

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1993**

**Grand Orator
Frederick L. Sorsabal**

Prior to commencing this Grand Oration, may I say to you Most Worshipful, on behalf of all the appointed Grand Lodge officers for 1992-93, thank you for giving each of us a fantastic opportunity to serve our Grand Lodge and the wonderful, dedicated Masons of California. This time of service has been an opportunity for each of us to feel the real vibrancy of our great fraternity. It truly has been an exhilarating year, and we thank you for allowing us to be part of it.

The theme for the 1992-93 Masonic year has been "Masonry in the 21st Century." Many of you probably are worried that because of the decrease in the membership of your lodges, there will not be a Masonic Order in the 21st century. I now want you all to dream about the future and nurture those dreams in Masonry. We must encourage the dreams of others - don't feel you brighten up a room by leaving it. We in Masonry have a message of good things - great philosophies. Share this message with all those with whom you come in contact. Remember that a broken clock is right twice a day. God has given us the ability to share - share our Masonic teachings of brotherly love, relief, and truth. After this sharing, show how you can help the other person rather than just yourself. You will have then fulfilled our dream. Give thanks to God for the benefit to dream.

History is but the prologue for the future. Our Masonic history has been phenomenal. From small groups of workmen primarily concerned with preserving their status as highly skilled craftsmen, it has evolved over the centuries into a fraternal and philosophical society covering a major portion of the earth. Our past is secure. Masonry in the United States had a silent but large part in shaping this country, its fundamental life, and certainly its laws. Would the American Revolution have been different if Washington and most of his generals were not held together by that peculiar tie which Masons spin and weave between men?

But, my brothers, what of the future? What of our dreams? Gillet has said, "We are always looking to the future; the present does not satisfy us. Our' ideal, whatever it may be, lies further on." This is certainly true of Masonry. The golden age is not in the past but in the future. Longfellow said, "Look not mournfully to the past - it comes not back again; wisely improve the present - it is thine; go forth to meet the shadowy future without fear and with a manly heart." My brothers, this should be our determination.

Is today's Masonry organized to meet the demands of a realistic society? When making men Masons, do we give them an intelligent and authentic knowledge of what Masonry is or what it means? The future of Masonry, if it is to have a future worthy of its past, will be determined by its historic genius and purpose, its spirit and tenants. Otherwise, our lodges will become mere clubs - Rotary with a ritual - far removed from the original meaning and intent of our craft - our trinity of purpose - brotherly love, relief, and truth.

Relief — nothing need be said beyond the words of an eastern seer: "When man will not help man, the end of the world has come."

By "relief we mean the urgent necessities of humanity in time of woe or disaster, which may, any day, devastate any part of our world, helping not only our brethren in dire plight but all who are made helpless. An unknown poet puts it vividly:

"Men in the street and mart
felt the same kinship of the human heart
that makes them, in face of flame and flood,
rise to the meaning of true brotherhood."

By "truth" I mean the important things in the service of which the modern Masonic craft is enlisted and devoted. First, Free Masonry stands for those great freedoms of the mind by which men arrive at the truth. Our craft is utterly committed to the principle of freedom of thought - unhampered by political or religious dictation - the right, and yes, the duty of man to seek

everywhere and in every way the truth by which no man is injured, but by which we have the only basis for freedom and faith. Second, we mean by truth our devotion to the enterprise of public education without which democratic societies cannot permanently endure. By letting in the light all the way, we will be successful in driving ignorance, intolerance, superstition, and despotism off the face of the earth.

Now, let's get back to the future - the future of Masonry depends upon many things. Today, we live in a technological age. Scientific research has given us vast knowledge in a short time. These strides in science have brought us prosperity beyond our wildest dreams, even though we are presently in a recession. While we have seen changes in our society, some of which we don't like, our population has a fluidity and mobility which is without precedent. Youth is again full of unrest. Protests are increasing in number, and violence rises like an ugly serpent.

All of these changes require different uses of our talents, our time, ourselves, and the ways in which we are family members. Either we change and adapt ourselves to these changing times, or we die. The same is true of our great philosophical order. No one is asking Masonry to change — only that it adapt to today's and tomorrow's world. We must change our approach to, and visible exemplification of, that which is good. Alien Roberts, in his book, *The Craft and Its Symbols*, expresses this thought very well. He says, "The principles of Free Masonry are transmitted unimpaired, but the vehicle through which they are expressed changes as the years go on." We need to continue to change our way of imparting the teachings of Free Masonry to those who will seek them, and in so doing, it is within the limits of probability we will find new ways to attract worthy and well-qualified men to petition our fraternity.

Some of you say "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." Doesn't this really mean we are doing the same thing over and over again? The U.S. Auto Industry is a prime example of this approach. Look how long it took them to realize that the auto-buying public had shifted from gas-guzzlers to little cars. The foreign auto manufacturers had seen this shift and adapted early on. Masonry must adapt to these shifts also. Remember, I did not use the word "change".

The future of Masonry depends upon leadership — your leadership — your direction. We must have good leaders at the grass roots of our order. We need men full of energy, vision, and a willingness to work. We need a base of younger men who speak out and are not "put in their place" by older Masons. Young men who know that one of our ancient landmarks is not "we can't do it, because it has never been done that way." We need to focus our attention upon the young men in our lodges by giving them increased Masonic knowledge and an opportunity to become participants and not mere spectators. This is the work, and should be the goal, of every leader. Any organization is but the lengthened shadow of its leaders. Its success or failure depends almost entirely upon what they do. If they start out with the command, "Come on, men", success is sure; however, if the command is, "Go on, men!" the organization will be assured of total failure.

Our leaders will provide the necessary goals and programs for our lodges to attract and retain its members. We should remember to make our meetings more than just boring repetition of our ritual or degrees. Good lodge leaders will provide an avenue for the family to enjoy our Masonic heritage. Bringing non-Masons into those activities could well provide a cadre of potential members. Quality leadership will provide the desire for members to attend and also find the opportunity to provide for our families and our church and/or social life. Begin by developing fellowship in your lodge. Remember, you can't shake hands with a clenched fist.

The future of Masonry depends also upon education. The necessary education and instruction to our new members and officers is needed to understand the meaning of our very important Masonic lessons. Let us not be like the small child who has learned to count to ten but cannot recognize any of the numbers and would not know what to do with them even if he or she knew what they looked like.

In our Masonic educational programs, are we giving too much emphasis to a fixed course or routine, a repetition of forms or phrases, without giving attention to meaning and instruction as to how these truths are to be applied to everyday life? I ask, how much do you know about Masonry? I am sure many of you are good ritualists. You know the work, words, signs, and the grips; but, if this is the total of your Masonic education, you have learned only the first lesson. You cannot do unless you know, but knowledge without application is of little value. Author Benjamin Kidd has indicated that it would be possible to change the trend of an entire nation in a single

generation if the ideals of the desired end could be implanted in the youth of that generation. What would our nation and world be like in the 21st century if we could implant in the hearts and minds of all our members the great teachings and ideals of our fraternity? Wouldn't the future of Masonry surpass even the imagination of the most optimistic person?

The future of Masonry also depends upon dedication and service -dedication to the point of faithfulness to the tenants of our fraternity, which begins with faithfulness in attendance at the regular meetings of your lodge. I know I am preaching to the choir, as most of you are faithful attendees. But why aren't the other members of your lodge attending? Are your meetings dull and boring?

Dedication to the fundamental principles of Free Masonry. Showing and practicing these principles in our homes and our communities. Masonry we are told, strives to make good men into better men. It is my hope that as Masons we try to practice the virtues and to display sound moral judgment, not only within the lodge but outside it as well.

The fundamental principles of Masonry are the foundation of a healthy society. Whenever the guidelines of society are bent, redirected, or removed too far, then society tends to return to absolute standards which are proven As Masons, we must promote these fundamental principles! Each of us must commit to make a difference. We must be reassured that every Mason practices the virtues for which we subscribe and display a sound moral judgment, not only within our lodges but outside as well. We must have a genuine concern for our neighbors. We can no longer live within ourselves even though we may want to, remembering the phrase, "no man is an island, entire of itself." We must have a genuine concern for our neighbors. This requires a sharing of time.

By helping and sharing with others, we influence them You will continually influence through your words and actions. You are constantly teaching others how to behave towards you. Remember what Gandhi said "I am my messenger." Your words and behaviors are just representation of your real self. Don't chip away at integrity.

The supreme architect has given each of us three great gifts, some to a greater degree and some to a lesser degree. The first gift is a span of time to live out our lives during which we can decide to be selfish, grasping for worldly possessions, or we may decide to have a genuine concern for our neighbors. The latter requires a sharing of time. If we are to get the most out of life, we must share our time and ourselves with others. The second great gift is our talents or abilities. We differ in abilities. Some of us may only be able to listen. Some of us may use our vocational skills to help our fellow worker. And some may be called upon to lead. The last great gift is our worldly possessions. Often we think of these only in terms of money. However, to relieve the needs of others, we can use our money and our other material possessions. If we employ our abilities, possessions, and time to help others, we need not proclaim what we have done for the cause of good.

"How you manage your whole life,
responsibly or carelessly,
generously or selfishly,
imaginatively or fearfully is your stewardship.
All gifts belong to god and you are
the responsible caretaker for a little while.
To be a good steward
is to be able to offer each day,
as an act of worship,
abilities well used
time well spent
possessions well distributed.

Author unknown

The future of Masonry depends upon action. We must put into action the ideals, the teachings, and the principles of Free Masonry. In Masonry, we need to become "doers of the word and not hearers only." "By their works, ye shall know them" is most true when spoken of Masons. We must "walk our talk."

Masonry in action is a group of men at work seeking to overcome the spirit of selfishness. Our true spirit is one of friendship, companionship, and brotherly love. Ours is an organization in

which we are taught that we have not only a duty to God but also a duty to help our fellow man. When it is our time for God to measure us, He will measure not by the words spoken, but by the deeds done. So will our communities!

Masonry in action is a group of men practicing toleration. Toleration for opposing viewpoints and tolerance for ethnic diversity. Adiai Stevenson indicated, "Tolerance is the key to peace, for there can be no peace unless there is mutual tolerance between differing peoples and systems and cultures.

Masonry in action is a group of men seeking to overcome the spirit of immorality. When we follow the teachings of morality and virtue, we become better men and, thus, inherit a better world. You cannot have a better world without better men.

"Your task...

To build a better world," God said.

But I answered, "How?

The world is such a large, vast place,
so complicated now,
and I so small and useless am;
there's nothing I can do."

But God, in all His wisdom said,

"Just build a better you."

My brothers. Masonry in the 21st century will have adapted to the then society; however, the fundamental principles of our craft will not change. Each of us has the responsibility to use our abilities, time, and possessions for the benefit of our lodge, the craft, and our communities. If these fundamental principles are observed, our Masonry will be meaningful. In our changing society, the challenge to practice and communicate these fundamental principles will ever be before us. I say to you, "Let your Masonic principles live outside the lodge room for everyone to see, admire and emulate; then, yes, Masonry will live and flourish."

May we forever succeed!