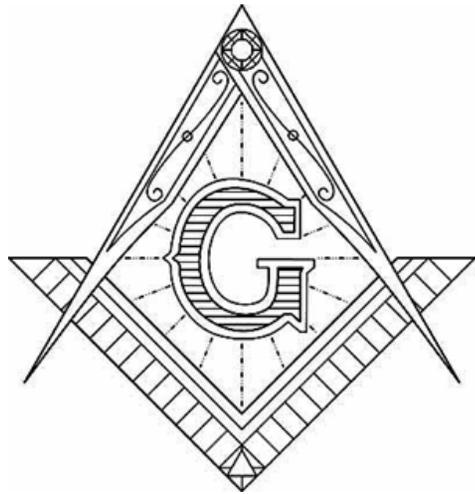


Trestleboard

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Greenleaf Gardens Lodge
No. 670



"Welcome to Spring"

Whittier, California

Greenleafgardens@verizon.net

(562) 695-2755

What does Freemasonry Offer the World?

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*Originally a talk given on the 100th Anniversary of Burns Lodge #173,
Monticello, Iowa June 15, 1965 by Alphonse Cerza Riverside Lodge
#862, Riverside Illinois. P.M. Waubansia Lodge #160, Chicago, Illinois
member Illinois Grand Lodge Committee on Masonic Information, F.P.S.*

While Freemasonry in its present form has existed less than 300 years, there have always been associations resembling this great Fraternity. Such groups were formed at various times and in many places because man is fundamentally a social creature; he has an inherent need for friendship, love, and association with others.

What is Freemasonry? A brief definition is: an organization of men believing in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, using the builder's tools as symbols to teach basic moral truths, thereby impressing upon the minds of its members the cardinal virtues of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth which they should apply to everyday activities.

If this description seems out of place in the cynical world of today, let us remember that "Man does not live by bread alone." There is a real need for what is derisively called "the old-fashioned virtues."

Last summer Rosco Pound, one of the great men of this country, laid down the working tools of life after ninety-four years of distinguished labor on this earth. Many years ago he made a significant observation: "Masonry has more to offer the twentieth century than the twentieth century has to offer Masonry."

Why did he make this statement?

At the dawn of history man was confronted with many problems: hunger, the elements, disease, and other dangers. But God gave him memory so that he could profit from his experiences; later came the gift of communication which enabled him to pass on his experiences from

generation to generation. Over the intervening centuries we have increased our means of producing food, conquered many diseases, and solved most of the problems concerning the practical things of life. Yet with all this progress in technological skills man has not kept up his moral advancement. In spite of all the comforts afforded us in this modern world, we do not find happiness, peace, and tranquility.

As we look around us today, what do we find? Frustrated individuals, unhappy people, everyone demanding more "rights", everyone seeking more "security", a desire for more gadgets, an increase in community problems and undeclared wars in many places. Everyone thinks "BIG" about the production of things, accomplishing a program, or handling community matters.

What can we learn from Freemasonry which will help the modern world?

First, Freemasonry is not a "mass medium". It works with and through the individual member. We do not have group initiations; each member is taken alone and taught the lessons of a good life. Each new member is prepared as an individual; he is the one important person who is initiated, then passed to the higher grades as he acquires proficiency in the tasks at hand. Certain members spend time with him alone so that he may learn the lessons exemplified by the degrees.

In Freemasonry the individual is all important. We consider the individual member the most important thing in the world. Bear in mind that in every community we have plural persons; you cannot have a happy community unless the individuals who form that community are individually happy. Under our form of government the individual is glorified; he is part of the nation's governing body. Unlike other political ideologies which preach that the person is merely a means of serving the government, we as Americans and as Masons say that the government exists to serve the people.

Freemasonry offers to the world today the basic ideal that is being slowly forgotten: that each individual is important and that his personal welfare counts.

Continued on page 10

Second, Freemasonry is among the agencies which offer the world the principle of the Fatherhood of God. In too many places God is the forgotten element. Many of the prevailing "isms" cast aside the idea of God as old-fashioned, superstitious, an opiate. Freemasonry has God as its sole foundation stone.

Freemasonry does not concern itself with the dogmas, forms of worship, or the theology of any church. A Mason must profess a belief in God and immortality; but Freemasonry does not teach him how God manifests himself to man or how man is reconciled with God. It is true that Freemasonry tries to enrich a member's belief in God by instructing him in the moral law and the hidden secrets of nature and science. It tries to do that for every member.

Freemasonry therefore offers a tolerance for the religious beliefs of all men, to the point that they can meet and pray together in complete harmony. There is only one God, no matter what name we give Him. Freemasonry has for centuries afforded men of all creeds a chance to meet together and to understand each other's belief in the Fatherhood of God. It is the only world-wide organization where there is no political or religious discussion permitted.

Third, Freemasonry also offers the world the principle that follows logically from what has just been said, "The Brotherhood of Man". If we have a common Father, are we all not brothers? Today we hear too little about this ideal.

At every turn we hear of demands for "rights" of one kind or another. How often do we hear of duties or obligations? Freemasonry teaches the duties we owe to others; it teaches obligations that its members owe their families, their communities, and their country. With every "right" there is a corresponding duty or obligation. The world today is emphasizing its demands for "rights", but is conveniently forgetting its corresponding duties. Freemasonry says nothing about "rights", but has much to say about the duties and obligations that each member owes. If all of us do our duty, all will profit; and there is no need to discuss "rights" where men do their duty, because justice will prevail.

Fourth, Freemasonry evolved from the builder's guilds of the Middle Ages, and therefore the word "work" plays an important part in our philosophy and our ceremonies.

Continued on page 12

Freemasonry takes this idea of work from the operative Masons and converts it into a symbol. No longer do Freemasons build structures that are visible, but we build a symbolic structure of character, that house not built with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Our Federal Constitution assures us that we are entitled to the pursuit of happiness. Too many people overlook the word "pursuit" and place the stress on the word "happiness." This great charter of government does not guarantee happiness; that is an individual matter. It merely guarantees the "pursuit"; or to put it in a different way, it offers opportunity to use your God-given skills so that you can work with them and secure happiness. This also is the aim of Freemasonry.

Each candidate for the degrees receives this philosophy of life in a most impressive manner. Suffice it to say here that this Way of Life contains all the lessons or rules adopted by all good men. It covers the Golden Rule. It teaches us that we are our Brother's keeper. It teaches that we can best worship God by rendering service to our fellowmen. We are taught tolerance in all things. We are taught that honesty is the only policy.

It is true that these moral lessons are taught in the schools and in the churches, but the method of teaching used in a Masonic lodge is unique. Furthermore, these lessons can be taught without reference to sectarian creeds or dogmas. Masonic teaching is not restricted by practical considerations such as exist in a political organization. Freedom of thought and expression can be taught and practiced without any reference to the results of the next election. Freemasonry has blended together many of the characteristics of churches, schools, social clubs, and ethical societies; but while resemblances with such organizations can be noted, none is exactly like the great organization the world knows as Freemasonry.

To summarize all this in just a few words, let us answer the question in the title as briefly as possible. Freemasonry offers to mankind an emphasis on the importance of the individual, the belief in the brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God, the concept of the dignity of work and its necessity for the pursuit of happiness, the opportunity to realize one's social aspirations in a morally constructive way, and a philosophy of life which can lead to individual, and therefore community happiness. And the twentieth century really needs what Freemasonry offers.