

# **Freemasonry and Societal Change**

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Thank you, Bro. President, and it is a pleasure to be with you tonight, and to have an opportunity to address so many distinguished guests. I have been a member of the Philalethes Society almost as long as I have been a Master Mason, and over the years I have been struck by the courage with which it tackles some of the most difficult issues of our time. The pages of the *Philalethes Magazine* chronicle the ideas that have stirred us over the years in this great fraternity, and it has sometimes championed unpopular causes as well as focusing our attention on who we are as Freemasons, and what we are going. The late Allen E. Roberts was outspoken in his defense of what Freemasonry could be if it only understood itself, and made its teachings available to the larger society in which we live. And if the best defense is a good offense, he was also good at that. It is in that spirit that I want to share something with all of you tonight about Freemasonry and Societal Change, about how the best and most erudite scholarship may in the end be less important than when and how an idea is launched amongst us.

I came to this subject by a close observation of a contemporary issue that has divided the informed Masonic public in this country the past two years. Two years ago the Grand Lodge of Minnesota extended recognition to the Grand Lodge of France. No Grand Lodge in this country could escape at least a cursory knowledge of the issues at stake, for we all received copies of official correspondence sent out by the Grand Lodge of Minnesota defending their actions, and copies of other official correspondence from Grand Lodges which objected in the strongest manner possible to this action on the part of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota. If we had not done so before, this was an excellent opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with some of the primary issues pertaining to the fundamental issues of regularity, exclusive territorial jurisdiction, and Masonic law. It may have caused some of us to re-examine fundamental assumptions that we held on these subjects, and – if we were fair minded – to try to understand each point of view in the controversy as impartially as possible. The Philalethes Society itself became embroiled in the controversy, and probably gained as many members as it lost over it.

It may disappoint some of you to learn at this point that I am not going to give you an opinion on who should have won and who should have lost. Instead I want to share with you some insights on how history is made, and my belief that it is not so much the validity of arguments in situations such as this that make a difference in the long run, but rather that events are shaped by the social context in which they occur. As Masonic scholars, we like to flatter ourselves that our well-researched conclusions make a

difference, and that our reasoned arguments will be heard just because they make so much sense to us. It comes as a surprise to discover that in most cases very few listen to us, and if they do, that our arguments are beside the point. As one wag put it, "The truth, though interesting, is hardly relevant."

I hope to show you tonight the validity of this observation, not in the most recent controversy in Minnesota, for there is still much to learn from that event, and I have no doubt that future Masonic historians will tackle it in due course. Instead I want to show you how history was made in California with our decision to recognize the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of California and Hawaii in 1994. In doing so, I will share with you what I found out about the history of this issue in our own Grand Lodge, and the impact that society itself plays on all human institutions, even when they suppose themselves to insulated from it.

It was Monday, October 10, 1994. The Grand Lodge Officers of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of California were about to process into the Masonic Auditorium atop Nob Hill in San Francisco, resuming labor after having called off for lunch. Leading our procession into the auditorium was Most Worshipful Warren J. Blomseth, the 127<sup>th</sup> Grand Master of Masons in California. That afternoon a fateful piece of legislation was before us, and the minds of many in the auditorium that afternoon were turned to it. As the strains of the organ playing Purcell's Trumpet Voluntary in C died out, as the Grand Chaplain led us in prayer, and as the Grand Master called Grand Lodge from refreshment to labor, many minds were on the legislative agenda before us that afternoon, and particularly on Grand Master Blomseth's Recommendation No. 18. That particular piece of legislation would extend full Masonic recognition to the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of California and Hawaii.

It was anyone's guess how the vote would go. In California changes in our code require a 5/6 for adoption. If proposed legislation fails to receive a 5/6 vote the first year, but does gain at least a majority, it is carried over to the next year, where only a 2/3 vote is required for adoption. But the vote on the Grand Master's recommendation on Prince Hall Freemasonry was a crucial one. It was widely believed that failure to pass the first year would mean ultimate failure for the legislation. The work of five long years by a joint committee with our Prince Hall brethren was hanging in the balance.

Our legislative process in California is a carefully controlled one. Legislation submitted by members of Grand Lodge has to be sent out to all lodges at least ninety days in advance of our Annual Communication, and although Grand Masters are not bound by this rule, most also send out their recommendations with ample time for lodges to consider them and instruct their delegates. Grand Master Blomseth's Recommendation No. 18 had thus been sent out during the summer before, and it was widely believed that the delegates had come prepared to vote with their minds already made up on this important piece of legislation. We would know very shortly.

As is our custom in California, the Grand Master surrendered his station to the Deputy Grand Master and made his recommendations from the adjacent lectern. That gives the Grand Master the opportunity to be an effective advocate for his recommendations, while the Deputy Grand Master presides impartially in the East. Grand Master Blomseth recounted the history of our joint talks with the Prince Hall Grand Lodge from 1990 to 1995, and outlined the changes needed in our code to permit the recognition of another Masonic Grand Lodge within the boundaries of the State of California. In his message to the delegates, he told the following story:

“With regard to Recommendation No. 18, you should know that I was moved to act now and in this manner by a great Masonic mentor and President of the United States. His story motivated me to offer you an opportunity to make a *choice* concerning our relationship with the Brethren of Prince Hall. Here’s the story: One night a gentleman was walking along 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in New York City, actually walking from the train terminal to the hotel, carrying a very heavy briefcase and an even heavier suitcase. Suddenly a hand took hold of the briefcase and a most pleasant voice said: “Pretty heavy Brother! Suppose you let me carry this one. I am going your way.”

The first gentleman resisted at first but finally allowed the young man to assist him in carrying his burden, and for several blocks they walked along, chatting like old friends. “And that,” said Booker T. Washington years later, “was the first time I ever saw “Theodore Roosevelt.”

Brother and President Theodore Roosevelt understood the very essence of Freemasonry. Recommendation No. 18 is a *vision* which includes those who are going our way.”

Then the debate began. In California we strictly control debate on our legislation, allowing three proponents and three opponents to speak alternately on the floor of Grand Lodge. The usual supporters and opponents came forward, and there were no surprises in the arguments made. The suspicion was that most had probably already made up their minds on the issue, and that arguments for and against would make little difference.

Then one young man stepped to the microphone to address the delegates. He was Mark Harris, the Master of Oriental Lodge No. 144, one of our oldest, and most prestigious lodges in California at the time. He was a Senior DeMolay, a Past Master Councilor, and a Chevalier. He was also a very talented young man. The day before he had sung a duet (along with my wife, Heather) at our Vesper Service at Grace Cathedral, across the street from the California Masonic Memorial Temple. Mark spoke plainly and simply, and a hush fell over the auditorium as he spoke. Although these words are not a verbatim transcript of what he said, because we do not tape record the proceedings of the Grand Lodge in California, here is the substance of what he said:

“I am Mark Harris, Master of Oriental Lodge No. 144, in San Francisco. My father was a Master Mason, and he was very proud when his son became a Master

Mason. Many of you in this room are also proud that your sons are Master Masons. I suspect that many more of you wish that your sons were Master Masons. My father died last summer, without ever having sat in lodge with me, because he was a Prince Hall Mason.” And the young African-American sat down. The hush continued all over the auditorium. Nothing more was said. Ballot cards were punched on Grand Master Blomseth’s Recommendation No. 18. It passed by 92%. Many of us at the time observed that Grand Lodge couldn’t vote to go to lunch at the same time by such a percentage!

The overwhelming adoption of this legislation was the last act of a drama that had begun some fifty years before, and brought to a close a long and heated debate on the issue of exclusive territorial jurisdiction in California. Only some of us in the auditorium that day knew the history of this long debate, which stretched much further back than the creation of our joint committee with Prince Hall in 1990. I had even had a small personal part in that history. In 1972 as the young, thirty-year old Master of Southern California Research Lodge I had written papers on the legitimacy of Prince Hall Freemasonry, and was active in an organization which promoted dialogue and greater understanding amongst Freemasons who did not recognize one another – Prince Hall Freemasonry amongst them. My stand was not a popular one in those days, and the then Grand Master, William H. Price, summoned me to a meeting in Los Angeles that year to inform me that I must stop writing such nonsense, and quit meeting socially with unrecognized Masons, or my Masonic membership would come to an abrupt end. I did what a good Mason would do in 1972, and I ceased writing on the subject, as well as resigning from what was termed a “clandestine” organization. It was left to others to take up the cause which eventually led to the recognition of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of California.

The story really begins much earlier than 1972, and it begins in Massachusetts, not in California. At a regular Quarterly Communication of the Grand Lodge of Masons in Massachusetts, held on March 12, 1947, a report was laid before that Grand Lodge concerning – as they called it – “Negro Freemasonry in Massachusetts.” The vote was accepted, approved and recorded by unanimous vote of the Grand Lodge. The Henry Wilson Coil Masonic Memorial Library in San Francisco has a copy of the original, which I consulted for tonight’s message. One member of that committee of Past Grand Masters of Massachusetts was Melvin M. Johnson, certainly one of the leading Masonic scholars of the twentieth century. I think you might find it to be of some interest to hear a portion of this unique report:

“There is need for unifying and strengthening all influences for the improvement and uplifting of mankind. Freemasonry seeks to build character and promote brotherhood among all men. These objective has nothing to do with race or color or social or economic status. In this country, the welfare and the future of the white and colored people are interdependent and largely identical. Each has its own schools and colleges and churches and societies, but both have the same ultimate hopes and aspirations; both make common sacrifices in defense of their singly country; both read the same periodicals, hear the same radio programs, and enjoy or suffer together the triumphs or

failures of our national well being; and each is affected by the material and spiritual welfare of the other.”

The report went on to state that, “In conclusion, our Committee believes that in view of the existing social conditions in our country, it is advisable for the official and organized activities of white and colored Freemasons to proceed in parallel lines, but organically separate and without mutually embarrassing demands or commitments. ...[W]ithin these limitations, informal cooperation and mutual helpfulness between the two groups upon appropriate occasions are desirable.” The motion to adopt this report firmly stated that “the Committee does not recommend what is technically known Masonically as “recognition.” Neither does it recommend intervisitation. Mere acknowledgement of legitimacy implies neither.”

I was curious as to how California reacted to this report, and I found the answer in our Proceedings. In 1947 our then Grand Master John R. Moore reported on correspondence which he had conducted with his counterpart in Massachusetts on this subject, and in 1948 Grand Master Chester Harvey Warlow, in his message to Grand Lodge, outlined the growing controversy which apparently was mushrooming out of control all across America. Brother Warlow was an attorney by profession, and a graduate of Stanford University, and held a law degree from Harvard Law School. He was thus very well prepared to understand the issues of Masonic law and jurisprudence raised by the action of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts when it adopted the 1946 report of its Past Grand Masters, and his message to our Grand Lodge reflects his considerable learning. This part of his message in 1948 filled eight pages in our Proceedings, and reflects his erudition, and well as his punctilious attention to historical detail.

Most Worshipful Bro. Warlow recounted the usual history of Prince Hall Freemasonry, as he then understood it, listing all the well-known reasons for doubting the legitimacy of Prince Hall Freemasonry. In his message you will find each of the major arguments against legitimacy articulated: The lack of authority for the formation of African Lodge No. 1 when it was first organized, the illegality of the issuance of a charter from the Grand Lodge of England after the independence of the United States and the formation of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts in 1777; the questionable and checkered history of African Lodge No. 1 after the receiving of its charter from England; the erasure of that charter in 1813 when the United Grand Lodge was formed; the irregularity of African Lodge No. 1 in chartering a “daughter lodge” in Pennsylvania, and the further irregularity of that lodge forming itself into a Grand Lodge in 1827. Historians of Prince Hall Freemasonry today would recognized many faults in his arguments, and many inaccuracies in the information he had at hand, but given the state of historical knowledge of Prince Hall Freemasonry in 1947, he did a pretty creditable job of putting together a damaging attack on the legitimacy of Prince Hall Freemasonry.

However, his main argument against the actions of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts were not based on the legitimacy of Prince Hall Freemasonry. On page 36

of the Proceedings of 1948 he lays out his real reasons for taking extreme exception to what Massachusetts had done. I will let his words speak for themselves:

Our present differences with the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Massachusetts are but incidentally concerned with its belief as to the regularity of Prince Hall Masonry. It is something much more fundamental in Masonic affairs that concerns us. It is most unfortunate that the real issue has been obscured by highly technical and meticulous discussion of the origin of Negro Masonry in the United States and its present status, and that the situation has become confused with considerations of civil liberties and extra-Masonic political policies and expediencies. ... The real issue is that the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, after one hundred and sixty years of claiming and exercising exclusive territorial Jurisdiction, and after exclusive territorial jurisdiction has become firmly established as the Masonic law and custom of all jurisdictions of the United States and the goal to which all other organized Masonry in all other countries of the world is striving, now suddenly renounces that principle and boldly shares its jurisdiction in violation of that historic position.”

One might observe at this point that whether or not Massachusetts wished to voluntarily share its jurisdiction with another Masonic jurisdiction was beside the point. He concluded that Massachusetts has no right to do so because, first, it violates a fundamental and settled Masonic law that there can only be one grand lodge in any American state, and secondly, because recognition of Prince Hall Freemasonry in one jurisdiction automatically invades the territorial jurisdiction of others because non-recognized Masons in other jurisdictions are thereby granted legitimacy. The issue for the Grand Lodge of California in 1948 was that “shared jurisdictions” were illegal and could not be countenanced.

A year later, Grand Master Edward H. Siems reported to our Grand Lodge that the issues we had with Massachusetts had been resolved. The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, under pressure from other American grand lodges, had rescinded its report. Grand Master Siems reported on his attendance at the Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in North America in Washington, DC, the previous February, and noted that “While the subject was not formally on the program of the Grand Masters’ Conference in February 1949, it was discussed off the record by many of the brethren in attendance. Your representatives were a particular target since many were interested in the position this Grand Lodge would take in October 1949. Since my two predecessors in office had so ably laid the foundation of our position, and concurring in that position, I felt obliged, recognizing full well that it would be received with mingled feelings, to issue a ‘declaration of intent’ at the closing session of the Grand Master’s Conference. The statement was to the effect that our patience was rapidly running out. I further indicated that if the situation remained the same in October I would have no alternative but to recommend to this Grand Body that we join the Grand Lodge of Texas and of Florida in severing fraternal relations with the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. The statement made at the Conference, as was expected, was stricken from the record, but “even though the Judge sustained the objection, I am confident the jury got the point.”

The “jury” did, indeed, get the point. It was not acceptable to maintain that Prince Hall Freemasonry was a regular and legitimate Freemasonry, even if it did not involve either intervisitation in a tiled lodge or full recognition of Prince Hall Freemasonry. To even assert that Prince Hall Freemasonry was in any way regular and legitimate was to undermine the so-called Doctrine of Exclusive Territorial Jurisdiction. And the case was closed. It would not be for another 27 years before another American grand lodge raised this issue. And by then Freemasonry in the United States had started its long, slow decline from a position of pre-eminence in American society to one hardly known by many Americans today. And it took California until 1995 to change its historic position as articulated by Grand Masters Moore, Warlow, and Siems in the late 1940’s.

What had changed in the intervening years? What “new things” did we know in 1995 that we did not know in 1947? By 1995 we had certainly changed our mind about the possibility of more than one grand lodge sharing territory. On February 7, 1981, the Grand Lodge of Alaska was formed with the support of the Grand Lodge of Washington, whose jurisdiction before that date had included Alaska. In the past the formation of a new grand lodge out of the territory of another grand lodge had resulted in all the lodges in the new territory or state forming a new grand lodge. There was no “shared jurisdiction.” But in 1981 four lodges in Alaska did not want to surrender their charters and become part of the Grand Lodge of Alaska. The Grand Lodge of Washington and the new Grand Lodge of Alaska agreed to this arrangement, and although other American grand lodges at first looked askance at this novel situation, peace and harmony prevailed, and most American grand lodges soon recognized the new Grand Lodge of Alaska. California followed suit, despite our ringing declaration in 1947 that such a practice was a violation of one of the fundamental laws of Freemasonry. It thus became possible to discuss the idea of sharing a jurisdiction with another grand lodge which, while common in many parts of the world, was not the norm in this country. An important amendment to this changed practice was added. The sharing of territory had to be by mutual agreement. In other words, California would not recognize a second grand lodge within the territory of an existing grand lodge unless the second one agreed to share its territory and agreed to California recognizing the second grand lodge. That is still the law in California.

Another change that happened since 1947 was an acknowledgement that we should not attempt to influence the right of other grand lodges to recognize whom they pleased, and that recognition of another grand lodge by a grand lodge with which we were in amity did not automatically cause a problem for California. Many call this the law of “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Some grand lodges, the United Grand Lodge of England, for example, do not allow their members to sit in any lodge where Masons may be present from lodges or grand lodges which are not recognized by the United Grand Lodge of England. If such is the case, the English Mason is expected to withdraw from the meeting. California, however, follows a broader practice of allowing its members to sit in a lodge of any jurisdiction recognized by it, without questioning the Masonic status of any Masons allowed to be present in that lodge. In other words, California Masons may sit in a lodge in a foreign jurisdiction recognized by us, and may remain in that tiled meeting even if there are Masons present which are legally present

according to that jurisdiction, but who come from a jurisdiction not recognized by California. This practice was approved by Grand Lodge in 1992 under the Grand Mastership of Most Worshipful R. Stephen Doan.

These two changes are background for the eventual sharing of territorial jurisdiction with the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of California, but are by no means the only reasons that this change occurred. It was rather the changing nature of American society since 1947 which really lies at the root of the 180 degree turn in California's attitude toward Prince Hall Freemasonry.

Without a study of history it is difficult for Masons of the present generation to understand how much American society has changed since 1947. Grand Master Warlow rightly noted in 1947 that the Grand Lodge of California did not discriminate on the basis of race, and that his arguments against the action of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts had nothing to do with racial prejudice. I believe him. Freemasonry in California, as in most jurisdictions, has never had any formal rules against the admission of men of other races. Grand Master Warlow cited several instances in 1947 of men who were not Caucasians who were members of California lodges – even some in positions of leadership. But society at large was on the side of “separate but equal.” Many things were to change in our society after 1947, and as with all human institutions, Freemasonry is affected by the world in which it lives. You must remember that World War Two, a war which saw the defeat of Nazi Germany and its racist doctrines, was fought by Americans with armed forces that were racially segregated. It took a Master Mason – Most Worshipful Harry S. Truman, Past Grand Master of Masons in Missouri – to issue the Executive Order which integrated the Armed Forces of the United States of America in 1948. It took a landmark decision of the United States Supreme Court in 1954 – authored by another Master Mason – Most Worshipful Earl Warren, Past Grand Master of Masons in California – to begin the process of desegregating the public schools in this country. And it took a stirring speech by another Master Mason in 1963 not very far from where we are sitting tonight to galvanize the Civil Rights Movement to begin the end of racial segregation in our society at large. Dr. Martin Luther King inspired a whole generation with his promise that America could really become a nation where brothers and sisters could sit down together without regard to race or creed. By 1995 American society had changed in its attitude toward the institutions resulting from racial segregation, and not the least was an understanding that Prince Hall Freemasonry had a unique place within our Masonic heritage. Arguments over the legitimacy of their history were largely beside the point by 1995, and completely lost on a new generation of American Masons. Issues of “territorial exclusivity” were perceived as specious reasons, keeping us from doing what we wanted to do, and from doing the right thing. I found it to be of great interest in reading the minutes produced by our joint committee on Prince Hall recognition in California that very little time was spent even studying the issues of legitimacy of origin or Masonic regularity. The old issues, while acknowledged, simply ceased to be important.

I have often wondered how history might have turned out differently for American Freemasonry had we reacted differently in 1947. If we had truly tried to

understand what was happening in Massachusetts, instead of building higher the wall of separation, could things have been different? Popular wisdom has it that Freemasonry began its decline in the 1960's because a generation of young people didn't want to join organizations. My study of this time period belies that simple assumption. Young people created many new organizations to fight for the idealism that sprang up during and after the Vietnam War. They just didn't find Freemasonry to be one of those organizations which appealed to their idealism. They found it to be a racially segregated organization, an organization which fled the inner cities and its problems for suburbia, and an organization whose prohibition on discussing religious and political questions meant that it never discussed anything of relevance. Instead of being the progressive organization which it had been for most of its history, it was now tied to the past, with legal quibbles about who could be a Mason hardly understood, and certainly not appreciated. In 1965 California Freemasonry had a long way to go before it could be attractive to the new generation. Don't forget that in 1965 a Vietnam Veteran returning home without an arm or a leg – which he had sacrificed for his Country – could not become a Mason in California. When I tell young Masons today that we once had a rule like that they don't believe me! But we did. And so at one time did most of the Grand Lodges from which you hail tonight. We could not let go of the past, no matter how absurd it was. And by 1995 Masons in California were not going to buy the old argument that they could not sit in lodge with a Prince Hall Mason.

We have always had a difficult time in Freemasonry with acknowledging how much we limit ourselves by our own preconceived ideas. And lest all of you here tonight – Masons who consider themselves as students of Freemasonry, if not Masonic scholars – think too highly of yourselves, I need to point out how you and I also contributed to this obscurantism which passes for Masonic “knowledge.” In 1982 Henry Wilson Coil, Sr., and John MacDuffie Sherman, wrote a book on Prince Hall Freemasonry. It was published by the Missouri Lodge of Research, certainly a respectable Masonic venue if there ever was one. The Introductory Remarks were by the great Masonic scholar, Alphonse Cerza, a Fellow of the Philalethes Society. I found his introductory essay on the subject of Prince Hall Freemasonry to be particularly enlightening, not only because he was an eminent Masonic scholar in his day, but because he wrote it just a few short years before California recognized the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of California. I will quote the leading paragraph as an example of how Masonic scholars are not immune to error as well as anyone else:

“There is only one Freemasonry, the regular organization of men associated under this name. Freemasonry has developed certain standards which are utilized to determine whether the specific group is or is not a part of Freemasonry. For many years there has been working in our midst in the United States a group which calls itself “Prince Hall Freemasonry.” This is a misnomer and the group should really be described as the “Prince Hall Organization.”

What a silly argument! If I define an organization as something other than Freemasonry I have eliminated any need to treat it as a Masonic organization. This past October, in our Masonic auditorium in San Francisco, a Prince Hall lodge conferred the Third Degree of

Masonry on one of their candidates in the presence of our Grand Master, and all his officers. The auditorium was packed, for this was a “first” for us. While sitting there that evening, I recalled the opinion of Bro. Cerza that whatever the Prince Hall Organization was, it certainly was not “Masonic”. For a “non-masonic” organization, the Prince Hall lodge certainly did a beautiful job conferring the Third Degree of Masonry!

But before you let yourself off the hook by maintaining that 1982 was a long time ago, remember that many of us define Freemasonry as “a fraternal organization of men.” If so, that means that there are – by definition – no women in Freemasonry. Yet most of us know that this is certainly not so. We are aware that there are lodges of women – indeed lodges comprised of both men and women – who consider themselves Freemasons, call themselves Freemasons, and probably – for all I know, because I cannot sit in their lodges – practice a Freemasonry that is every bit as genuine as yours and mine. And that’s only the beginning of the problem when we depend upon definitions to describe reality. In California, as I supposed in almost all other regular jurisdictions of Freemasonry, we tell our candidates that “Be it known to you, my brother, that no atheist can ever be made a Mason.” So if I meet a Mason from the Grand Orient of France, a Masonic obedience which does not exact a statement of a belief in a Supreme Being as a condition of membership, and many of whose members may very well be agnostics, if not atheists, I know for sure that he isn’t a Mason. He belongs to the “Grand Orient Organization” – to paraphrase Alphonse Cerza – but he isn’t a Mason. You and I know *why* we require a belief in a Supreme Being for membership in regular Masonry, but it doesn’t get us very far to affirm that belief by taking a silly definitional position on the subject.

What does all this have to say to us today as Masons? First, dogmatic assertions that our form of Freemasonry is the only one, and one that will last forever, are surely unwarranted. It doesn’t mean that what we hold dear is not correct. It just means that we need to be aware that time and circumstances may create an entirely different reality in the future. As Freemasonry is a part of the larger society, so it will undoubtedly be influenced by that larger society. The recognition of Prince Hall Freemasonry was occasioned not so much by our having discovered new “truths” about their history as our having discovered something new about ourselves. Fifty years ago we lived in a time in which it was acceptable to insist that Prince Hall Freemasonry was not really Freemasonry, and we now live in another time in which it is not acceptable to insist that they aren’t. The arguments of 1947 – or even of 1982 – seem quaint to informed Masons of today. I would therefore urge you to take a careful look at your own assumptions about who is “Masonic” and who isn’t, about which grand lodge is “regular” and which one isn’t. The future just might surprise you.

Secondly, we have to recognize that whatever ideas we wish to impose on Freemasonry, another generation may undo. There is a bumper sticker I like – “Be careful how you treat your children – They get to pick your nursing home!” Freemasonry is growing in California. We have had the good fortune to have more Entered Apprentices each year the past two years than the year before. In some jurisdictions the growth has been more dramatic – Ohio, and New York, come to mind. What will these

new Masons think of our concepts about “exclusive territorial jurisdiction?” What will they think about how we treated the Grand Lodge of Minnesota when it recognized the Grand Lodge of France? What will they think of the fact that a significant number of “Masonic” organizations in which many of us spend our time are off-limits to non-Christians? Are we prepared for what history may do to some of our cherished ideas? What happens if grand lodges are perceived by the next generation of Masons as being inimical to the advancement of Freemasonry as they understand it? Are we so naïve, or so confident of the rightness of our own type of Freemasonry today, that we cannot conceive of anyone else being correct? Are we unwilling to let go of our own preconceived ideas, and admit the possibility that someone else might know more than we do?

I have shared some thoughts with you this evening, some thoughts that you may find disturbing, or even unacceptable. The Philalethes Society is a place where we should be able to share our thoughts and treat them with respect, whether we agree with them or not. Your president these past two years has called your attention to new areas where Freemasonry must define itself. He has courageously asked us to consider whether our old paradigms of who can be a Mason – who should be a Mason – are the right ones. I applaud this courage, as should you. You don’t need to accept any or all of what I have told you tonight. After all, these are just the opinions of one Grand Secretary. In taking advice, you should always consider the source.

In conclusion, let me tell you a story I heard from my good friend and brother, Nat Granstein, Assistant Grand Master of the French National Grand Lodge. I took some license with the story, so I ask him to accept my apologies. It seems that during the French Revolution a Grand Master, a Deputy Grand Master, and a Grand Secretary were arrested and sentenced to the guillotine. The Grand Master walked up, put his head on the block, the blade came down – and stuck! The executioner said, “That’s an Act of God. You are free to go!” And the Grand Master said, “Glory to the Great Architect of the Universe! And left.” The Deputy Grand Master walked up, put his head on the block – and the same thing happened. He said “Praise to the Grand Architect of the Universe! And left.” The Grand Secretary walked up to the block – looked at the guillotine – turned to the executioner, and said, “You know, if you’d just put a drop of oil up there.....” Good night, my brethren!