

The New Law of Love

by

J. Winfield Cline, 32° KCCH
Valley of Spokane, Orient of Washington
knightofsilence@att.net

*I never really intimated it, now reveling in its newly revealed importance.**

The “constellation” which appears in the Degree, with the words Infinity, Nature, Reason, and Immortality, correspond to the letters INRI. Write an essay explaining the relationship of these four concepts with Man and God.

“Dying thus, He bequeathed His teaching to man as an inestimable inheritance” (*Morals and Dogma*, p. 310)

The Entered Apprentice degree is very powerful because it is a man’s first experience with the language, ritual, and symbolism of Freemasonry. It is also his first introduction to just how we do things. That is, his belongings have been taken from him, he is hoodwinked, and he’s being led around a room full of men, wearing little more than pyjamas. It’s a very vulnerable situation to be in, and I would bet that every Mason thought “What have I gotten myself into?” at least once on that first night. The beaming smile on the new Brother’s face at the end of the evening is, I contend, as much from relief as it is joy. Then the Fellow Craft degree comes around and, with a few minor changes to the details of the garb, the room, and the language, the ritual goes much the same as it did before.

But an amazing thing happens during the Master Mason degree. Again, the ritual of the first section seems very familiar to the candidate and, just when he’s been lulled into thinking that becoming a Freemason was actually pretty easy, the Worshipful Master informs him that he is not yet a Master Mason, and that he must travel a rough and rugged road at peril to his life. The look of confusion bordering on fear is a joy to behold for all who have traveled that road before.

The amazing thing that I alluded to above is that during the drama of the Master Mason degree the new Brother is not just a candidate, but he *represents* someone (and *something*) other than himself. Up to this point, he has been a participant insofar as things have been done to and around him; but he was still John Smith. In the drama, however, he represents “one of the most celebrated characters in Masonic history,” and the things that were done to *that* character are now being done to him. It is this dual-nature component to the Third Degree that makes it so powerful. As a candidate, you are not just watching or being told about a grisly murder. The murder is actually happening to you! But it’s not really *you* who is being murdered, but a character you represent—so it is simultaneously immediate and yet removed.

The impact continues when you later realize that the character you played that night was not just a man, but an archetype of perfect, beautiful, harmonious Humanity—and he was murdered by greed, jealousy, and hatred, thereby severing Man’s immediate connection with God (the loss of the Word). Further, you realize that *you* represented that perfect Man and that, just as he was raised, you may be able to use the tools of Freemasonry to raise yourself to a more perfect state—or Harmony with yourself and God—as you strive to recover the Lost Word.

I realize this is a lengthy preamble to an essay about the Eighteenth Degree, but for my purposes it is important to have the above in mind. First, just as the lesson of what Hiram Abif signifies was made more powerful by the act of representing and internalizing him, so too the drama of the Eighteenth Degree is made more powerful when we realize just who it is the candidate represents—even though that information is left out of the modern version of the degree. Second, the Eighteenth Degree is a turning point because so much of what has come before is finally completed, or perfected. I believe that the True Word of the Eighteenth Degree completes the Substitute Word of the Third Degree, in much the same way that the new constellations complete the old constellations, and, indeed, in much the same way that the new law completed the old law.

First, let us look at who the candidate actually represents. In the *Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor and Guide*, the synopsis pertaining to the Eighteenth Degree tells us that this degree teaches us “to honor every reformer who has offered up his or her own life for the benefit of all humanity” (p. 373). That sounds very much like Hiram Abif, although he may not have considered himself a “reformer.” It also sounds a lot like another reformer whom, I contend, the candidate represents in this degree.

Albert Pike’s Masonic Formulas and Rituals gives a fascinating insight into the evolution of the degrees and how they were presented in the past. In the text based on an “ancient manuscript in French” we find a description of the various names of the degree. “Of the Rose Croix, because the Masons...wore for jewel a rose upon a cross; as an allusion to Jesus Christ, compared in the gospel to a rose upon a cross” (p. 376). It also states, quite clearly, that “The first [apartment] represents Mount Calvary; The second, the tomb of Jesus Christ, and represents the events of his death and resurrection” (p. 376)

Interestingly, the opening ritual has the Thrice Wise (the Master) ask the Senior Warden what the hour is. The SW's response is, "The moment when the veils of the Temple were rent; when darkness had succeeded to light; when consternation covered the earth..." (p. 377). Thus, the hour of the dramatic action of the degree closely echoes the language found in Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, and Luke 23:44-45, when 'darkness came over the whole land' and the 'curtain of the temple was torn in two.'

In a different version of the degree from 1787, "Sovereign Prince of Rose Croix de Heroden," the Thrice Wise laments during the opening that, "My Brothers, you see me overwhelmed with sorrow... The veil of the Temple is rent, the columns of Masonry are shattered the Cubical Stone (*sic.*) has sweated blood and water, the Word is lost and 'it is finished'" (*Formulas and Rituals*, p. 403-404). Clearly, the last phrase is meant to refer to John 19:30 and the words there uttered. Further, in a written statement to be prepared before the drama, the candidate is "directed to put down 33 years" as his age (p. 404), the age of Jesus at the time of his death.

I point all of this out because the degree in its present form has been stripped of some of the elements that may make it seem overtly Christian. Not only because we strive not to promote one religion over another, or offend any Brothers who may not be Christians, but also because many Christians themselves would be offended at the idea that we would put a man in Jesus's shoes, so to speak. These concerns notwithstanding, it is clear that at one point the candidate for the Eighteenth Degree actually represented Jesus, in much the same way that he represented Hiram Abif in the Third Degree.

Still not sure? Let's look at the current drama, and the three apartments, which, although not explicitly stated any longer, most definitely represent the crucifixion, the tomb, and the resurrection. The *Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor and Guide* describes the three apartments. Among other descriptions, we find that the first apartment is hung with black; there are broken columns and fragments strewn about; there is an altar featuring a passion cross; and it is called "The Dark Chamber" (p. 375). Further, there are three constellations, Faith, Hope, and Charity, which hint at the Blue Degrees of Masonry. The broken column reminds us of Hiram Abif ("His column is broken, and his Brethren mourn"), and the first time we Masonically saw a reformer cut down. As in the older forms of the degree referred to above, in the opening of the current version, the Senior

Warden says, "...the Cubical Stone has sweated water and blood" (Drama, p. 18). This is a direct reference to John 19:34, when the soldier pierces Jesus's side with a spear. Thus, a link is forged between Hiram Abif and Jesus of Nazareth. The attentive and discerning candidate will put himself in the latter's position, just as he was once in the former's.

The second apartment represents "the abode of the damned," and is decorated with hellish scenes and human skeletons. We are told that this represents the realms described by Dante and Milton, but I believe it represents the tomb of Jesus. Not only did the earlier form of the degree explicitly state this, but it is noteworthy that the candidate is supposed to have wandered in the second apartment for three days, the same number of days Jesus was said to be in the tomb. Indeed, the words of the Master of Ceremonies are extremely telling. As the action moves to the third apartment, he is speaking of the candidate, but try reading the words as if he were speaking of Jesus. "It is a Brother, who has taken his obligation in the dark chamber. He has journeyed three days in darkness, traveling by intricate and difficult ways in search of the True Word...He now hopes to win that ample reward of his faith and toil" (Drama, p. 34).

And win that ample reward he does! For directly after this, the candidate sees the new constellation, which doesn't necessarily replace the first constellation, but rather makes it complete—in much the same way that many believe the old law (testament) was completed by the new law (testament) of Jesus at the resurrection. In fact, many times in this degree we hear of the New Law of Love.

The third apartment is hung with crimson; dominated by a five-pointed blazing star with a *yod* in the center; and features a cross with a rose at the center (*Monitor*, p. 375-376). Now, we are told, the Cubical Stone has become the mystic rose, which "is a symbol of Dawn, of the resurrection of Light and the renewal of life, and therefore of the dawn of the first day" (*Morals and Dogma*, p. 291).

The new constellations, Infinity, Nature, Reason, Immortality, represent a "new covenant"; the candidate has died to his former understanding and is re-born, so to speak, into a new understanding of his duties as a man and Mason. (Be clear: this is not a spiritual rebirth in the sense of salvation or an afterlife. It is a new understanding of the natures of God and Man shared by Knights Rose Croix.) Jesus lived in accordance with the constellations of Faith, Hope, and Charity. By that way he (and we) arrived to

discover the new constellations, or True Word. Enlightenment and harmony can only be obtained through this New Law. “No one comes to the Father but through me” (John 14:6-7) means, nobody can understand God but by living as I have lived.

If it is not clear enough by now that the candidate for the Eighteenth Degree represents Jesus, consider the following Q&A from the 1787 degree, referenced above, in which the candidate answers questions *as Jesus*:

“Q: My Brother, when came you?

A: From **J**udea.

Q: Through which place have you passed?

A: Through **N**azareth.

Q: Who was your conductor?

A: **R**aphael.

Q: Of what tribe are you?

A: Of the tribe of **J**udah” (*Formulas and Rituals*, p. 406).

The initials of the answers, of course, spell INRI. It is interesting to note that, although Jesus is mocked in all four gospel accounts as “The King of the Jews,” only in the Gospel of John is a sign reading “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” affixed to the cross (John 19:19-20), which, of course, is the source of the acronym INRI. Thus, the new INRI applies to us, just as the original INRI applied to Jesus, and once again, the old is augmented by the new: the Lost Word gives way to the True Word. In much the same way that we internalized what Hiram Abif symbolized by representing him, we have now internalized the Great Teacher by representing *him*, and we understand the blazing five-pointed star with a *yod* at the center, which dominates the third apartment. It is God within; the divine essence in Man. With this understanding, see John 14:23 and Galatians 2:20.

Finally, because this important acronym, INRI, comes from the Gospel of John, let us look more closely at that text for hints to how Infinity, Nature, Reason, and Immortality relate to God and man. This I will do by briefly commenting on what I believe are the most salient verses. The reader may wish to have a Bible handy, as I will not reproduce each passage.

1:1-5 The Word was in the beginning, it was Light, and the darkness could not overcome it. Man has been separated from God (concept of Lost Word), but can realize the divine essence in man (discovery of True Word). There was a word at the beginning

(creation) and a word at the end (crucifixion), showing again how the new law perfects the old.

1:12 In the context of this exploration, I read the phrase “his name” as meaning the name given him, that is, INRI. By grasping the new meaning of this word, which we have learned in this degree, we understand God.

1:14 As St. Clement of Alexandria said, “The Word of God became man so that you may learn from a man how man may become God.”

2:13-21 Masonry teaches that the Temple a man builds is himself. Jesus’s cleansing of the Temple symbolizes the need to purify one’s body and mind. He says that he could destroy the Temple and rebuild it anew in three days. Symbolically, a man’s Temple was destroyed in the first apartment, he spent three days in the second apartment, and was rebuilt anew in the third apartment.

5:38 Those who do not understand the true nature of God and Man do not “have his word abiding in” them.

6:54-56 Those who “eat his flesh and blood”—that is, take in his lessons—abide in him, and he in them. This harkens back to the Table of the Bread of the Presence of the Fourteenth Degree.

7:24 A Masonic injunction if there ever was one!

8:12 This verse refers back to the opening passage. By following the New Law of Love one will not be overcome by the darkness. Or, as Albert Pike wrote, “That is the True Word, the knowledge of which our ancient brethren sought as the priceless reward of their labors on the Holy Temple: the Word of Life, the Divine Reason, ‘in whom was Life, and that Life the Light of men’;...the Infinite Reason that is the Soul of Nature, immortal, of which the Word of this Degree reminds us.” (*Morals and Dogma*, p. 279-280).

17:3 For me, this is one of the most important—yet overlooked—passages in the Bible. Far from some notion of a never-ending paradise, this verse suggests that knowing God, recognizing that divine spark within man, *that* is eternal life. “It is that Light, the true knowledge of Deity, the Eternal Good, for which Masons in all ages have sought” (*Morals and Dogma*, p. 287).

17:23 Again reinforcing the notion of the *yod* within the five-pointed star.

In conclusion, I hope that I have shown that just as a candidate internalizes the qualities of goodness, honesty, integrity, and harmony by representing Hiram Abif in the Third Degree, so he becomes a living representation of the New Law of Love by representing Jesus in the Eighteenth Degree. In both cases, the character is murdered by greed, avarice, suspicion, jealousy, and corruption, but in both instances the candidate is “raised” to a new, and hopefully better, existence. Neither, of course, is meant to supplant a man’s experience of God, or replace or belittle his religion. Those who regard Jesus as the Savior and God incarnate should not be offended, for this reading of the degree does not take anything away from that understanding. Those who do not regard him in that way must still acknowledge that he was a great teacher, whose wisdom applies to all men of every faith.

The new constellations shine in the sky, giving new illumination to the old; the newly discovered True Word perfects the Lost Word; and a new law of love completes the previous law. “When, lo, a voice, in the inconsiderable Roman Province of Judea proclaims a new Gospel—a new “God’s Word,” to crushed, suffering, bleeding humanity. Liberty of Thought, Equality of all men in the eye of God, universal Fraternity! a new doctrine, a new religion; the old Primitive Truth uttered once again!” (*Morals and Dogma*, p. 309).

*So enthralled was I with the topic of this essay that, while tossing and turning one night, in the early morning hours—somewhere between sleep and wakefulness—the above sentence came to me. When I suddenly realized exactly what was happening I was wide awake, and jumped out of bed to get a pen and paper before the thought left me. Still not sure about it? Look at the first letter of each word...

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