

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

Book Review – August 2020

Are We Making Good Men Better? *A Quest For Knowledge and Spiritual Growth*

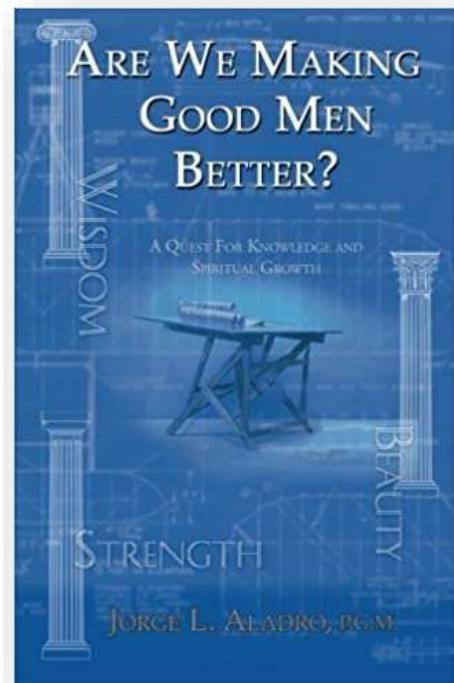
Author: Jorge L. Aladro, P. G. M., Grand Lodge of Florida

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Most Worshipful Bro. Jorge Aladro's 2015 work, *Are We Making Good Men Better? A Quest For Knowledge and Spiritual Growth* is remarkable in that it is a stinging indictment of the practices of mainstream contemporary American Freemasonry delivered from the heart of institutional Freemasonry. M. W. Bro. Aladro, who served as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Florida in the 2012-2013 Masonic year, methodically and honestly confronts the issues that have been so long neglected by the vast majority of Lodges and Grand Lodges in American Freemasonry. Identifying both individual and organizational weaknesses, M. W. Bro. Aladro offers a prescription for the ills that have weakened our Fraternity over the last century. That prescription is, simply put, to demand excellence in all things Masonic and to not accept anything less. The first part of the prescription is often recommended. The last portion is rarely found.

M. W. Bro. Aladro write passionately about the exclusion of Entered Apprentices and Fellowcrafts from our stated meetings. He points out the inconsistency of repeatedly calling these men "Brother" and telling them that they are bound to us by ties that can never be broken, then denying them admission to our business meetings. M. W. Bro. Aladro identifies this practice as being a primary contributor of Freemasonry's low retention rate. He also cites this practice as fueling the custom of rushing men through the Degrees without laying the proper educational foundation for each.

The need for foundational Masonic education is a recurring theme throughout the book. M. W. Bro. Aladro points out that our Craft is generally uniformed as to our history and philosophy. Only by rectifying this deficiency can contemporary Masons be set on the path to self-improvement. M.



W. Bro. Aladro correctly points out that good cannot become better without first understanding that that, in fact, is their mission, and then having effective instruction as to how to accomplish their goals. With no little sadness, M. W. Bro. Aladro answers his title question in the negative. Contemporary American Freemasonry generally does little to make good men better because that to be our primary aim and purpose. M. W. Bro. Aladro urges thoughtful introspection on the threshold question, what came you here to do?

The heart of M. W. Aladro's book is found where he describes the Masonry's path to self-improvement. He writes that Masonic education leads to enlightenment. Enlightenment, in turn, leads to the quest for self-fulfillment. The quest for self-fulfillment leads to a closer relationship with The Grand Architect of the Universe. The result of a closer relationship with the Grand Architect of the Universe is a good man having been made better.

Interestingly, M. W. Bro. Aladro observes that highest level of Masonic education should be found in the Symbolic Lodge. In his view, if Lodges were accurately and fully teaching the lessons of the first three Degrees of Masonry, there would be no need for appendant bodies who claim to "complete" the story and lessons of the Degrees found in the Symbolic Lodge. It is a reflection on both the Craft and its leadership that the duty to provide suitable education has been surrendered to the appendant bodies. The result is the perception that the Symbolic Lodge does not have a responsibility to provide for the ongoing education of its members. M. W. Bro. Aladro asserts that nothing could be farther from the truth.

American Freemasonry has lost roughly 75% of its members over the last sixty years. As a result, most American Grand Lodges have focused their energies on making new members. M. W. Bro. Aladro warns of the mistake of sacrificing quality for quantity. As a counterbalance to the desire for more members, he quotes M. W. Bro. LaMoine Langston, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of New Mexico, who observed, "Yes, we can increase our numbers in Masonry, but we can lose Masonry while we are doing it." Such penetrating wisdom, coming from within the core of institutional Freemasonry is both rare and compelling. M. W. Bro. Aladro addresses the negative consequences of the periods of rapid expansion in American Freemasonry. Perhaps the most intriguing question in the book appears in his discussion of Lodges that formed in those periods and whose existence now is tenuous at best. M. W. Bro. Aladro asks of such Lodges, if they were forming in the present time, would they qualify for a charter? If the answer to that is no, one wonders why such Lodges are allowed to exist, other than to inflate membership rolls and contribute their yearly payment of Grand Lodge assessments.

Other chapters in

Are We Making Good Men Better? include discussions of the need for mentoring programs, festive boards and competent ritual performance. Additionally, M. W. Bro. Aladro writes about the inherent problems attached to the use of the progressive line to fill Lodge offices. He warns about the misunderstanding of the concept of charity, and how such misunderstanding has served to divert the nature of American Freemasonry from its original aim and purpose. He writes with equal force about the need for investigation committees to be thorough in their vetting of candidates for admission in the Order. His advice is, that whenever there is doubt about the suitability of a candidate for the Degrees or for affiliation, err on the side of the Fraternity. M.

W. Bro. Aladro notes that the ranks of Freemasonry include many men who are just, moral and upright men, yet whom should have never been accepted into Freemasonry because they have no desire to improve themselves. M. W. Bro. Aladro offers the insight that since we do not teach self-improvement as our primary aim and purpose, investigation committees are not inclined to ever inquire about the candidate's inclinations in such matter.

In M. W. Bro. Aladro's closing thoughts, he urges the Craft to follow the advice of M. W. Bro. Dwight L. Smith, Past Grand Master of Indiana, who wrote that the solution to Freemasonry's problems is to practice Freemasonry. M. W. Bro. Aladro suggests that we do just that. If there is a negative element to M. W. Bro. Aladro's book it is that it contains many misspellings and grammatical errors. Unfortunately, these are so many in number that they distract from the book's otherwise powerful message. M. W. Bro. Aladro would have been better served had he sought the services of a professional editor.

Are We Making Good Men Better? A Quest for Knowledge and Spiritual Growth represents M. W. Bro. Jorge L. Aladro's honest assessment of the state of American Freemasonry. M. W. Bro. Aladro has been privileged to view Freemasonry at all levels and from the highest leadership positions. His perspective is an important one and American Freemasonry should take note. M. W. Bro. Aladro is to be congratulated for his candor and his vision.

Are We Making Good Men Better? A Quest for Knowledge and Spiritual Growth remains in print and is available from on-line booksellers.

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