this is what one believes.

Courage is the affirmative choice, not acquiescence because there are no alternatives. With this concept of courage in mind, why do I say that lack of courage is the greatest threat to Masonry today?

I dare say that there is not a man among us in this Annual Communication who would not have the courage to stand firmly for freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of worship . . . these which we might label "external freedoms." But do we have the courage to preserve our "inner freedom" . . . the courage to be true and faithful in our actions to the innermost, God-given beliefs and convictions within our hearts? Do we have the ability, and do we devote the necessary time and effort, to think through and evaluate a given situation in relationship to the fundamental purposes and objectives of Masonry which we summarized a few moments ago? Do we stop to consider a proposed course of action in the light of the three principal tenets of brotherly love, relief, and truth and the four cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice? Then, having sorted out the essential from the trivial and reached a conclusion as to what we really believe to be the truth of the issue at hand, do we then have the courage to take action to implement our beliefs, or do we then, having arrived at an understanding of what we believe to be the truth, allow expediency or complacency to over-rule integrity when it comes to the words we speak or the actions we take?

In a society governed by Watergate morals and an ethic of expediency, Masonry must stand true to its principal tenets, proclaim duty to the Supreme Architect of the Universe as man's first allegiance, and affirm compassion and brotherly love as the guiding quality in the relationship of man to man. We need the courage to proclaim the eternal truths of Masonry to the world in clear and unmistakable terms, and of equal importance, we must proclaim these truths in language that is understood by the world today. Masonry is too often content to mumble to itself rather than to speak relevantly to the world. By that I mean to say that we tend to focus our attention and effort on what goes on within the lodge room-on the repetition of ritual and the conferral of degrees-rather than challenging and motivating the Brethren to live as Masons before the world so that family, neighbors, and business associates will indeed observe that upon becoming a Master Mason we have become better men. The world is groping for men of high moral standards, men of integrity, men who are concerned and involved with the desperate needs of present society. But all too often we present to them a Masonry that conveys the image of beautiful ritual, impressive ceremonies, and officers with high-sounding titles . . . an image of self-aggrandizement rather than of ministry to the needs of our fellowmen. The world recognizes men who are able to translate their lofty ideals into noble lives and actions relevant to contemporary society. But we so often speak to the world in terms of the patterns of past decades which may no longer have their previous dynamic impact or even be relevant today. Thus we may be mumbling to ourselves and failing to communicate to the world at all, or at best, sending out a message that is confusing and bewildering. Hear me carefully, for I am in no way saying that we should lower our standards and ideals to conform to the society in which we find ourselves. There is a marked difference between conformity and relevance. It is so easy and comfortable for us to continue to follow Masonic patterns of the past, to repeat past phrases, functions, and activities . . . to continue doing the same old thing, and at most, trying to do it a little better than last year or the year before. However, it takes courage to take a fresh approach, re-evaluate current practice, and

struggle to interpret what it really means to affirm the eternal truths of Masonry in the social and cultural life of modern 1977 America.

Let me illustrate. What does the Master-elect of a Lodge do as he starts to plan the program for the Lodge for the coming year? I venture to say that in most cases he sits down with a copy of the current year's calendar of events, alters the dates a bit so that the events will fall on the proper meeting nights, and then proudly announces to the Lodge "the program for the new year" . . . which turns out to be a repeat of the program of last year, and the year before that, and the year before that.

I would challenge you Senior Wardens-you Masters-elect-as you plan for next year in your Lodge (and I hope you are doing it now and not waiting until next January), before you ever start to think in terms of events and activities, have the courage to sit down, think through, and write out basic goals for the year ahead. Clearly define your objectives as they relate to the fundamental purposes of Masonry which we were talking about a few minutes ago . . . purposes such as challenging men to achieve their highest and best, motivating them in their quest to convince the world by their acts that on becoming a Master Mason they have become better men. Have the courage to evaluate the events of past years' programs. Do they really contribute toward your goals? Do they communicate Masonry to the world in a manner that is meaningful, relevant, and understandable in your particular community? Let us direct the time and effort of our available manpower into activities that really contribute toward growth in Masonry rather than being shackled to past patterns or somehow confused into thinking that continuing some trivial practice is an important Masonic tradition that must be preserved.

Grand Lodge Committee Chairmen, do you have the courage to discard old patterns and set forth on new ventures if, after careful thought and evaluation, you conclude that a revised program will be more effective in accomplishing the fundamental Masonic objectives of your Committee? Do the Line Officers of this Grand Lodge have the dedication of purpose and clarity of vision to thoughtfully and constructively evaluate the effectiveness of present activity patterns of seminars, laymen's conferences, youth programs, Masonic Homes support, receptions, luncheons, etc., and then do they have the courage to select which of these, or possibly other new programs, merit the time, effort, and emphasis of the of the Grand Lodge of California?

Let us face the question of courage or conformity very directly in another most important area. As we meet here these days in our Annual Communication, as we participate in the various committees and consider their recommendations and motions, and as we vote on the resolutions that are to come before us, are we ready to act as men of courage, or are we going to adhere to a complacent, easy-going conformity? Conformity to past patterns is a much easier path to follow and involves less risk of criticism than to struggle to develop the most effective and perhaps new means of achieving our Masonic goals that will be relevant to 1978.

Do we have the courage to strive to understand what the Landmarks, the Foundation of Masonic Law, truly mean to speculative Masonry today when they speak of the qualification of candidates for initiation? In our justifiable desire to preserve the sanctity of our lodge room, do we convey to the world inconsistent moral standards when we prohibit alcoholic beverages of any sort in our social halls, and yet freely participate in social drinking in our homes and in restaurants? Do these postures communicate an image of integrity to the world, or are we sending out garbled messages as to what Masonry is all about? Are we "mumbling to ourselves?" May we have the courage to thoughtfully re-examine some of these positions we have traditionally taken and the courage to affirm our convictions when such issues are under discussion or come to a vote.

Why do we find it so difficult to depart from the familiar and press forward into the unknown? Let me suggest that it, at least in part, stems from a basic reluctance to take the responsibility for error. We cannot be assured that a new action taken today will prove to be better than preserving the status quo. Hence, we are willing to forfeit the possibility of a greater and better future in order to avoid the risk of being responsible for what future history might show to be a mistaken judgment or decision. As long as we merely continue with past decisions and conform to past patterns, it is our forefathers who made those decisions who stand responsible should these programs fail. We have reached the most difficult step of all along the pathway of courage when we realize that we have come to the point where to be faithful to the fundamental truths of Masonry taught to us by our forefathers we must depart from the specific rules and

regulations laid down by those same forefathers for their generation. With gratitude and respect for the rich heritage in which we stand, and with due attention to the lessons taught us from the past, may we have the courage, after humbly seeking the guidance of Almighty God, to rely on our own wisdom and judgment-as dedicated Masonic Brethren have done throughout past ages-to direct the future course of this Grand Lodge.

I like the way theologian Paul Tillich expresses it when he speaks of "the courage to accept one's finiteness." He is speaking of the courage to trust one's self despite the acute awareness that we are finite, that we do not have all the answers, that we are not infallible, and that history may someday prove that what we are saying or doing may be a mistake. However, my Brethren, it is only from a courageous acceptance of "finitude," and a responsible acting thereon, that one develops the powers that one does possess, far from absolute though they be.

Let me leave one final and crucial thought with you. As I confront you with the challenge to be men of inner courage, I would also remind you that courage apart from humble dedication to God and sensitivity to His leading is arrogance. If we would be men of courage, we must look to our Supreme Grand Master as the ultimate source of courage as well as the source of wisdom, judgment, and loving compassion to match that courage. Recall the question asked of you when you were first admitted into a Lodge of Masons. Trust in God is indeed the very life-breath of Masonry. No man can find true wisdom and courage except down on his knees in the sight of the Supreme Grand Master. It is only when men on their knees are touched by the Divine-then, and only then, can they rise up to discover their true dimension and find courage, the virtue of maturity. However carefully and candidly we may examine and evaluate the Grand Lodge of California today, we cannot determine what new strength and courage God will awaken in us tomorrow, or what the Supreme Architect of the Universe has on His trestleboard for us to accomplish in the days ahead if we would but earnestly seek His guidance.

On our knees, let us dare to ask great things of God; and let us rise from our knees to expect great things from God! Masonry is indeed on the move. May the attitude throughout this Jurisdiction for the year ahead be "Expectant Masonry." May we commit ourselves to and expect a greater future than even our glorious past, and may we have the inner courage to be true, in word and in deed, to the eternal and essential truths of Masonry and to our God-given convictions.

Will you be men of Courage . . . or Conformity? The answer is up to you!