

## **Farewell Address and Presentation of the Mavrov Tracing Boards**

Wor. Douglas Hamer Wood  
Worshipful Master 2008  
Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22  
A.F. & A.M.  
December 11, 2008

Brethren,

You honored me greatly in December of 2007 by electing me to serve as Master of this historic Lodge. This long year of work in the Craft has deepened my understanding of our symbols and ritual, and has given me the opportunity to build profound friendships, with both the officers who served with me and the candidates I coached during 2008.

Together, we have achieved remarkable progress this year towards the vision of a more perfect Lodge which I set forth in my Senior Warden's presentation last year and in my Master's Installation Address. We heard substantive presentations in Lodge this year from world-class scholars of Freemasonry, including: Wor. S. Brent Morris, Wor. W. Kirk MacNulty, Prof. Jessica L. Harland-Jacobs, Bro. Stephen J. Trachtenberg, Prof. David Stevenson, Prof. Steven C. Bullock, Prof. Margaret C. Jacob, and Wor. Mark A. Tabbert. Two significant authors wrote new papers to be read on specific occasions in our Lodge: Wor. Jim Tresner and Bro. Tobias Churton. Lodge members have also given excellent talks and papers, including a Fellowcraft immediately prior to his being raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason. Any Brother who attended Lodge this year has now increased in his knowledge and understanding of the Craft. The Moment of Reflection, accompanied by a different selection of classical music at each meeting, has served to remind us of our proper tasks of mystical union and contemplative prayer.

At the same time, participation by members at Lodge events has increased to a level not seen in several years. Many of the Lodge's events this year had 50 or 60 Brethren in attendance. These events and the traditional Festive Boards after Lodge have increased fellowship and brotherly love among us. Many interesting discussions of our Royal Art among the officers of the Lodge have continued long into the night and morning hours.

We have raised 14 new Master Masons this year in carefully-performed initiatory degrees, and admitted 4 as affiliate members. Already, many of those Brethren have proven themselves in the Degree work of the Lodge. It is clear that there are Brethren of sufficient dedication and zeal to lead the Lodge for years to come.

The teaching of the Catechisms of all three degrees has continued and flourished in our Lodge. We have a large number of qualified coaches now, and candidates for the degrees have benefited from meaningful instruction in the symbols and significance of our ritual.

The degree work of the Lodge has been excellent, and has been characterized by the ability of the officers to change roles on short notice to an unprecedented extent. We are ever-more becoming a Lodge of interchangeable ashlar, ready to work harmoniously in any of the Lodge's several parts.

The Lodge has also accomplished a significant artistic work. The Tiler, Bro. Dimitar Mavrov, has painted five-foot by eight-foot oil-on-canvas Tracing Boards for the three Degrees as conferred in Virginia that are both operatively beautiful and speculatively profound. As we shall see shortly when they are unveiled, Bro. Mavrov's work will be a lasting contribution to the Lodge's work and instruction.

In short, the Lodge is flourishing and I am filled with profound optimism that it will continue to make progress as it has this year.

I do have several concerns about the future. I hope by mentioning them to allow the officers in 2009 to consider and address them in the years to come. I must emphasize that I speak here for myself. These are my personal views and not those of the Lodge or anyone else.

I hope in the future that Lodge members continue to exercise judgment and discretion in voting on whether profane candidates are suitable for membership in the Craft generally and in our Lodge in particular. The secret ballot is of course sacrosanct in Freemasonry. I am concerned that increasingly strident demands that petitioners should never be rejected unless they are guilty of some crime or moral or ethical turpitude will be heeded. It should not be necessary to say that not all law-abiding, honest men are suited to the work of a Lodge of Freemasons. Ours is a demanding Craft seeking mystical union with the Divine through ritual and symbol. It is a rare man who is truly interested in such a journey or prepared for the demands it makes of the body, mind, and spirit. I hope every member continues to feel unimpeded in his free, secret vote to listen to the demands of his conscience, and vote to admit only those who are truly suited to the Craft. There was a time in the Craft when petitioners were routinely rejected. Even one in five being rejected was considered generous then. That a petitioner being rejected is cause for alarm in our Lodge is itself a cause for concern to me. The following is a true statement and an important paradox to understand: a group that accepts substantially all who apply cannot be worth belonging to; but selective hard-won groups invariably attract long waiting lists and much prestige in the world at large.

I certainly hope that our being the Lodge of Ill. Bro. Washington does not lead us to accept all who express reverence for that great founder of our Country. Admiration for Ill. Bro. Washington is or should be nearly universal, and is not in itself any indication of a candidate's being suitable for membership in our Fraternity. In any event, the Craft is universal, and not tied to any particular creed or nation. I hope that when we seek to maintain "Tradition," we are talking first about maintaining the traditions of Freemasonry and the Landmarks of the Craft, before we heed any particular habits of only a few decades vintage in this particular Lodge.

I am also concerned that the exoteric approach to the Craft might ever come to dominate the work of our Lodge. Freemasonry is an esoteric work, an exploration of the inner temple, the temple of the spirit within which is the dwelling-place for the divine. I hope in the future that the teaching of the Craft is not portrayed as being merely about outward and exoteric conformity to ethical behavior or the collective undertaking of charitable works. Outwardly ethical behavior is the very least that the Craft can demand of its members, and should be taken for granted. The real work of the Craft takes place within, through a proper understanding and application of the symbols and ritual. Charity is an individual work, which the Entered Apprentice is so unprepared for that he is said to have nothing of that kind about him while destitute. Only those who have made progress towards Enlightenment can begin their charitable work, and it must be their own. I hope that organized collective charitable work is never thought to be a suitable substitute for the inner individual labor of a lifetime.

Our degrees in Masonry are intended to convey serious truths through carefully-selected symbols. They are intended to make a deep and lasting impact through a vivid and even traumatic initiation of the candidate. I hope in the future that this or any other Lodge is not forced to give up the initiatory degrees as conferred with great care on properly-prepared candidates in the Lodge room by the Lodge's officers. The *initiation* of candidates is in my view a Landmark of the Craft, which no man has the power to infringe.

The Lodge is or should be a prayerful place. I hope that all members of this Lodge come here to pray and meditate. Any quarrelsome, bureaucratic, or worldly personalities should be left outside the Lodge. To come here is to tread hallowed ground, to heave a deep sigh of relief and enter into a sublime union with Brothers who come here to do the same. The ritual should be an ascent, performed perfectly, but also uninterrupted by pedantic corrections and stage-prompting.

The Master, too, should not be interrupted and besieged by competing voices clamoring for attention in the Lodge. The roles of the Officers of a Lodge are intended to be symbolic. The Master alone rules and governs. For a Lodge to have more than one Master is for it to be fatally divided against itself. All of us, even Past Masters, must yield to the Master's authority, so far as he remains within his proper legal Masonic province and within the Landmarks of the Craft.

Another province in which the Master rules and governs is in the spending of the Lodge. I am concerned that the bureaucratic tendency in this Washington, DC area may one day invade this ancient and well-established custom for the running of the Lodge. Submitting budgets for prior approval by

Committees who truly direct the Lodge's spending priorities should at all costs be avoided, leaving those tasks where they properly belong, with the Master and the vote of the Lodge.

I hope that the trend of active participation of so many members of the Lodge which was present this year continues. Despite progress, I remain embarrassed that we have so many members who do not attend at all. In the past and in other Lodges even today, unexcused non-attendance was grounds for the suspension of membership in that Lodge. I would rather have 40 members who attended every meeting than 400 who attend one in ten meetings. We are supposed to be a closely-bonded family of Brothers who know and like each other. Being strangers simply will not do, nor is it remotely fair to ask the officers of the Lodge to labor ceaselessly on behalf of those they will never meet. The obligations which we take, of course, require us to attend all meetings of the Lodge, whether Stated or Called. As a Past Master, I will expect nothing less of myself in this regard than I expect of all my Brethren.

We should continue to raise our dues, both to discourage non-attendance, and to enable us to do the first-class work of America's premiere Lodge. Historically, Masonic Lodges' dues were one month's wages for a working man. We have much further to go before we give anything like that much to this Lodge.

I hope that we remain unhurried in our work with candidates. The work we do with candidates properly takes time, and there should be no hurry to confer the degrees on them or to become a large organization.

But Brethren the foregoing remarks are concerns about the future, and my private concerns only.

I have called this my “Farewell” address, but it is my farewell only as Master. I look forward to being involved in the life of this Lodge for years to come and as long as I am able.

At this time, I ask that the Tiler, Bro. Dimitar Mavrov, join me for the presentation and unveiling of his Tracing Boards.

The degrees in Freemasonry are an interior journey and upward ascent towards Deity through ritual and symbol. The rituals of Freemasonry are the Degrees, principally the three Degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason, as well as the ceremonies for opening and closing a Lodge. Candidates for Masonry are initiated as Entered Apprentices, passed to the Degree of Fellowcraft, and raised to the sublime Degree of Master Mason. Each of the Degrees requires proper preparation of the candidate, and is followed by a period of work, instruction, and testing before the candidate can advance to the next Degree. When properly conferred by the Lodge and understood by the candidate, the Degrees are a dramatic path of spiritual advancement towards Enlightenment.

The principal task of a Lodge of Freemasons is to confer the Degrees on properly-selected and prepared candidates, and to instruct the candidates in the significance of the rituals and symbols contained in the Degrees. The Degrees are a progressive initiation for the candidate, and are accordingly often said to be “initiatic” in character. Each degree contains powerful symbols which have been carefully selected by the Craft to imprint on the candidate’s mind serious truths concerning God and himself.

From the earliest days of Speculative Freemasonry, the Master of the Lodge presented the symbols of to the candidate upon whom he conferred them

by drawing them with chalk on the floor of the Lodge room. Often, the Lodge's Tiler would assist in drawing the symbols with chalk. Over time, Lodges began to embody the symbols in more permanent form for use during the lectures of the Degrees. Floor-cloths or "Master's Carpets" evolved with the symbols of all of the degrees on them, and they were progressively pointed out and explained to the candidate over the course of his taking the three degrees. Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 owns a particularly-good example of a Master's Carpet, from the 1820s, which is displayed on the North wall of the Alexandria-Washington Lodge room in the George Washington Masonic National Memorial in which it meets. Over time, Lodges began to use separate Tracing Boards, one for each of the degrees, which were progressively unveiled to the candidate as he took them. Still later, Lodges began to use slide presentations and more modern technologies to project the symbols onto the wall of the Lodge room one by one.

One disadvantage of using slide shows was that the significance of the arrangement of the officers of the Lodge and the symbols was lost. As has been majestically set forth in the works of Wor. W. Kirk MacNulty (*The Way of the Craftsman* and *Freemasonry: A Journey Through Ritual and Symbol*) and Wor. Walter L. Wilmhurst (*The Meaning of Masonry*), the officers of the Lodge represent components of the inner self, and the Degrees portray the Temple of the Spirit within, at the heart of which is Deity. Freemasonry is therefore a God-centered psychology, whose intellectual origins are in the hybrid worldview of the late Renaissance. The many intellectual and spiritual currents which converged there resulted in an integrated account of the inner self as an outward emanation of Deity through a fourfold world of body, psyche or soul,

and spirit. The journey through the symbols of the Degrees as portrayed on the Tracing Boards is a journey within to the origin of the self in Deity, a mystical ascent towards the Oneness which is at the heart of all of the world's Religions and constitutes the highest aspiration of man.

In 2008, the Tiler of Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 was Brother Dimitar Mavrov. With the support of the Worshipful Master, Wor. Douglas Hamer Wood, Bro. Mavrov embarked on the project of painting three original oil-on-canvas Tracing Boards for the three Degrees, which contain all of the symbols in the Virginia rituals of Freemasonry and which are used in the Degree work of this Lodge. We are pleased to present them to the Craft and to the world as compelling artistic representations of the symbols of Freemasonry, and hope that they will benefit this historic Lodge and the Craft for many years to come.

Thank You.