

K. Tyler Curtis

College of the Consistory

School of Philosophy

30° – Knight Kadosh

Topic 4

“Welcome to Man School”

“‘Man School’ Teaches Youths to be Responsible Men.” The headline certainly caught my attention while perusing the newspaper. Designed to help minority boys who have not had the opportunity to be positively mentored as youth, the “Man School” program is aimed at helping and encouraging these boys to find a productive purpose in life. According to the article, the program focuses on job skills and leadership development through a process that involves goal setting, volunteerism, and team-based activities. *Man School* certainly sounds pretty cool. It also sounds pretty familiar.

Masonry is certainly a form of “man school.” We often hear the line that Masonry “takes good men and makes them better.” As trite as that statement has become, I can certainly attest to the fact that Freemasonry has provided me numerous opportunities to grow as both a person and a man.

As I was beginning my Masonic journey, I started seeing some patterns and themes being communicated in the various Blue Lodge degrees. Concepts such as the importance of leading a moral and ethical life, achieving enlightenment through education and faith, the nature of courage, and the importance of having hope and faith were all conveyed in these first three

degrees. After being initiated as an Entered Apprentice, passed to the degree of a Fellow Craft, and raised as a Master Mason, I had heard the message to love and serve our fellow men while honoring and upholding truth. Truly, these lessons are a part of what it means to be both a good person and a good man.

I took some time to digest the Craft Degrees before joining the Scottish Rite. When I joined the Rite, I found a wonderful series of degrees in the Lodge of Perfection and the Chapter of Rose Croix. While I noticed some very familiar overall themes and messages in these initial degrees, the concepts presented in the Blue Lodge were certainly expanded upon and further analyzed. New perspectives and provocative questions led to a deeper level of understanding and appreciation. Leading up to the 18th Degree, Knight Rose Croix, the Scottish Rite degrees seemed to flow and tie together quite nicely.

And then there was the Council. What was progressive and logical now seemed disjointed and chaotic. In fact, my first thought regarding the degrees contained in the Scottish Rite's Council of Kadosh was, "What a mess." I mean, we start off with a Jewish-based degree (19th – Grand Pontiff) and then we move back to the symbolic lodge (20th – Master of the Symbolic Lodge). Next we're in the 12th century (21st – Noachite or Prussian Knight and 22nd – Knight Royal Axe or Prince of Libanus) and then we're back to Old Testament times, surveying Jewish Mysteries (23rd – Chief of the Tabernacle and 24th – Prince of the Tabernacle). We then move to Islam (25th – Knight of the Brazen Serpent) and Christianity (26th – Prince of Mercy or Scottish Trinitarian) and back to a degree tied to alchemy and symbolism (27th – Knight of the Sun or Prince Adept). When I took my degrees, there was a chivalric degree in between the previous two (28th - Knight Commander of the Temple). The Council degrees then close with a

series of chivalric degrees, including a degree about the Knights Templar (29th – Scottish Knight of Saint Andrew and 30th – Knight Kadosh).

While I enjoyed the drama and lessons of the individual degrees contained within the Council, it wasn't until I began the study of these degrees as a whole during my work in the College of the Consistory that I really began to see themes weaving in and out of each degree and ordering them into a sequential whole. In sum, these degrees are meant to teach us to free men from their ignorance, prejudice, and error. Our duty as Scottish Rite Masons is to not only work to build our own individual temples, but to also work to build a better community of temples – to build a better world. The chief aim for members of the Council of Kadosh is to labor towards a world full of educated, tolerant, and loving people. In short, the Council of Kadosh teaches us to be better men.

At the onset of the Council degrees, we learn of bridge building and its importance. In the 19th Degree, we learn to work today for a better tomorrow. Today's labors should be aimed at improving the future generation. A valued legacy only stems when we connect the wisdom of the past to the actions of the day, all in the effort to forge a better tomorrow.

Next, during the 20th degree, we are reminded of the Blue Lodge degrees, although the lens through which we view these working tools is somewhat different. Whereas we are laboring in the Craft Lodge to build our own temple, in the Council we are applying our working tools to the outside world, constructing communities honed in justice, equality, and liberty.

As we move into the 21st degree, we are reminded that justice requires a balance of power. We learn how easily injustice can occur when it is held in the hands of only the few. We learn that a system of shared power and shared government requires checks and balances. Plus,

we learn that despite the injustices of this world, the Almighty Father will surely ensure that justice will be done.

In the 22nd degree, we are reminded that Masonry requires labor and we are also introduced to the mysteries. The degree reminds us that we have to humble ourselves and meet our fellow man on the level. It is only when we meet others on the level and accept our brothers and sisters for who and what they are that we can appreciate the gifts that God has afforded them.

Throughout the mystery degrees contained in Council, we are introduced to various cultures and beliefs. Though technically different, these mysteries all have common ground and shared attributes. Appreciating the mysteries and the wisdom of other cultures leads to both tolerance and understanding.

As we round out the degrees of the council, we move from a series of philosophical degrees to the more practical lessons of the chivalric degrees. These degrees remind us of time-honored virtues and teach us to employ these ideals in our daily lives. In the 29^h Degree, Scottish Knight of Saint Andrew, the nine great virtues of a Knight are outlined: humility, patience, self-denial, charity, generosity, clemency, virtue, truth, and honor. As we are reminded several times in the Council, we must never forget the lessons of one degree merely because we have obtained another. Thus, the virtues of temperance, prudence, fortitude, and justice are also to be heeded and obeyed.

As the 19th and 30th degrees are the bookends of the Council of Kadosh, it is only appropriate that each degree incorporates a device used to move from one place to another among its symbols. Whereas the bridge is used in the degree of Grand Pontiff, the Knight

Kadosh utilizes a ladder - the mysterious ladder of the Kadosh. While at first glance the ladder's teachings do not seem so "mysterious," we know that first impressions are rarely accurate. Living a life grounded in justice and equity, treating others with amiability, being a man of a faithful word, laboring constantly for a better world, overcoming apathy with endurance, and realizing that wisdom and true understanding is only obtained through elaboration and intelligence – these are truly "mysteries" of life. Once again, we are once again reminded to never forget those truths taught to us in the symbolic lodge, especially of those valuable liberal arts and sciences which adorn the mind and lead us to a better understanding of the Grand Architect of the Universe. In both the 19th and 30th degrees, the lesson of these two symbols is clear: today's actions are meant to bring about a brighter tomorrow.

The eagle is another repeated symbol we find in the degree of Knight Kadosh. While we have been introduced to the eagle as a symbol in previous degrees and taught that it signifies wisdom and light, in the 30th Degree we are confronted with the double-headed, white and black eagle, which teaches us to ever be mindful of the past while laboring for the future. The lesson of the double-headed eagle of the 30th Degree mirrors the message of the 19th Degree. Along with the bridge and ladder, the symbolism of the double-headed eagle brings the lessons of the Council of Kadosh full-circle.

Throughout the degrees of the Council, we are reminded of a central message from the Chapter: to be men of both reason and faith, and to keep each area in proper balance. We must have faith and hope in something bigger than ourselves and in a bright future, and we must have the reason to know that this future will only come through constant, meaningful, charitable labor. As we work to hone our own temples and labor to construct a better world for the glory of the Most High, we have to think, act, and reflect on ourselves and our actions.

Maybe the most powerful lesson of the Knight Kadosh degree, and one that is truly referenced in every degree of Freemasonry, is that we must overcome the dread of death to live free. We must free ourselves from the worries of this temporary existence in order to focus our lives and take the necessary action to ensure a better future for those who come after us. We are all traveling through this life. As we drive towards the future, we must properly adjust our rear-view mirrors to accurately discern the past and overcome the blind spot of death in order to properly navigate towards Truth and Light.

Of course, the real question is, how do we move this theory into actual practice? How do we bring these ideas to fruition? Teaching “how” versus “what” is a difficult task when it comes to instructing someone on living an ethical, meaningful life. How do we teach humility? Patience? Self-denial? Generosity? Truth? Honor? How do we convey the message in a way that spurs corrective action and future behavioral change?

The short answer is, “Not easily.” The world has recognized this need and has begun to focus on these ideals once again. Aside from programs like Man School, projects such as Character Counts, Youth Frontiers, Project Wisdom, and Eight Keys all aim to build positive character among youth and families. The Big Brothers and Big Sisters organization is constantly seeking mentors for their clients. In an era where the traditional family and religious unit has seemingly broken down, the school and community have felt the need to step up and educate youth about what it means to be a good person.

Our world is hungry for character development and ethical education. Masons have been involved with this kind of a programming since the beginning of our Craft. Learning to

transform ourselves from rough stones into beautiful temples is a process of honing our character and conduct to emulate the Master. Our process?

1. Convey teachings via powerful, initiatory experiences;
2. Model behavior that mirrors these teachings both inside and outside the lodge;
3. Engage in discussion and mentorship to expand upon these teachings; and
4. Build mutually beneficial relationships between men of multiple generations.

We have so much to offer to this world. We have such rich, meaningful teachings. We have time-honored methods of instruction. We have a noble past – and we must labor today for an even brighter future.

Freemasonry is a “man school” of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. As one Man School participant states, “My dad told me one thing – take care of your family. Man School taught me how to do it” (Biles). We are all told to do the right thing and to be a good person. Freemasonry teaches us how to do it. Brothers, welcome to man school.

Works Cited

Biles, Jan. “‘Man School’ Teaches Youths to be Responsible Men.” *Emporia Gazette*. 2 Nov 2012.