

The Function of Freemasonry

(Address delivered by Rt. Wor. Dr. Raymond E. Wilmarth, DGM, at the Convention of Visayan Masonic Lodges in Dumaguete City January 8, 1966)

Men were embracing Masonry, in some form or other, long before recorded history began. Why have men become Masons throughout the ages? Why do men continue to become Masons? Why did you become a Mason? Perhaps the answer is not the same for every brother, but if we search for it, there is an underlying reason common to all which can be found by examining carefully the function of Freemasonry. The purpose which Freemasonry serves in the lives of men.

Masonic historians may disagree on the actual date that Freemasonry ceased its operative function and became the speculative fraternity that it is today but they are in general agreement that whenever that date was, it was a long, long time ago. On the other hand, there is no dispute that the first Grand Lodge in the world was constituted in London on June 24, 1717, from which came the Freemasonry you and I know and practice here in the Philippines.

Today there is a greater need for the world to know more about the function of Freemasonry. To some, it provides a way of life; to others a common ground on which to meet other men looking for truth; to some, it is a haven for lonely men seeking the fellowship of other men; and to our critics, it is the instrument of the very devil himself. If our Brethren were more conscious of the critical eyes which scrutinize their daily activities and ears that listen to their words, they would take better care that their deeds would project an image of Masonry that would

no longer be the disputed subject of controversy.

The booklet published by the Grand Lodge of Kansas entitled "The Master Mason", states, "Freemasonry will be to you what you will make of it." It then continues, "Masonry's great mission is to bring mankind to a full comprehension of the Brotherhood of all men under the Fatherhood of one Everlasting God. In seeking to accomplish that mission, Masonry calls upon each of her sons to contribute something: to perform some great service to his fellowmen. It is the internal and not the external qualifications of a man which is regarded by Masons, and your mark among us will depend greatly upon the performance of those things which tend to increase the stature of your inner self. In that manner you will be building your Masonic edifice, that house not made with hands eternal in the heavens."

According to the ancient charges Freemasonry offers itself as "the center of union between good men and true, and the happy means of conciliating friendship amongst those who must otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance." Freemasonry has survived centuries of changes in culture and political forms of government and has withstood persistent attacks from multitudes of uninformed and misinformed critics. The fact that Freemasonry has survived under these circumstances is ample evidence that it does serve an important purpose in the lives of men; if not all men, most certainly those men who have

embraced it and have remained active in it.

Masonry knows no language barriers, observes no political boundaries, and is not restricted by religious beliefs. Freemasonry, believing in God, the Great Architect of the Universe and the life everlasting, is a fraternity of men dedicated to the building of temples within the hearts of men throughout the world, wherever men may be.

While Freemasonry may have a different meaning to each of its members, its basic meanings are common to all. From its name Freemasonry, we are immediately informed that its basic concern is the desire to remain FREE. It is perhaps because of this that it has been the source of many free thinkers who have arisen from its ranks to become national heroes, leading their countrymen out of oppression to enjoy the benefits of political freedom.

The word Freemasonry suggests a personal religion and a philosophical way of life. While it is admitted that the primary basis of Freemasonry is religion, Freemasonry is definitely not a substitute for any form of religious beliefs and it does not seek to undermine or destroy any established religion. Masonic meetings are prohibited from being held on the Sabbath, since that day is set aside with reverence by Masons to render their respect to God by worshipping in accordance with the teachings and ritual of their religion. Masonry does not ask its members to accept any particular religion but to be better followers of their respective beliefs.

Freemasonry provides a place for all people who believe in God to meet regardless of creed, dogma, or ritual; whether they be Jews, Buddhists, Mohammedans, Hindus, or Christians. The Masonic Lodge is the only common ground where be-

lievers of different faiths can join together in praying to their common God, the Great Architect of the Universe for wisdom and guidance in their daily lives.

Most men believe that man is fundamentally good and wants to do good. Some men, however, have not been able to discipline themselves to keep their individual lives within the due bounds expected by society. Generally these men will not be found within Masonic Lodges because Freemasonry is a highly selective association and the members of each Lodge, through the judicious use of the ballot box, admit only good men who have been able to keep their passions and actions within the due bounds of propriety.

Freemasonry provides for those men who are accepted as Brothers, a continuing opportunity to serve mankind and in so doing improve the individual himself by building within his heart greater strength and courage to practice out of the Lodge the good works taught within it, not for any material benefits which may accrue, but because of the richer reward of knowing he has helped his fellowmen.

Most people are fast to talk and slow to act. Although talk is essential to exchanging ideas, it never gets a job done. Thinking is fundamental, but the best thoughts in the world are of little value, if no one puts them into action. The Lodge is a place where good men can assemble to translate good thoughts into good deeds.

Every day each of us goes about living much the same as every one else. There are a few who try to do better than the rest or to accomplish more than others, but their divided efforts seldom reach above the average. The Lodge provides a place where the efforts of good men can

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be coordinated and harnessed for a better than average performance that will help others. Most people spend nearly all of their lives trying to copy others and don't have any time left to do something distinctly their own. The Lodge is a place where original thinking and action is inspired. Once conceived, the creative idea can be put into coordinated action for a dynamic accomplishment.

The main difference between the average man and the successful man is — the average man is a follower while the successful man is a leader. The difference between the follower and the leader is — superior human performance. The Lodge accepts all as equals and gives to each the equal opportunity to serve. Through the work, leaders are discovered within the Lodge and repeated opportunities give them the chance to excel themselves but only the individual can improve himself. His family can help, his school can help, his employer can help, his Lodge can help but in the long run personal improvement is strictly PERSONAL. If a brother has the will to personally improve, the Lodge will provide the place and the opportunity for him to improve.

The vital comparison of men and the leader is that men look to the past to find the standards set by others, they conform to those standards and hope to comply better than other men to what is discrete and acceptable whereas, leaders are men of vision. Leaders not only know what is the best by existing standards — but in addition, they can visualize what should be done to improve themselves, their society, and their nation. What is more important, they have the courage to act even though it is *not in conformity* with past or present standards be-

cause they know that more than passive compliance is necessary to move forward. They know that positive non-conforming action is essential to the progress of man individually and of all men collectively, and they know that only strong men of vision can meet this challenge. History has shown that here in the Philippines and elsewhere in the world many of the strong men of vision who have emerged as world leaders began their ascent within a Lodge of Freemasons.

No greater challenge can be made upon the courage of man than to live a moral life while exposed to the material environment and experiences of earthly existence.

The valor of a Mason is not tested on the field of battle but within the confines of his conscience.

It is my fervent hope that now and in the future our Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons in the Philippines will be the source of strong men of vision who will seize the opportunities provided by Masonry and emerge to lead this great nation onward and upward to its rightful place in the political, economic, cultural and scientific world of tomorrow. We must visualize the needs of our Fraternity and start doing something about it TODAY. That is why we all came here to this convention. We were looking for the opportunity to act for the good of our Order. Let us not depart until each one of us has done his work.

We want more Masons, but we want real Masons.

We want more Masonic Lodges, but we want strong Lodges.

We want a Militant Masonry — ever moving forward, in the service of God, executing the will and design of the Great Architect of the Universe. △