

Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22

Installation Address of Wor. Douglas Hamer Wood St. John's Day, Dec. 27, 2007

Thank you.

I wish to thank the Officers and Brethren who have reposed their trust and confidence in me by electing me Worshipful Master of this historic Lodge for the ensuing Masonic year. Working together in peace and harmony, Brethren, we will make great progress towards achieving our universal aims of enlightenment, fraternal affection, and charity.

I also thank all those outside the Craft who have made my election possible, especially: my wife Rebecca, my mother and father who are here this evening from Massachusetts, my identical twin brother Keith, and my mother and father-in-law who are here this evening from Pennsylvania. All of them have supported me with their love and indulgence in my pursuit of the Craft, and I cannot thank them enough for their kindness and sacrifice in doing so.

If it is even possible to select from among the Brethren, I now thank Rt. Wor. Sheldon Barnett Richman and Wor. Arthur Ray Wise, who sponsored my petition to become a Freemason; Wor. Hamilton Edwin "Buck" Pape III, who patiently taught me my catechisms, imparted ancient wisdom to me with great affection, and continues as my mentor and inspiration ("Buck" told me he would be here tonight even if they had to carry him in); Wor. James McHenry Stevenson and Wor. Robert Malcolm Harrison, who raised me to the sublime degree of Master Mason; and Wor. Earl Elmer Covey, who prepared me to obtain my Warden's Certificate.

Finally, I wish to thank the Officers who have agreed to serve with me. Already, their labors do them great credit. In particular, the upright zeal and wise insight of the Junior Warden, Bro. Andrew Urkidi Hammer, has been both an indispensable support and light to guide me as I prepare for the year ahead. I wish to thank the District Deputy Grand Master, Rt. Wor. George Douglas Seghers, who is also the Executive Director of this majestic George Washington Masonic National Memorial. I look forward to continued growth in the amity and concord which has already renewed itself between the representatives of Illustrious Brother George Washington's Lodge and the National Memorial to him in which our Lodge meets.

We are gathered tonight for the Installation of Officers in a Lodge of Freemasons. Many of you who are not Freemasons must be wondering what Freemasonry is, where it comes from, and what it seeks. After all, what is all this pomp and circumstance in aid of?

Freemasonry is an ancient Brotherhood, a fraternity, which teaches the initiated members important moral lessons and spiritual truths through ritual and symbol. The Craft as we know it today emerged as early as the 17th century, when speculative gentlemen in Scotland and England who shared an interest in various currents of late Renaissance thought joined Lodges of operative stonemasons. These speculative or "accepted" Freemasons, such as Elias Ashmole in England and Robert Moray in Scotland, gathered together in fellowship to initiate other men whom they knew shared or were capable of sharing their commitment to a God-centered worldview which was in part neo-Platonic, Hermetic, Alchemical, Cabbalistic, astrological, and scientific. Over time, the initiatic "degrees" in Freemasonry developed, taking the names of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason from the operative stonemason guilds in which they were now performed. What were once implements of stonemasons became symbols in the degrees, whose purpose was not only to initiate and instruct new members but also to teach and remind those already Masons of those great and important truths which bind them together into one. In other words, our ritual - our catechisms and Degrees - are the beautiful essence of the Craft. As is written in the Corpus Hermeticum, "...when the mind has entered a pious soul, it leads that soul to the light of knowledge; and such a soul is never weary of praising and blessing God, and doing all manner of good to all men by word and deed, in imitation of its Father." (Libellus X, 22a.)

From its genteel origins in the 17th century, Freemasonry grew to become the vanguard and animating creed of the aptly-named 18th century Enlightenment which brought into being our modern world. Members of the Craft included many prominent Founders of our Republic, from Illustrious Brother Washington, who was Charter Master of this Lodge, to Benjamin Franklin, Paul Revere, John Hancock, and many signers of the Declaration of Independence. Subsequently, Freemasons were the leaders of the great Democratic movements that took place in the 19th century, from Andrew Jackson in the United States to Simon Bolivar in South America to Garibaldi in Continental Europe. So far, fourteen of our Presidents have been Freemasons. In the 20th century, great men of all political persuasions continued to be nurtured by the Craft around the world, including President Teddy Roosevelt, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Sir Winston Churchill, President Harry Truman (who attended our Lodge), and many others. Even royalty have not hesitated to patronize our assemblies, including every Prince of Wales since 1717 down through the present. Not only political leaders have arisen in the Craft, but leaders in music and poetry, from Bro. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to Bro. Franz Josef Haydn to Bro. Ludwig Van Beethoven to Bro. Robert Burns. Great men seek the Craft, and by it, are made better.

How does Freemasonry make men better? Masonry requires among other things that men seeking membership believe in Deity, that is, a Supreme Being, as well as the Immortality of the Soul. As a result, the teachings of Freemasonry explore the common substantive core of belief shared by all who have faith in God. Among these truths are the importance of self-control as regards the Self, the importance of ethics as regards Man, and the importance of the immortality of the soul in its ultimate return to God as regards the Divine. As well as the common substantive core of belief, Freemasonry proceeds in a manner which is universally accessible - namely by powerful psychic symbols which resonate in man's conscious and unconscious mind to great effect. We seek in Freemasonry nothing less than the perfection of the Temple within, or what Plato called the "steep and rugged ascent," the return of the immortal Divine Spark within us to its ultimate source in the fullness of Deity. To say the least, our work is important for each of us.

The work of Freemasonry is no less important for the world today. We meet in Lodge in a condition of perfect equality. The lesson of equality taught in our Lodges is the aspiration of every Republic. It is the Lodge that most powerfully taught the founders of our Nation the idea of equal justice under the law, that government is framed by men and among men and by their common consent for the protection of their rights and dignity, for their mutual well-being and happiness. It will be the work of many lifetimes for those of good will to establish this idea both in our Nation and throughout the World. The Temple on which Illustrious Brother Washington labored remains for us to complete. To say the least, our work is important for all of us.

Sadly, four decades of decline have until recently left the Craft in a reduced state, unable properly to pursue its noble aims as effectively as it once did. In a well-meaning effort to maintain our membership at levels seen after the Second World War, some Lodges have resorted to methods which come at the expense of: the initiatic degrees for each candidate, the Art of Memory, and the patient teaching of the catechisms and their hidden meanings. Unfortunately, such methods have reaped their inevitable reward - many seeds sowed in unprepared ground, and a further decline in membership, followed in some places by further reduced standards for entry into our ancient and honorable Craft.

But I am here to suggest another way forward. I am here to observe the beginnings of a Restoration. A new generation has arisen in the Craft to carry it forward as former generations have done, young men drawn to the Craft by its ancient customs, eager to demand much of themselves and meet the challenges set before them by the Craft. Far from being discouraged when they encounter resistance, young Masons of today are only attracted more to the Craft by the high and exacting standards set by excellence and beauty.

This year in Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22, excellence in ritual and beauty in ceremony will be our watchwords. We will insist on the highest standards in the ritual, degrees and catechisms. We will hear speakers of international renown, academics and authors such as Wor. Kirk MacNulty, Ill. Bro. S. Brent Morris, Ill. Bro. Stephen J. Trachtenberg, Ill. Bro. Mark Tabbert, Wor. Bro. Jim Tresner, Prof. Margaret Jacobs, Prof. Jessica Harland-Jacobs, Prof. Emer. David Stevenson of the University of St. Andrews, Prof. Steven Bullock, and others. Finally, we will return to the Festive Board of ages past, those feasts of fellowship and Brotherhood which warmed the heart and strengthened the fraternal tie. We will teach not only by severity, but also by fraternal love and affection, in peace and harmony. As Bro. Mozart wrote in his opera *The Magic Flute*:

"Within these holy bounds, revenge is unknown, and if a man fails, love leads him back to duty. Then he wanders, led by friendship, joyful and happy into a better land. Within these holy walls, where men love their fellow men, no traitor can lurk, because we forgive our enemies. He whom such teachings do not please, does not deserve to be a man."

To all in the Craft who share our high ideals, I ask that you visit us in Alexandria and support us in a remarkable year. Great and positive

change is coming. With your help, the Craft will endure as it has endured, and we will restore the Craft to its former glory.

Thank you.