

## Freemasonry and the Quest for Liberty

Thank you for inviting me here tonight. It is an honor to be addressing a fraternal group of which my father was a member, and for which I was raised to have the greatest respect.

My admiration for Freemasonry has only increased as I have learned more about it. Between your work in developing human affinity, building community, making “good men better”—your support of youth, education, and charity—there is very little not to like.

But as my interests have increasingly evolved toward a concern for human liberty, I appreciate that campaign as Freemasonry’s greatest contribution.

I have come to regard Political Liberty as a Spiritual Value. Like our American Founding Fathers—many of whom were Masons—I believe human beings function best in conditions of freedom. I also agree with the Founders that Political Liberty is the surest means to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number.

And I unequivocally assert, that with proper moral and intellectual guidance, there is no better design for a political system than that contained within America’s founding documents: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

I have also read many of the arguments, debates, discussions, and polemics of the period of the founding of the American republic. I find therein a sense of hope and a recognition of divine destiny that are awe-inspiring.

When I realize that Freemasons made up some sixteen percent of the signers of the Declaration, thirty-three percent of the signers of the Constitution, and nearly half the Revolutionary generals, I understand the crucial role your Order played in the establishment of the greatest political experiment in history.

The eighteenth century European Enlightenment movement was equally critical. However, as I shall attempt to show tonight, Freemasonry provided the spiritual component on which our system rests. Without its ardent embrace of a Creator—to whom we and our leaders are responsible—the history of America would have been far less glorious.

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When we seek the essence of Masonic teaching, I believe we come inevitably to a concern for the right ordering of life.

John Adams, not a Freemason, wrote that the Constitution and the American system of government were designed for a moral and religious people. Only those who are capable of following the dictates of self-discipline may be free from the need for external tyranny.

Without supporting or rejecting any theory on the origins of Freemasonry, the earliest mythic birthplace of the Fraternity has been suggested as the Garden of Eden. The story of Eden presents two contrasting symbolic options for those in search of Virtue.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command, did they commit a sin for which they and we—their descendants—have been punished ever since? Was God the legitimate authority—the embodiment of that greater moral law which an initiate and free person must follow to maintain his or her liberty?

Or, were Adam and Eve called to their disobedience by the inner light of their True Selves—to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—to accept the responsibility to become as gods? Was the god of the Garden a Shadow Self testing their moral integrity and intuition? Was disobedience to this tyrant obedience to God?

How do we achieve the right ordering of our lives?

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Long after Adam and Eve's Expulsion from the Garden, and Noah's survival of the Flood, the Patriarch Abraham was born in Chaldea (modern Iraq), sometime around 2000 B.C. He and his family migrated to Israel where they flourished and multiplied.

The ancient Israelites enjoyed a very loosely established political system. God was the leader of His chosen people. Divine and Angelic guidance inspired the community with the ways of righteousness. The basic unit of society was the Family. As a nomadic people, the Israelites were further organized by the demands of their herds.

When a famine afflicted the land, they traveled to Egypt at the invitation of Abraham's great grandson Joseph. During their initial stay, the Israelites prospered among a nation with a very powerful ruler, regarded as divine.

When later Pharaohs forgot the lessons of their forebears and enslaved the Jews, nothing in Egyptian law prevented such behavior. The concept of political rights accorded to individuals or groups was unknown.

After their escape from bondage, and during the forty years of their wandering in the desert, Moses became the first political leader of the Israelites. His burden was lightened by the advice of his father-in-law, who suggested Moses appoint a corps of Judges to help him resolve disputes and assist in the moral guidance of the community.

God gave Moses the Ten Commandments which established the moral and legal foundation of Western culture. A Priesthood was instituted to lead the people in their religious obligations, and insure the well-being of the community. An angelic column of Light directed their travels, leaving little room for uncertainty.

Yet with all such guidance, the Israelites' disobedience to the commands of God caused them much hardship.

When they reached the Promised Land in the twelfth century B.C., the system of Judges, and the Priesthood remained in place. Wise men such as the Prophet Samuel helped to maintain a direct link with Heavenly Forces.

But the Jews became restless and jealous of the Kings they observed among neighboring populations. They expressed their desire for a King to Samuel, who discussed it with the Lord. God considered it another sign of the unworthiness of the Israelite population, and warned them:

“This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen . . . And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards . . .” (This was obviously written before the Progressive Income Tax!)

Despite God's warning, the Israelites chose to be ruled by Kings—who reigned for some five hundred years—until royal and cultural corruption led to defeat, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the Babylonian exile.

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Kingship was the predominant means of political organization for millennia. Whether mighty conquerors like Alexander the Great, or the myriad of local monarchs, there was little variation in the theme that a strong centralized leader was the natural means of governing society.

In Ancient Greece and Rome, however, alternate political systems flourished for a time. While each contained imperfections, they were both seminal precedents in the development of the American republic.

The Greeks introduced the idea of direct Democracy, a method of government based on the participation of the governed. Democracy in Athens lasted from roughly 500 B.C. to the Macedonian conquest of 322 B.C. It was unwieldy. Meetings of citizens made small decisions into big events, and lack of unity, and constant wavering led to inaction.

This was improved upon by the design of the Roman republic—509 B.C. to 49 B.C. The Romans established a representative government in which the people elected their leaders, and the leaders made decisions in manageably-sized governing bodies like the Senate.

The Roman republic flourished until it was overthrown by military leaders who established the Roman Empire. The Empire's policies of large standing armies, extra-territorial conquest, relaxation of respect for the rights and privileges of

Roman citizens, extensive and uncontrolled immigration, indiscriminate granting of citizenship to Barbarian races, excessive reliance on foreign mercenaries, burdensome levels of taxation, oppressive economic regulation, and widespread moral decline (the Bread and Circuses of the welfare state)—left the once-proud Romans vulnerable to the aggressive campaigns launched by leaner, meaner, and hungrier Barbarian conquerors.

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As wave after wave of invasion marked the European experience from the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century through the tenth century, the Catholic Church became an increasingly widespread and valuable civilizing force. It was universal, in the sense that its doctrines were embraced by those of different languages and tribal heritages. Its mission was, at first, spiritual, religious, and educational. The Church was the agent of nearly all literacy that existed during the Dark Ages.

Yet it was also responsible for teaching some pernicious doctrines. These included Original Sin, Hell and the torments of the Afterlife, a rejection of natural instincts, and the hopelessness of the human condition. People were regarded as incapable of moral progress because of the baseness of human nature and the domination of evil forces. The world was conceived as a purgatory, a way station of suffering along the road to eternal torment and damnation. The Church created strictures that were antithetical to Science,

exploration, philosophy and rationality. And as it grew in power, it increasingly attempted to consolidate political hegemony over European rulers.

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From roughly the fifth through fifteenth centuries, Europe was organized by the Feudal system. Feudalism included certain commendable ideals of social and moral bonding, and reciprocal moral responsibility. Vassals pledged allegiance, work, and military service to lieges, who offered economic and martial security, and community management in return. Yet means for the redress of grievances were either completely lacking, sparse, or capricious. While there was a recognized compact between lower and higher classes, there was no concept of Justice or Political Rights accorded the less powerful.

The Feudal System included abominable practices such as the custom of allowing the noble lord to spend the peasant's bridal night with the bride. Serfs were considered property. They were included in the sale or transfer of land. Unable to move freely from one place to the next, or to seek alternate employment, serfs were as beasts of burden, little better than slaves.

Could ideas such as Consent of the Governed or Unalienable Rights exist in such a system?

In theory, all property and the fruit of all labor belonged to the King, the Feudal lord of all vassals. He might be a just and tolerant monarch, in which case the

country thrived. He was equally likely to be a self-centered and incompetent tyrant. There was no protection against him.

The Magna Carta established the most important legal precedent that recognized limitations on the power of the English King. Signed in 1215, and finalized in 1297, it granted certain rights to the Barons who had revolted. While of immense symbolic importance, the Magna Carta had little practical effect on royal behavior during the Middle Ages.

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Another crucial stage in the development of the rightful understanding of political liberty came during the Renaissance—extending roughly from 1375 to 1575. Following two centuries of the Crusades, the Renaissance, in my opinion, was largely the result of communication between Christianity and Islam.

In 1460, the purchase and translation of a series of Hermetic writings opened a gateway in the European psyche that had remained shuttered during centuries of barbarism and superstition of the Dark Ages. The rediscovery of the Neo-Platonic roots of Western philosophy accompanied a similar revolution in Renaissance art, science, and architecture. Mankind's honorable estate in the natural order of Creation was a central tenet of Renaissance thought and creative expression.

When the Protestant Reformation was launched in 1517, it further freed Europe from the shackles of superstition. Martin Luther's exposure of clerical corruption challenged the psychological mainstay of the culture.

Despite all excesses of nobles and kings, all the inequities of confiscatory taxation, the lack of attachment to the fruits of their efforts—people had faith. They might suffer here and now, but a better world awaited them—if they could avoid the torments of Hell by living within the behavioral confines established by the Church. The Church was their only protection against the sorrows of this world and the next.

Yet it was being threatened by a religious man who claimed it was violating the very principles of God. And, rather than being consumed by Divine Fire—as had some rebellious Israelites during the Exodus—Luther's campaign met with success. Resentment against the excesses of the One True Faith had long lain beneath the surface.

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Of special importance to us here tonight were the ambitious construction projects of Cathedral, castle, and public building from the twelfth through sixteenth centuries. Well over two hundred examples survive today in some twenty-five countries. The overwhelming majority are churches.

This work was performed by a unique group of people—the Stonemasons and Architects of the Gothic style.

These skilled craftsmen, geometricians, and designers formed a class of medieval worker outside the restrictions of the feudal system. They were extended the right to travel to various worksites as required. They were considered Free of any town or estate. They were thereby known as Freemasons.

They were allowed to elect their own officers, and establish and enforce guild practices and standards; construct and occupy their own worksite living quarters—often in isolated areas—to meet the practical needs of their task; and organize themselves to create charitable, health, and death benefit programs.

Concerns for safety and efficiency would require them to find ways to recognize and impart various levels of technical skill among strangers—even those of different languages. Errors made by Masons could result in the collapse of a building. They needed to protect workers during construction, and to ensure the safety of those for whom they built.

Masons developed the Guild system to properly transfer knowledge from Master to Apprentice. They had to be able to identify a stranger's ability and training to assign his rate of pay and degree of responsibility. It was also essential to be able to detect fraudulent claims by those who sought to trick their way into positions for which they were unqualified.

Developing signs of recognition—including secret handshakes or ritualized answers to seemingly innocent questions—was an excellent practical means of safeguarding knowledge and protecting against deceit. Secrecy is also the mark of a free person. If I have the right not to tell you something, I have the precious sense of ownership of my own mind.

Freemasons were undoubtedly responsible for common community tasks of governance—such as collection of garbage, maintenance of roads and footpaths, purchase and distribution of food, providing opportunities for social interaction during periods of leisure, and organizing message delivery systems to communicate with families back home. Trade issues needed to be solved so that materials could be acquired; worn-out clothing replaced; and tools and other construction apparatus maintained, replaced, and upgraded. Injured workers required medical treatment.

Such autonomous communities could last for years, if not decades, or even centuries in some cases. There would be an ebb and flow of workers as those with different skills came in, while others would either return home or move on to job sites elsewhere.

Men exposed to the liberties of self-government would be unlikely to accept the restrictions of the larger society when they returned home. They would carry their ideas and insights wherever they traveled.

Chafing at the bonds of Feudalism, Freemasons, along with artisans, merchants, and lawyers helped build a hitherto unknown social grouping—the Middle Class. Neither landed hereditary nobility, pledged vassals, nor bound serfs, they widely experienced their own sense of independence. They tended to work autonomously. They faced stiff challenges of economic survival, were required to exhibit diplomacy with clients and customers, and needed to train and manage others.

Freemasons, especially, observed their construction projects transform barren landscapes into magnificent edifices aspiring heavenward, stained glass windows diffusing divine radiance. Their hearts would swell with Pride of Accomplishment—the singular experience of a free person.

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Freemasonry underwent an important, if mysterious, transformation during the seventeenth century. In 1646, Sir Elias Ashmole recorded in his diary that he had been admitted to a Masonic Lodge in England. Ashmole was an intellectual, scholar, librarian, nobleman, alchemist, and occultist. What possible relation could he have had with the rough hewn leather aprons and tools of the builder's Craft?

This is the first recorded evidence that the Idea of Freemasonry had begun to spread outside the confines of builder, architect, laborer, and artisan. That the

Mason's skills were believed to include universal secrets of Sacred Geometry and the Holy Mysteries of Hidden Wisdom.

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We have now arrived at that final independent building block in this great Temple of Liberty: the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment. A new ideal began to permeate the thinking classes of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, expressed by a variety of writers primarily in England and France.

The power of the printing press and increase in literacy fueled the growth and reach of their philosophy, as did the rise of discussion groups in the salons of France, taverns of England, and reading rooms of Germany.

Scientists, philosophers, and political thinkers associated with the Enlightenment include Sir Isaac Newton, Christopher Wren, John Locke, Elias Ashmole, Voltaire, Diderot, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson.

They shared in common a recognition of Rationality as the means for exploring reality. They looked to science and the scientific method to understand nature. They rejected superstition and the role of religion in establishing scientific truth. They further rejected the doctrine of Original Sin, the concept of the flawed nature of human beings, and the hopelessness of earlier Catholic thought.

Instead, they espoused respect for humanity, and celebrated human dignity. They were optimistic. They embraced the notion that man has a natural and rightful place in creation. They promulgated the ideal of Consent of the Governed. They sought after Justice and Political Liberty.

But the Enlightenment movement suffered from one major problem. In their haste to overturn the domination of Superstition and the ill effects of the dark side of Catholicism, some Enlightenment thinkers tended to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

The human soul craves religion, spirituality, and a oneness with God. Divine consciousness is the highest form of human attainment. It is the goal of art, philosophy, and love. To discount its importance with Atheism and Agnosticism leaves an unfulfilled hunger in the human psyche.

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And here is where Masonic spirituality seamlessly entwined itself with the secular rationality of the Enlightenment. It reestablished the unity of heart and mind, soul and spirit, that writers such as Voltaire had neglected, and Rousseau blasphemed.

Freemasonry offered to reveal to the seeker after knowledge the secrets of the Universe. He could turn to Masonry for answers to pressing questions without leaving his intellect or self-respect at the door of the dark confessional of the

Church. In well-lit Lodge rooms, men could discuss ideas of liberty, philosophy, science, and commerce while surrounded by sacred symbols.

They sought after Great Mysteries in the presence of a Higher Power that both sustained the Universe and looked kindly on their Quest for Truth.

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And I believe that quest ultimately led to the greatest experiment in human liberty in history—the establishment of the United States of America.

America's political philosophy is a Union of Rationality and Spirituality. The principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights represent a fusion of Freemasonry with the Enlightenment.

The American republic is a testament to attempts at self-government we have traced to biblical times. In fact, as Whittaker Chambers writes, "Political freedom, as the Western world has known it, is only a political reading of the Bible."

Our entire legal and ethical system is biblically-based. It is no misstatement to identify America as a Christian nation—as long as our definition of Christianity is flexible enough to include the entirety of the spectrum of American spirituality.

Our Judeo-Christian heritage, and the strong tradition of faith in America, should be celebrated with gratitude rather than derided with scorn.

America has done more good in this world, protected more people, extended greater charity, exhibited more religious tolerance, and corrected a greater number of evils than any nation in history. While we have our faults, nihilistic paroxysms of public self-flagellation are hardly in order.

The Bible teaches us that human beings are neither perfect nor perfectible. Therefore no political system—nor litany of “good intentions” espoused by cynical politicians—will allow for government or society to become a utopian paradise.

The Founders’ biblically-based understanding of political liberty confronts human nature exactly as it is—rather than some fantastic projection of what it “should be.”

The Constitution is erected upon a rational assessment of human beings. It establishes a political design that takes into account imperfection, greed, and lust for power. And it does so by counterbalancing all within a legal structure that incorporates the supreme tension of competing self-interest.

America’s unique doctrine of enumerated powers defines the limitations proper to bind our politicians with “the Chains of the Constitution.”

In America, we celebrate the individual. Our leaders are our employees.

Americans do not bow to royalty.

I believe the union of the secular rationality of the Enlightenment with the esoteric spirituality of Freemasonry represents the most refined advance of Western culture.

With courage conquering fear, may we retain allegiance to America's root principles. That all men are created equal. That we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights. That our government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed—not the other way around.

May we here again tonight, mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor—that freedom may survive and prosper.

God Bless America.

And thank you.