Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1979

Grand Orator
M. William Holsinger
“Whence Came You And Whither Are You Traveling?”

Most Worshipful Grand Master, my fellow Grand Lodge Officers, Past Grand Masters, Distinguished guests from other Grand Jurisdictions, members of the Grand Lodge of California, Brethren all

It is an honor, a privilege and an awesome responsibility to stand before you this afternoon. I feel both flattered and humbled having been asked to address you in light of the eloquent men who have occupied this office in years past. I pray that the Supreme Architect of the Universe will assist me in bringing a message that will be meaningful to all of you.

Grand Master on Monday afternoon. A mess unlike the eloquent addresses which he has delivered many times this past year; messages which have demonstrated his devotion to Masonry and his ability to shape words into meaningful phrases which stimulate the listener's thought. During this year I have heard our Grand Master refer on numerous occasions to "Ruskin." John Ruskin was probably the most influential English critic of the 1800's. His many writings on art, literature and social issues helped form the tastes of Victorian England. Ruskin was a master of turning his impressions into words that make his pages windows through which you see what he saw and feel what he felt. During this year now about to conclude, the Grand Lodge of California has had its own Ruskin in the person and character of the Most Worshipful Donald G. Ingalls, for he has turned his Masonic impressions into words that have made his addresses windows through which we might feel what he feels about Masonry. I am confident that his tenure as the leader of Masonry in California will have a deep and lasting impression, not only on this jurisdiction but nationwide. Speaking for my fellow Grand Lodge Officers, the Donald G. Ingalls family of 1979, may I say that we are indebted to you Don and to Mary for the opportunity of sharing your year. We, and our wives, shall always remember 1979 as a truly vintage year.

Do not misinterpret what I have just said my Brethren and assume that life has been a bed of roses this past year, because it has not-especially for your Grand Orator. Contemplate if you will, the prospect of traveling up and down this great jurisdiction from Alturas to Chula Vista, following to the microphone a speaker such as our Grand Master. It might be compared to being served an entree of filet mignon followed by a dessert of lumpy chocolate pudding. My Brethren, you have enjoyed your entree, it is now time for your pudding.

Whence came you, and whither are you traveling? Words familiar to every Mason. Words which bring to mind a never to be forgotten journey common to each one of us. A journey which creates that special feeling we have for each other, knowing that the stranger you have just met has traveled that same journey and shares many of your ideals and beliefs and suddenly that man is a stranger no more, but rather a brother who has traveled the pathway of friendship and brotherly love. This afternoon let us consider that inquiry, "whence came you, and whither are you traveling?" On a broader scope that is the Fraternity as a whole.

It would be redundant for me to attempt to review the history of Masonry for you. Our history is well known to each one of you. Further, it is impossible to determine precisely our beginnings; however, we know that our roots run deep. We can state with certainty that Masonry as we know it today originated with the founding of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717. But Masonry did not spring into existence at that time, but rather was a gradual evolution over countless centuries of time. It would seem reasonable to assume that Operative Masonry and the fundamentals of the ancient mysteries evolved more or less hand in hand from time immemorial. Through the ages sparks of divine inspiration fell upon men and kindled a flame of desire for knowledge. On some it kindled the flame of desire to know God. On others it kindled the desire to understand the sciences, the workings of the earth and all things therein contained. Others felt

the urge to build temples wherein could be disseminated this new fund of scientific and spiritual knowledge. Out of these desires the flame welded an association of men and of ideals. The many paths of knowledge finally joined together in one broad path of friendship and brotherly love; a path leading to a greater understanding of the divine plan and a closer association with God. This path is Masonry. Through this process of evolution Masonry has developed as we know it today, an amalgamation of men who know that power comes not from themselves, but from the Supreme Architect of the Universe, source of all light and power, the spiritual force of Masonry itself.

Masons know-note that I did not say believe-but know that God IS. No man can go through the ceremonies of Masonry thoughtfully and sincerely without feeling His presence. Knowing that God is they know that they are the sons of God, and therefore, brothers. Since there can be no Brotherhood of Man without the Fatherhood of God, it follows that the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man must be the great tenet of Masonry. It is on this foundation that Masonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion, and causes a true friendship to exist among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance. Nevertheless, there are times in our Masonic family when brothers seem to allow differences of opinion to create chasms of ill will and hard feelings to develop-when brothers will not speak to each other or if they do speak it is in terms that serve only to enlarge the valley of difference that lies between them. My Brethren, the perpetuation of these attitudes can only serve to divide our great Fraternity.

The five points of fellowship, it seems to me, are Masonry's way of exemplifying the Golden Rule; whereby we are taught to do unto others that, and only that, which we would wish them to do unto us. We might understand this concept better if we abandon the ritualistic form of its normal presentation and broaden its form into a series of questions which from time to time we might ask ourselves as we go about our usual activities; "Do I go out of my way to serve my fellow man?", "When offering my adoration to the ever living God do I remember the welfare of my fellow man as my own?", "When entrusted with the secrets of my fellow man do I keep them as such, whether given to me in charge as such or not?", "Do I stretch forth a helping hand to raise my fellow man from his fall?", "Do I whisper good counsel in his ear and thus endeavor to bring about his reformation?" The great task of Masonry is to spread these principles abroad, and by so doing help to overcome the ruffians of our day.

With such honorable and lofty ideals, it would seem to follow that our Fraternity should be a growing and vibrant organization. Many voices of doom are heard everywhere these days, all pointing to the continued loss in membership suffered by most jurisdictions in this country. One such voice, a prominent Mason and an actuary by profession, has made the following prediction: "If Freemasonry continues the downhill slide for the next twenty-five years that it has had for the past twenty-five, by the year 1990 the York Rite will cease to exist and by the year 2037 there will be just 100,000 Masons left in the entire United States of America;" which brings us to the second portion of the question which I asked earlier- "Whither are you traveling?"

You may be asking yourself what enables this Grand Orator to look into the future and determine our destiny. I am neither a fortuneteller nor an expert in the growth of our Fraternity; however, during the past seven years I have had the privilege of traveling this great jurisdiction and visiting many Lodges. In reminiscing over these travels one cannot help but wonder why some Lodges are active, have great enthusiasm and good attendance while other Lodges seem to barely exist. My Brethren, enthusiasm is the answer. Enthusiasm is more a matter of infection rather than injection. If you, the leaders of our Lodges, are enthusiastic it will become infectious. It will infect the members of your Lodges and you just may have an epidemic on your hands. I recall the story of a mother one Sunday morning who went into her son's bedroom to awaken him, saying, "Son it's time to get up. You have to go to church this morning." The son responded by saying, "Oh, Mother, I don't want to. I'd rather just stay in bed this morning." The Mother said, "No, son, now get up, it's time to go." The son responded again with a sleepy, "Oh, I hate to go to church, the songs are always the same, the sermons are boring, and I'd rather just stay in bed." The Mother replied by saying, "Son, you have to get up. You're 48 years old and you are the pastor of the church." Brethren, if the Masters of our Lodges are like that pastor, it is no wonder that many of our members are very reluctant to attend our Lodges. How can we incorporate

enthusiasm in the leaders of our Lodges and thereby in our members? Let's examine some specific areas for your consideration.

The Laymen's Night Program

One of the finest programs developed by this Grand Lodge is the Laymen's Night Program. Here is a method of acquainting the uninitiated with the principles of Freemasonry and at the same time kindling the fire of enthusiasm in some of our present members. It is a membership program in keeping with Masonic law and custom, and at the same time a Masonic education program. If you have not held a Laymen's Night Program, I encourage you to do so. If we accomplish nothing more than encouraging our members to talk about our Craft when given the opportunity, we will have overcome a great obstacle. I recall a cornerstone ceremony I attended a few years ago in a city where the community spirit was particularly high. The ceremony was well received by an enthusiastic crowd with many non-Masons in attendance.

After the ceremony I overheard a lady who had approached one of our Inspectors, express her gratitude for the beautiful ceremony and then she asked a question which had puzzled her for some time. Her question was, "What does the 'G' in your Masonic emblem stand for?" Here was an opportunity to enlighten someone who had a genuine interest in the Craft.

What was the Inspector's response? "Oh, I'm sorry I can't divulge that information. You see that is part of our secret ritual." I don't mean to point my finger at our beloved Inspectors; I point my finger at each and every one of us for allowing this attitude of "Oh, I can't talk about that" to continue.

Consider the case of Brother David H. Weber of Composite Lodge No. 774 of the State of Illinois. When people question Brother Weber about his lapel pin he responds with a comprehensive answer including all printed information available to non-Masons rather than the brief and generalized response usually given. Brother Weber's informative responses have resulted in 73 petitions for membership in Composite Lodge. Make no mistake, I do not advocate membership solicitation, but I do advocate an informed membership capable of responding to inquiries. When a timid knock is heard at the door, do not turn your back and respond by saying, "You must knock louder so all can hear."

The Lodge System of Masonic Information for Candidates

An uninformed membership is an unenthusiastic, uninterested membership. Masonic education in most of our Lodges has been limited to the candidates' lectures of the three degrees augmented by whatever the candidate picks up on his own, if he is interested enough to ask. The Masonic Information and Responsibility Committee of this Grand Lodge has developed the Lodge System of Masonic Information for Candidates. If implemented, Master Masons with greater knowledge and greater interest will result; Master Masons who will be more likely to attend Lodge on a regular basis rather than seldom seen after being raised. Our ritual is beautiful and filled to the brim with valuable lessons; however, a degree of explanation and encouragement along the way will bring into focus that which might otherwise remain a blurred impression for many.

The Hiram Award

Every man likes to be recognized for a job well done. In fact it often encourages added effort on the part of others to see one's contemporaries I honored for their efforts. The Hiram Award Program represents an attempt to recognize the unsung workers found in every Lodge. Don't forget to say "Thank You." That small remembrance will be returned in service many fold.

Social Activities

Some Lodges have achieved a high degree of success as essentially a man's organization, with minimal involvement of the wives and families. This, however, is the exception rather than the rule. For the most part, those Lodges which provide programs and activities of interest to the Mason and his wife alike, are the Lodges with well-attended activities.

Plan programs for the members and their wives which will be interesting-programs which are meaningful and useful-social activities which are truly enjoyable. Remember, today's world is a competitive world and your Lodge is competing with television and a myriad of other activities

for your members' time. Be competitive-you will gain his attention and make of him a more active member.

Public Schools Month and Constitution Observance Program

These are two traditional programs encouraged by our Grand Lodge and observed by most constituent Lodges. Our support of the public school system will take on a new dimension this coming year as we are faced with the proposed Family Choice Initiative-a new sounding name which still means "the voucher system". Here is an opportunity to acquaint your membership with the meaning of this proposed legislation and its effect on public education if such becomes law.

Our Constitution Observance programs which focus attention on our heritage as Americans and move us toward a dramatic rediscovery or remembering of the underlying reasons which led to the revolutionary birth of American freedoms, all too frequently fall upon the same ears which are present at most Lodge activities. I feel a strong effort should be made by constituent Lodges as well as the Grand Lodge to make this observance felt in the community by Mason and non-Mason alike.

Condition of Our Temples

Remember that non-Masons know and judge us by our actions as individual Masons and also by our Temples. Strive to keep our Temples in good repair, clean and inviting. I know we cannot all afford costly building programs, particularly in this period of runaway inflation, but even the most modest Temple will create a far better impression if maintained clean and in good repair.

Ritual

By my lack of reference to our ritual work up to this point, please do not feel that I am suggesting any less emphasis on our ritualistic endeavors. The valuable lessons portrayed in our ritual represent the heart and soul of our Fraternity, and I do not countenance any reduction in its importance. I am saying, however, that in addition to our ritual we must address ourselves to the total needs of our Fraternity.

My Brethren, the essence of these thoughts can be summed up by saying, as Worshipful Master remember that you are the chief executive officer of your Lodge. Think as the chief executive of any corporation would think. Maintain your corporate entity in a sound financial state and develop your most valuable asset, your members. As Wardens, you are the junior executives preparing for the day when you too shall lead your brethren. Plan your programs now and be prepared to give your fullest energies o the implementation of the plans which you should be making now. Be positive and set your goals high.

The talented author, Robert Louis Stevenson, suffered from consumption the last years of his life. His sleepless nights were interrupted by coughing and hacking. One morning Stevenson's wife entered his room after a particularly difficult night and found the sunlight entering the room, filtering through the many medicine bottles which lined the windowsill. "And I suppose you are going to tell me what a bright and cheery day it is outside," she said. Stevenson replied, "You don't think I am going to allow a few medicine bottles to obscure my horizons do you?"

Brethren, like Stevenson, let's not allow our horizons to become obscured.

In a recent speech to the Nation, our President admonished us that our country is experiencing a crisis of spirit and confidence. It is a time of disrespect for government, the news media and old institutions. These are symptoms-warning signs along the pathway of human existence that we are traveling; a time when two-thirds of our citizens do not take the time to exercise their franchise and vote. The two greatest concerns of many of our people today are how to find a place to park and what to do with our garbage.

We are at a turning point in the history of our Country, and our Fraternity. One path leads to sure defeat and obscurity and the other to certain success and prosperity. We seem to have found all the answers, but the important one-how to live with God, with others and with ourselves. Freemasonry portrays the truth about man, it teaches the eternal truth that despite all the differences that exist in race, color, tradition, language and culture all men in the deepest sense are brothers.

One year ago our Grand Master said, "The light of Masonry leads the way with a willingness of the heart." Your presence here at this Annual Communication demonstrates the willingness in your heart and now it is time to let the light of Masonry shine for all to see. There are thousands of dedicated Freemasons who live and practice every day the tenets of our Fraternity. They are living examples of Freemasonry in action and represent our present and future strength and hope.

Let every Worshipful Master, on accepting the gavel and receiving the jewel of his office, resolve to leave his Lodge at the conclusion of his tenure just a little stronger, just a little more active and prosperous than the way he received it from his predecessor. If each and every Master will do this, stronger Lodges composed of stronger Masons will result, and strong Masons will build a stronger America.

As Most Worshipful Thomas J. Davis, Grand Master of Masons of the state of Missouri in 1972 said, "Our future lies within the heart of each one of us-you and me. If our hearts should guide us to continue our work in the vineyard for the principles of Freemasonry, then surely our future is one of success. Success or failure is measured in two words-minimum and maximum. If we do just what we have to do and nothing more, then we have followed not our hearts, but the minimum necessary to get by, and our Fraternity will probably be one of failure. It is my belief that each one of us will give a maximum effort, truly from the heart, and success will prevail."

My Brethren, adversity is the prosperity of the great. Kites rise against, not with the wind.

"If you think you are beaten, you are;
If you think you dare not, you don't,
If you'd like to win, but think you can't,
It's almost a cinch you won't.
If you think you'll lose, you're lost,
For out in the world we find
Success begins with a fellow's will;
It's all in the state of mind.
Life's battles don't always go
To the stronger or faster man;
But sooner or later the man who wins
Is the one who thinks he can."

My Brethren, I know we can!