



**The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free
and Accepted Masons of Virginia
Committee on Masonic Education**



DEO Presentation Program Paper

CONTEMPLATING FREEMASONRY

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When we think about Freemasonry, we generally start by thinking about some of the impressive lessons we encounter in the Lodge work. We are encouraged to get beneath the surface of the symbols in our ritual and through further study to learn their additional meanings. However, we first should consider the ideas which form the very basis of our Fraternity, if we are to put our further studies into proper perspective.

Dr. Oliver, in his "Historical Landmarks of Freemasonry," observes that there have been numerous definitions of Freemasonry. These various definitions "are all united in declaring it to be a system of morality, by the practice of which its members may advance their spiritual interest and climb, by the aid of that theological ladder, from the Lodge here on earth to the Supreme Architect's Lodge in heaven. It is a mistake, however, to suppose that Freemasonry is a system of religion; it is but the servant to religion."

The definition in the English Lectures, which is often quoted, says that "Freemasonry is a peculiar system of morality veiled in legend and illustrated by symbols." But Brother Albert Mackey believed that a more comprehensive and exact definition is that it is a science which is engaged in the search after divine truth, and which employs symbolism as its method of instruction. Another writer, Dr. K. Bein, defines Freemasonry as a religious and mystical society, whose aim is moral perfection on the basis of general equality and brotherhood.

Masonry, while religious and discerning the divinity in humanity, is not a religion. It is not a secret society, but something much, much more. Yes there is some secrecy in the element of the mystic work, but it is more than mere ritualism, though the ritual is a factor. It is more than symbolism, though its symbolic teachings are significant and transfigures the ordinary. It is more than philosophy, though it speculatively teaches how to live wisely and well. It is more than mere landmarks, though these have their defining, historical, and traditional place. It is more even than Brotherhood, for as in the Pythagorean days, it is educational and intellectual as well as social and fraternal. It is more than constructive and practical benevolence, though love crowns all. It is all of these together with that something more of which language is inadequate to express, even to those few choice spirits who seek to penetrate to the heart of its teachings. Indeed, the span of life is too brief to enable those who endeavor to attain the ideal perfection of that living organism, whose countersign is manhood, whose inspiration is the Supreme Master, and for whom the Masonic edifice of love and truth form the base and spire.

The art or mystery of Freemasons is a universal spiritual, moral, charitable, and benevolent outlook. It is spiritual in requiring belief in the Supreme Being as a prerequisite of initiation and insisting on such belief as one of its unalterable fundamental points. Beyond this, and a belief in immortality, it leaves to the religion to point the way to salvation, and it encourages each Brother to follow the religion which he professes. For the rest it seeks to promote morals by ceremonies, symbols and lectures, inculcating life measured by reason, and performance of duties toward God, one's country, one's neighbor, and one's self. It relieves needy Brethren, cares for their widows and orphans, and insists upon duties of charity and benevolence. It is nothing more or nothing less.

Every Master Mason has certain duties. These include an obligation to abide by the laws, rules and regulations of the Grand Lodge and the by-laws of his Lodge; to maintain and support the Landmarks, usages, and ancient customs of the Fraternity; to be a quiet and peaceful citizen, and to comply with civil authority. It is your right and duty, as a Master Mason, to attend all meetings of your Lodge whenever possible. You should always be ready to lend a helping hand toward a Brother in sickness or distress. You are to participate in Lodge deliberations, to have a voice in its decisions, to vote on all matters submitted for consideration, and to do your share in maintaining and supporting its charities and other programs.

These duties should never be taken for granted, as they form the basis for our behavior and our bond as Freemasons.

If we will but keep the basis of Freemasonry and our duties as Masons firmly in mind on a daily basis, then we can truly say that we are

contemplating our Freemasonry and applying its precepts as our predecessors intended.