

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1985**

**Grand Orator  
R. Steven Doan  
"MASONRY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Distinguished visitors and Brethren of this Grand Lodge

Masons are builders. Legendarily, we built King Solomon's Temple. Historically, we built the great Gothic cathedrals in Europe during the Middle Ages. We built our Fraternity from a guild, or a labor union, if you will, of operative stonemasons to a speculative society of non-operative Masons accepted to study and put into practice the philosophical principles of the ancient stonemasons' craft, the moral and philosophical lessons associated with the working tools and practices of our operative forbearers.

Because Masons have always been builders, some of us are uncertain as to how we can reverse the recent decline in our Fraternity. Our membership has eroded steadily since the middle of the 1960's; Lodges consolidate but still cannot find officers. As builders, we have never been trained to defend against those forces of our contemporary world, sometimes more interested in destroying than building on the foundations which have supported Mankind for eternity.

We can, however, find comfort and consolation in two overriding principles of civilization. First, as with the tides, all things ebb and flood. Life is cyclical, moving back and forth, pulsating, in a cycle. It does not necessarily move on a continuum to one goal.

Consider the vitality of Masonry over the centuries. Our historical beginnings can be traced to the construction of the great Gothic cathedrals in the late Thirteenth Century. Operative Masonry thrived and expanded as every population center with a bishop sought to build a cathedral more impressive than any other. Operative Masonry began to die in the Seventeenth Century when cathedral building slowed. It was then that men in increasing numbers were admitted to Masonry to study or speculate on the moral and philosophical lessons associated with the working tools and techniques of the operative stonemasons, and our Fraternity expanded once again. Masonry expanded to this country, arriving with the Colonists. However, in the 1820's, many blamed the Masons for the disappearance of a William Morgan who had published an alleged expose regarding the secrets of Freemasonry. The public's reaction was so severe against Masonry that in New York alone over a four-year period the number of Lodges dropped from five hundred to eighty-two and the number of members from over twenty thousand to fewer than three thousand. After the Civil War, the growth of Freemasonry was rapid and permanent with only a temporary setback during the Great Depression and the hopefully temporary setback which commenced about twenty years ago. Over many centuries, therefore, the size and vitality of Masonry has been cyclical.

The second overriding principle of civilization from which we can take com-fort and consolation can be summarized as follows: institutions with a message or a truth on the essence of Man never die. They adapt to changing times but the truths taught remain the same. Man has certain basic beliefs in common, regardless of background: a belief in a Supreme Being and respect for Nature and all things beyond his control. These are the only means of make sense of an often senseless world. Therefore, the greatest and most enduring ideas of Man are those which use these basic instincts to explain the mysteries of life.

All great institutions have survived because they address Man's basic instincts with a timeless message. Christianity began as a small sect of Jews who believed that the Messiah had come and would return in a few years in a second coming to save all people. Christianity has developed into a worldwide religion. Although its adherents cannot agree on the time of the second coming, they all agree that each person should lead his life as if that second coming and each individual's personal Judgment Day can come at any moment. Christianity has survived because its basic truths - faith in a loving God, hope of personal salvation and commitment to

personal improvement - transcend all ages and have been interpreted by each age to apply to the problems of the time.

Consider our American system of government. Our United States Constitution, with a fragile start, has endured, from a rural, homogeneous, agrarian society of less than four million people in 1790, when communication between Massachusetts and South Carolina could take weeks, to an urban, diverse, industrial society of 200,000,000 people, with instantaneous communication available to the vast majority. Our system of government has survived because its basic truths - the guarantee of liberty for all; free, public education which equips people to rule themselves; and, most importantly, the personal vigilance of every American in preserving our Constitution and never countenancing any person who would abridge its liberties for anyone have been embraced by each generation and interpreted as needed to resolve America's problems at the time.

Masonry likewise possesses timeless truths. They are the truths which distinguished Masonry as an operative guild during the Middle Ages and allowed it to transform itself into a speculative society in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. They are the truths by which Masonry survived the Morgan affair; they are the truths by which Masonry survived the Depression; they are the truths which will permit us to reverse our present decline. We can reverse this recent decline in membership, this inevitable ebb tide in the continuing cycle of our Fraternity's existence, by redefining those universal truths about Mankind which Masonry teaches to meet the needs of our time. We must ready ourselves for the next inevitable flood tide by determining how Masonry can best exemplify its universal, timeless truths to answer Man's questions on life in the Twenty-First Century.

What are the universal truths of Masonry that survive all ages? The answer is so self-evident that we might otherwise overlook it. They are so fundamental to Masonry that they were explained to you on the very night that you became a Mason; they are the principal tenants of Masonry; they are: brotherly love, relief and truth.

#### **Brotherly Love**

By brotherly love, Masons are taught to regard all human beings as members of one family, regardless of power or wealth. As we believe that we are all children of God, we are, by definition, all brothers, obligated to aid, support and protect one another. Masonry unites people of diverse backgrounds because, having expressed a belief in God, all of us were brothers even before initiation into our Fraternity. In the medieval Masonic Lodges of operative stonemasons, brotherly love was essential to maintain harmony among a large group of relatively uneducated workers whose political allegiances and struggle for personal survival might be in conflict. Also, the medieval stonemasons traveled to whatever political jurisdiction had work available. Because it was often necessary to travel to strange lands with unfamiliar customs, a stonemason was expected to commence work immediately in harmony and concord with people who theretofore might have been complete strangers.

Masonry, of course, in the Twenty-First Century will not build stone cathedrals in Europe. However, many characteristics of the Twenty-First Century will not be unlike the Middle Ages. There is a greater mobility in society today. Men and women are often transferred several times in their economic career to different geographical locations as part of their work. There is also an unfortunate increase in economic inequality among people. While we in America have historically relied on the family to a certain extent for economic and psychological support, the family institution has declined with the increasing number of broken homes as well as the strain on family ties caused by people moving around the country as part of their work.

Masonry can supply the answer to this problem. Whether by membership in Masonry, Eastern Star, a Masonic youth group or any of the other Masonic-affiliated organizations, each of which is founded upon the Masonic principle of brotherly love, a member can find friends among strangers wherever he or she might travel. A member can travel to a new location, without family or any established friends, and immediately find friends and therefore support in strange surroundings at the local Masonic Temple. But, what are we doing to encourage this? What activities do we plan so that Masonry's practiced truth of brotherly love can help solve these problems of the Twenty-First Century?

In order to make Masonry's brotherly love important for the Twenty-First Century, we must dispel the myth that Masonry arbitrarily discriminates in its membership. We rightfully possess

and inspire the reputation of being selective in that only good men and true may join us, but this has sometimes been unfortunately viewed as selection based upon class or particular sectarian belief. There are no restrictions on membership in our Fraternity other than a belief in a Supreme Being and an expectation of personal salvation. No religious or political belief consistent with these two requirements for membership in Masonry bars any man from membership. There are no racial barriers on membership. There are no barriers based on the countries from which one's ancestors came.

We must dispel the myth about membership in our Fraternity whenever the opportunity arises. When someone asks us about Masonry, there is a great deal that we can tell him and, indeed, there are only a few things about Masonry which are 'secret': a few of our methods of recognizing one another and certain of our legends are secret and cannot be disclosed. At the same time, we should remind the questioner that there is absolutely no religious nor any other barrier to becoming a Mason, if the applicant believes in God and a future existence.

More importantly, we must make Masonry attractive. It should encourage and inspire men to join and share in its brotherly love and affection once they know that it is open to them. What can your Lodge do to make Masonry more attractive? Does your Lodge have a Layman's Night Program at least annually? There is no better way to acquaint the uninitiated who may have expressed an interest in Freemasonry with the Principles of our Fraternity and at the same time increase the knowledge and interest and therefore the enthusiasm of our present members. Lodges routinely have received from two to ten petitions as a result of a Layman's Night Program.

What social activities does your Lodge have? Some Lodges have achieved success as essentially an all-men's organization with minimal involvement of wives and family. This is certainly the exception and not the rule. For the most part, Lodges with programs and activities of interest to the Mason, his wife and children are the Lodges with no membership problems. My own Lodge has a family potluck dinner at every Stated Meeting. Many Lodges accompany their Stated Meeting dinners with programs for the wives while the men are in their meeting. When a man comes home on the night of his Stated Meeting, his wife will not encourage him to go to Lodge in most instances if it means that she must stay home alone. However, if going to a Stated Meeting means that she is going out to dinner and will meet with her friends while her husband is in the meeting, you can guess where that Mason will have dinner that night!

My Lodge has had family activities: picnics, baseball games and the like, that include children of the members and our local Masonic youth groups. When I served as Master of the Lodge, at the age of twenty-five, I had more than a dozen members of my Lodge younger than I was who joined as a result of those activities involving the members of my Lodge and my DeMolay Chapter. Some churches say that families that pray together stay together. In this instance, Masonic families that play together stay together because the Masonic youth, even if their parents do not belong to Masonic organizations, through social activities with the members of the Masonic Lodge become their friends and naturally want to be a part of them when they become eligible.

I have one more thought with respect to the impression which we give to the uninitiated. Never judge a book by the cover, we may have learned as a child, but a tattered, dirty cover on a book is much less appealing to the potential reader than a well-kept and clean cover. What does your Masonic Temple look like? My brother lives in a town which was a small, rural, farming community when its Masonic Lodge began. However, it is now a relatively affluent suburb of a major city. When asked if he had had any success in attracting his friends in the community to Masonry, my brother logically responded: these people are successful and live in nice houses. They do not want to go to a run-down, old Lodge Hall like that. Lodge Halls do not have to be architectural monuments but even the most modest Masonic Temple will create a far better impression if maintained clean and in good repair.

### **Relief**

To relieve the distressed is a duty which all men possess, but particularly Masons because of the indissoluble links between us of brotherly love and affection. Among our medieval stonemason ancestors. Masonic relief was of tremendous importance. The Gothic cathedrals constructed by the operative Masons reached almost forty stories in height, a feat not duplicated before or in any period afterward until many centuries later. The work was dangerous. In addition to working at great heights, the workmen were required to cut stones and move them to the

building site. In an era when there was no workmen's compensation insurance nor public welfare system as we know it today, there was no established means to assume responsibility for a stonemason injured on the job or for assistance of his widow and orphans should he be killed on the job. This responsibility was assumed by the stonemasons. A man upon becoming a stonemason could rest assured that, should any calamity befall him, he would be taken care of, as well as those dependent upon him, by his brother Masons. To aid and assist the distressed, worthy brother Mason, his widow and orphans thus became one of the first lessons a man learned upon becoming a stonemason.

As the operative stonemasons' actual building activities declined during the Seventeenth Century, the need for the relief of an injured brother or the family of a deceased brother declined also. This did not diminish the Masons' charitable concerns. So engrained in the philosophy of Masonry was the teaching of relief that the Masons extended their charitable endeavors beyond their own circle of members and families to the public at large. A fundamental impetus to the creation of the Grand Lodge of California was the tremendous need for Masonic charity caused by the sudden influx of people at the time of the Gold Rush in 1850. The crowning glories of California Masonic charity today are our Masonic Homes.

With Social Security, welfare, Medicare and MediCal, we sometimes lose sight of the need for Masonic charity. Unlike governmental programs, however, Masonry gives charitably with a human face. Our Masonic charities, such as our Masonic Homes and the Shriners' Hospitals for Crippled Children and Burns Institutes, just to name a few, admit regardless of economic means and, in the case of the Shriners' Hospitals and Burns Institutes, regardless of affiliation with Masonry. Our Masonic charities care in a family environment, with respect and without the impersonal, sometimes uncaring, approach of many governmental assistance bureaucracies.

How is this relevant for the Twenty- First Century? While the government assumes a bulk of the social welfare responsibilities in society, we are only too aware that this is and will continue to be an era of limitations. As life expectancies increase and as government programs continue to be limited, there will remain a significant proportion of society, particularly the elderly, serviced at only a bare minimum by government and then only with an impersonal rather than the personal approach of Masonic charity.

What can your Lodge do? Of course, your Lodge as well as any of the concordant bodies to which you belong can continue to support the organized charities of the Grand Lodge and of the governing body of your concordant organizations. But, each Lodge and concordant body can put charity into practice in the community on a personal, individual basis. During the early history of California Freemasonry, it was not uncommon for a Masonic Lodge to assume all of the responsibilities for the relief of a distressed member, including payment of all food and housing bills and medical expenses. There are countless examples of this Masonic charity in the early history of our Jurisdiction, which on many occasions was extended beyond our Masonic family to those in the community who were in need. We can do that today. Every Lodge is probably near an old folks' home. What is your Lodge doing for them? While charity clearly begins at home, there are many opportunities for us to extend charity to the community at large, opportunities to show those who may not be Masons one of the truths of our Fraternity and to turn our words into deeds by displaying Masonic Charity in relieving those who may be less fortunate.

### **Truth**

Truth is a divine attribute and the foundation of every virtue. In this sense, truth means sincerity, honesty of expression and plain dealing. Our medieval stonemason ancestors taught their apprentices to be truthful because they wished to maintain the reputation of their craft and to assure any potential employer that honest work would be received for wages paid.

Over the centuries, however, this sense of truth has broadened into a wider meaning. A real objective of Freemasonry today is the search for truth, that search for perfection of thought and conduct which God had in view when He originally created us in His image. Clearly, the search for truth will be as relevant in the Twenty-First Century as it has been in every century before as Man never has and probably never in this life will achieve perfection; but, the perhaps impossibility of the goal should not dissuade any of us from the necessity of the search.

How can we help ourselves and others in the Twenty-First Century in the search for truth? For those who are Masons, the ritual of our Fraternity is the foundation for our search. The great philosophers of different ages who have become Masons have extolled its symbols, allegories

and legends as the means by which any reflective member could discover the pathway to personal perfection. What are you doing as a Mason to discover the pathway to perfection through our ritual? Do you simply parrot the ritual by rote, or do you attempt to understand what it means? If you are a Master, what kind of Masonic education program do you have for your members? During this year, I have directed my orations to both members and non-members of the Fraternity in an attempt to help them understand the philosophy of Masonry and how it may apply in their daily lives. Even some of your Grand Lodge officers, Inspectors and Committeemen, including myself, have been surprised by some of the philosophical aspects of our Fraternity which I have discovered in preparing for these orations.

Do you help your new candidates learn the philosophy of life upon which they have embarked by becoming Masons? Do you motivate members who may have belonged for some time to increase their Masonic knowledge and, therefore, their interest in our Fraternity? Do you have a five to ten minute talk at every meeting about a subject of interest regarding our teachings? A member assigned to report on something of interest in Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, still in print and easily available, could report for several years in such a manner before duplicating any material.

Our search for truth should extend beyond our membership. Masons believe very strongly that each individual should have the freedom to search for truth > in his or her own way so long as that search does not interfere with the rights of another to pursue similarly his or her search for truth. Masons therefore support the United States Constitution and should make the observance of its anniversary in September of each year a prominent feature of a Lodge's program because it is our Constitution which is the best guarantee of each one of our searches for personal truth. In addition. Masons support free public schools as only an educated citizenry can, through elections and public service, guarantee that our constitutional system of liberties will be preserved and, therefore, that we and future generations will have our Constitution in a democratic society available to preserve our search for personal truth.

What is your Lodge doing to support the Constitution and public schools?

Do you have a Constitution and public schools observance? Do you invite the general public and explain the importance of the Constitution and public schools and why Masonry does and each citizen should support them? One

Lodge in this Jurisdiction has sponsored an annual public essay contest among local public school students to increase their awareness of these institutions.

My own Eastern Star Chapter this last year awarded a \$400.00 scholarship to a local high school senior as its contribution to the continuation of an educated citizenry.

In the Winter 1984 edition of the California Freemason, one of our Hawaiian Brethren reports a conversation in the late 1960's with an officer of the Grand Lodge. In response to an inquiry by our Hawaiian Brother as to what was being done to stem our membership decline, our Hawaiian Brother was shocked to receive the response: There is no need for concern, since membership numbers are cyclical in nature and we need only to ride this out. Our Hawaiian Brother observed: Ride out to what? Oblivion?

Institutions are cyclical and their truths can endure. But, institutions and their truths do not survive without the active support of each of their adherents. Masonry will survive and can be an important force in the Twenty-First Century only if we are committed to those actions necessary to make its truths relevant for the Twenty-First Century and an important part of the lives of all people, whether Masons or not. We must do something. I have given you some thoughts, but how best they can work in your own circumstances can only be determined by you on reflection on what your Lodge and its community needs.

The social critic Eric Hoffer observed that most of us are frightened by change: the more dramatic the transition, the more dramatic our reaction. Uncertainty with respect to the future of our Craft in a rapidly changing world is particularly troublesome because Masonry's truths have, to date, survived the test of time. However, as with all institutions, our Fraternity must grow, adapt to change, or stagnate. We must increase our commitment to Freemasonry and understand how its truths should be adapted to a changing world or we will stagnate.

The most important, the fundamental tenants of Freemasonry are brotherly love, relief and truth, but there will be no Freemasonry if it does not serve the current needs of Mankind.

Freemasonry will survive only if we make its tenants responsive to the needs of the Twenty-First Century. What will you do to help?