

**Master's Installation Address
28 December 2009**

**Wor. Bro. Andrew Hammer
Master, Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22
A.L. 6010 — A.D. 2010**

It is an honour and a privilege to be elected to govern this Lodge as its 151st Master. It is a humbling experience to follow in the footsteps of the men who have gone before me, and I thank the brethren of our Lodge for the confidence which they have placed in me.

Our Lodge is called the Lodge of Washington, but in truth it is much more than that; it is the Lodge of those lesser known men of Alexandria who invited him to join it, after they had worked to create it; men who he held in such esteem that he agreed to do so.

I would ask when you think of our Lodge, that you think of these men, Robert Adam, Robert McCrea, and Elisha Cullen Dick, and remember that as Masons we meet on the level, and that this Lodge is also the first Lodge of Alexandria, as is equally expressed in our name. This Lodge would not be here without these men, and our true connection to Bro. Washington is that he chose to honour those founding fathers of our Lodge by joining his cause to theirs.

I want to begin my remarks by thanking a number of very important people, because nothing that I have done here in this Lodge is my accomplishment alone.

I want to thank Right Worshipful Walter Downs for once again doing his exemplary task of installing our officers.

I want to thank the Grand Organist of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, F. Reed Brown, for his musical talents this evening.

I am extremely fortunate to have in attendance this evening Most Worshipful Kwame Acquaaah, Past Grand Master of Masons in the District of Columbia, Right Worshipful Bilal Raschid, the Grand Chaplain of Masons in the District of Columbia, and Worshipful Brother W. Kirk MacNulty, Past

Master of the Lodge of Living Stones, author of The Way of the Craftsman, and a member of our Lodge.

I want to acknowledge Worshipful Brother Mark Tabbert, Director of Collections at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial.

And I want to thank Right Worshipful Mike Aulicino, District Deputy Grand Master for District 1A, for his kind words and his being here this evening.

When we speak of Masonry being an organisation of good men, of men about whom there can be no question, I'm very fortunate to know one such man who was instrumental in piqueing my curiosity about the Craft, and this mainly because as I observed his own actions, I saw a man who was selfless, honest to a fault, and who always tries to see the good in others even when there was little good to be seen. This is my father-in-law, Worshipful Brother Richard Klein, Past Master of Excelsior Lodge #251 in Charlotte, NC. He was here with me when I was initiated, here again when I was raised, and I am delighted that he is here with me tonight. I'm also very grateful that my mother-in-law Paula Klein is here; both Paula and Richard come from a Masonic families, and through my wife Deborah, I am the fifth generation of Masons in our family. Speaking of my wife, she has been nothing less than heroic in her support for all my Masonic endeavours, and she knows that she will always have my eternal love and gratitude.

I want to thank Worshipful Bro. Earl Covey, who is an institution among us here at AW22. This fine, fine man has taught me and many others the ritual of our Craft, and we love him dearly as a brother and a friend. His diligent commitment to accuracy and correct attitude in our ceremonies affirms the value of the discipline of our order. I thank you, Worshipful, for being with us this evening. It means a great deal to your brothers here.

I want to recognise Wor. Bob Watkins, who is the reason I am standing here today. Bob had the confidence in me to put me in the officer line in 2007, and has always been supportive of my efforts in Masonry and willing to listen to my ideas.

I want to thank Wor. Heber Willis, who has an admirable calmness of spirit that equipped him well to deal with a Senior Warden like me, which he did with the patience of Job. He has been most supportive of me as I planned

for the year ahead, and I am extremely grateful to him for that.

And I want to acknowledge the man whom I have chosen to entrust with the welfare of our lodge's membership by making him our Secretary, a man in whom I have the greatest confidence, and who has inspired us all with his commitment to the highest standards of excellence in the Craft. Worshipful Brother Wood, I am greatly pleased to have you by my side this year, to help me continue the vision and the work that we began during your year in the East only two years ago. At that time you were very kind to thank me for helping you with the planning for your year, and I equally want to thank you now for the many hours of true Masonic friendship, brotherhood and contemplation we have shared in navigating this journey to higher things. Your sage understanding of the essence of Freemasonry has been indispensable to me, and I look forward to working with you during the coming year.

Finally I want to acknowledge my line of officers; I could not ask for a finer group of brothers to assist me in the year ahead. I want to give special recognition to three.

John Olson and I started talking about how we might improve our Lodge as well as Masonry almost as soon as we met just over three years ago. He shares a common vision of Masonry restored to its glory, and we have been partners in this laudable pursuit from the very beginning. This brother has a most promising future ahead of him in our Craft, and I am already looking forward to his following me in the East next year.

Mike Bailey is a brother who always has a good solution to any problem I might have. He thinks of the things that I sometimes don't see, and that is an extraordinary asset to any leadership team. He will make an excellent Master when he ascends to the East.

Joshua Adler is a brother whom I can go to for almost anything and fully rely on the fact that he will see to it that it is done. I know you will agree with me that in this day and age, such reliable men are exceedingly rare. He understands the dignity of principle and a job well done as it applies to both Masonry and to life, and he too will be an excellent Master of our Lodge.

Again, I could not ask for better officers, and I look forward to serving with

all of you.

Tonight I want to speak on the idea of Masonry in transition. There can be no doubt that our fraternity is in transition; the events of recent years have brought several changes in everything from important issues of recognition to the method by which we introduce new men to the fraternity. But rather than it being merely one of generations and numbers, the transition of which I am speaking also involves the idea of what Freemasonry is and what it should be. We are in the midst of a transition of *thinking* about the definition of Masonry, and that transition will, in due course of time, bring us to the question of what we do as an organisation and why.

By my own observation, the new men who are coming into the Craft are coming to it in search of something. They're not here because their friends have done it, or their families, or because it has any sort of social cachet with the community. We are living in an age of renewed inquisitiveness, and these men find something in our historical mystique that speaks to their souls, that calls them to seek us out for our meaning and philosophy, not mummery and philanthropy. Now, the problem with mummery is obvious, because a thinking man does not have time for such foolishness. Philanthropy is not a problem, because certainly no Mason can make an argument against it, as charity is such an essential part of what we do.

However, we engage in philanthropy only because of the philosophical teachings of our order, which compel us to do so in the first place. What I am emphasizing here is that Masonry is not simply a charity; to be honest, there are hundreds of other non-profit service organisations which do far more good much more visibly, and if that is what one is more interested in than anything else, then I suggest that one go to join those organisations. Masonry asks much more of a man than the external act of charity; it asks for an internal transformation of self that will inspire him to do such acts.

Without philanthropy, we are merely doing less in the world than our philosophy teaches. But without our philosophy, we lose our meaning, and when we lose our meaning, we lose our reason to exist. Masonry must return to meaning and philosophy; the men knocking at the door of the Craft now are telling us exactly that, and it is slowly changing the Craft for the better.

The visibility of Freemasonry before the public eye has never been higher. But this is not necessarily cause to celebrate.

Visibility can sometimes lead to greater misunderstanding, particularly by those who see our fraternity as a curiosity to be exploited for their own whims or profits. This question of visibility is also part of the transition in the Craft, and not all of the signs of transition have been positive.

We say that we do not admit fools into our institution; why then, are some of us so interested in catering to or accommodating the opinions of fools; the unbelievable nonsense that is found now in books, films, television shows about our Craft is no different and should be of no more interest than other forms of nonsense that comes out of Hollywood or cheap supermarket tabloids from those who talk much but understand so very little.

I have nothing to offer in the effort to make Freemasonry better understood to the masses, to churches, to states or to anyone else. We are free men with free minds; that is enough, and I have no desire to go out of my way to explain myself to those whose minds are captive to fear and wilful ignorance. This Craft does not answer to anyone but the Great Architect of the Universe, and if it ever seeks to bow down before the concerns of hostile institutions made by men, be they religious or secular, then we cease to be who we are, and we will not deserve to call ourselves free thinkers or Freemasons. We are taught not to suffer ourselves to engage in arguments with those who through their ignorance, may deride us. If we are to be consistent in that charge, then we must also not suffer ourselves to placate prying eyes or the mindless paranoia of philistines.

Freemasonry is older than this country; older even than the establishment of the United Kingdom from whence it came; we owe no explanations to anyone for who we are, what we do, why we do it or how, and no one has the right to demand an explanation from us.

The desire on the part of some to see quantity as the measure of success, as if we were just another membership organisation tending to our members' cheques, has led to a deeply flawed practice in some corners of the Craft which strikes at the very heart of the initiative function of our art.

The proliferation of so-called one-day classes, through no fault of the brothers who go through that way, does not equip men with the knowledge they need to be useful members of this fraternity. In the course of casual discussion, I have spoken with brothers who would pound their fists at the notion of giving anything to anyone who is in need but not working for it, yet some of those same men will then turn round and offer up the whole of Freemasonry in one day without asking men to work for it. The principle either applies or it doesn't; anything else is hypocrisy. If you say that people do not appreciate something unless they work for it, then it is impossible to bring men into this fraternity and expect them to remain with us as constructive brothers unless they are expected to work for it, and if they are not willing to work for it, then they should not be in it.

In 1772, William Preston, who is in part responsible for almost all Masonic ritual worked in the United States, wrote: "Were the privileges of Masonry to be common, or indiscriminately bestowed, the design of the institution would be subverted; for being familiar, like many other important matters, they would soon lose their value, and sink into disregard."

Indeed, brethren, Masonry is in a period of transition; a period of reckoning as to whether it will heed Bro. Preston's words, or allow our Craft to be offered up on the cheap and in an instant, until it is overrun by those who want to flaunt the privilege of being called a Mason without being the least bit concerned with working in the quarries to earn that honour. If we do the former, then we have an opportunity to recover that which some would say has been lost. If the latter, then I should not be surprised if within only one generation Masonry as we know it will no longer exist, despite, dare I say even because of the number of people who enter into it as a mere curiosity, easily obtained by a simple exchange of currency, without any regard for what it truly means or has meant to thousands across the globe.

Now, the theme of my year is silence and circumspection; but as you have witnessed, that does not mean that I intend to be a silent master, or that we should be silent about what might ail our gentle Craft. To the contrary, we should be very vocal indeed about what is necessary to restore Freemasonry to its dignity and its identity as a philosophical movement of serious, thinking men, a place where we challenge our own minds to comprehend more than we did when we came into it. Such an effort requires that we be circumspect about our visibility in the outside world rather than naively self-aggrandizing.

It requires that we take most seriously that question of what we came here to do, and seek to answer it according to the lessons of our mysteries.

For when you take that question seriously, then you become that 'better man' that we so often speak of; a man that your family can admire and respect, and your community can recognise as one of the best, not because you are explaining and pleading the case of Freemasonry to them like an apologist, but because you are simply living and acting as a Mason, true to your Craft, confident of your course in life, and a credit to the world you live in. That is the aim of this organisation, and I submit to you that that is all we need to say about it to those outside our ranks.

I thank you.