



THIRD ANNUAL CALIFORNIA MASONIC SYMPOSIUM
August 1-3, 2003, UCLA
(University of California, Los Angeles)

Extract from the address presenting
the Feminine Grand Lodge of France and women's Masonry
by **Marie-France Picart**, Grand Mistress

Let's ask ourselves one question: is there one logical, rational and intellectually acceptable reason for excluding women from free masonry?

It took a long time for the Feminine Grand lodge of France to convince people that women were capable of reflecting on symbolism and could achieve the intellectual and spiritual fulfilment that they were denied by the profane tradition, for exactly the same poor reasons invoked by the Freemasons at the time of Anderson.

After the Century of Enlightenment and the hopes it brought, for us the 19th century was, in some way, a century of social blackout, especially in Europe.

It took the fighting during the Résistance, the work performed during war in factories and in farms, for Europe to rediscover what the America of the pioneers and the Conquest of the West had demonstrated: namely, the fundamental role that can be played by women, together with men, in society, in the family and in the City.

Yet in your Country, that presents itself appropriately as the leading nation for Democracy and freedom of speech, women also had to fight for their rights in politics, in the economy and the industry and, additionally, for their right to serve their nation on an equal basis with men.

However, as Grand Mistress of the first feminine Obedience in terms of numbers sisters world wide, I am still surprised to see that American Free-masons have not given women a larger place in our Order.

I regret this even more so that, in terms of male Masonry, America has shown its extraordinary capacity, since American Free-masonry is the world leader, in terms of number of Masons. There is a second fundamental question: does Freemasonry provide a different approach from those currently available from other institutions in our societies?

In this country, where social order is based upon communities, and shows an interesting crisscross of religions, origins, and cultures from the whole world, Free-masonry can provide a means of getting together in order to know one another better, as well as find everything that can bring men and women closer, in spite of everything that separates them.

It would be unfair to say that all religions reduce freedom of conscience. The religious spirit was born from the hope of a better world and from the notion that life has a meaning. But we cannot deny the fact that human shortcomings and overly strong convictions produced the situation that we can see in today's world: poverty. And ignorance often leads to intolerance, fundamentalism and sometimes to dogmatism.

Ready-made human convictions lead to conflicts that bring misfortunes for some, dissatisfactions for others, and end up blocking good will.

Therefore, if the answer, or at least part of the answer, is a place where the respect of others could open the way to harmony, why should we reject it?

I have noticed, and so have others, that in the Masonic temple, women enhance the symbols and the rituals by extending them to universal humanity, without exclusions and without preconceived ideas, that is, in total freedom of conscience, the basis of freedom of speech.

The founders of the American democracy were certainly not wrong. They stated that right in the first Articles of the constitution of the United States.

Given the enormous task awaiting American Feminine Grand Lodges from various European countries, members of CLIMAF, and especially our Belgian Sisters who are already at work on this side of Atlantic, no doubt that for initiated women, there is a vast realm of thinking and action, with our Brothers, in order to carry on the work started nearly three centuries ago in support of human dignity. In Freemasonry, we are not afraid of the word utopia, to the extent that we associate it with the verb to hope.