

18th Degree, Knight of the Rose Croix
College of the Consistory
Milledge Murphey, Ph.D.
32nd Degree K.C.C.H.
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I have selected statement number 9 from those stipulated for the first of two essays required for this level of College of the Consistory work. This statement states that one of the principle philosophical teachings of the 18th Degree is that general equilibrium and balanced harmony results from the interaction between opposing and contrary forces. This statement applies to humans, who through conscience, moral strength, and willpower, can internally reconcile these personal and internalized conflicting tendencies, thus achieving internal equilibrium. This degree is concerned primarily with the duality between the concepts of faith and reason, and this essay considers faith and reason, which are in fact opposites, and thus diametrically opposite of equilibrium, while at the same time they are not hostile concepts (to each other). This is an extremely delicate and detailed expose, as these concepts are at once legendary, spiritual, and realistic in the context of the 18th Degree.

Few Masons who are exposed to the 18th Degree ritual consider its deepest meanings which are directly confronted in the topic (above), and which are thus considered in this essay. I asked a number of 33rd Degree and K.C.C.H. Masons who are members in the Valley of Ocala for their opinions on this subject after I received it from the College of the Consistory. I was surprised that even members of the 18th Degree ritual team in the valley had not considered the intricate question posed for this College of the Consistory essay. Thus, this degree is of major significance to all Scottish Rite Masons who desire to explore and learn from its content, as few have considered its deeper and more comprehensive meanings.

The duality in the faith/reason dyad is profound in that faith is essentially surreal, and often stated as legend or myth, whereas reason is the confrontation with concrete reality, and the confrontation with it in order to succeed in the current real time environment. One might ask the question, "can faith be rational?;" and thus the duality problem is internalized. To accept any concept, behavior, physical element in the real world, or action on faith, with no consideration for reason, can be interpreted as foolish in the current social world. Must an individual then accept anything on faith alone? Clearly the answer is a resounding yes, as most religious belief is based solely in faith, with, for example, the mythical and legendary based Bible being the written basis for the tenets of the Christian religion, and the Koran being the basis for the Muslim religion. Thus, while faith and reason seem diametrically opposed and in conflict, in actual practice they are intertwined irrevocably in the minds of all men who attempt to understand the relationship. In practice, men actually bounce alternately between the two concepts, accepting one and then the other alternatively. In the foregoing example, two very different religious philosophical positions are also clearly different, yet they exist in the same society currently. In order to achieve the balance between these concepts, and internalize them, men must have faith in reason, thus the two terms, and their meanings, are, or potentially may be, conjoined within an individual. Should this occur without insight, mental turmoil may result in the thinking individual.

Men can use their conscience complete with their grounding principles of right and wrong to gain access to the faith/reason equilibrium that is essential if they are to attain harmony in their lives. The construct of conscience in men of intelligence and reason, allows them to accommodate the seemingly opposed forces, with resultant appropriate thought and behavior. The strength of personal moral conviction enables the mature man to develop the willpower to overcome the seemingly opposed forces within himself, and thus to behave appropriately and successfully. Men who cannot effect this personal and internal transition within themselves are often consider odd, mentally deranged, or psychotic, and they are always

unsuccessful in their dealings with society. Those who do make the internal accommodation described in the foregoing, and who use great willpower, are often those who are famed and very successful in society. Thus internal personal congruence is the goal of Masonic teaching as clearly demonstrated by the content, and consequent enlightenment, provided by a study of the 18th Degree.

This consideration brings me to a narrative point wherein I must consider the "added assignment for the Adept - The Mystic Journey" statement included with the material for the 18th Degree essay, in the context of current Masonic doctrine, and the challenges and problems confronted by the fraternity at present. I do this from the perspective of the 18th Degree, as this degree, if properly understood by the entire fraternity, might mitigate the existing and current problems experienced by the fraternity worldwide (to some extent). It seems that today the fraternity has elevated many men to leadership positions who were not congruent during their pre Masonic membership professional lives, often being personally unsuccessful professionally, and then late in life seeking recognition, and in fact worship, by their fellow Masons. These men value only the titles, recognitions, and accouterments provided by the fraternity, and have little or no understanding of the principles portrayed in the degrees. Whereas the core of value in the Masonic experience is in fact the content and meaning provided within the degree ritual, and not in the symbolism and tokens provided therein (these are in fact virtually valueless in terms of the faith/reason construct previously discussed).

One hundred or more years ago, Masonic Membership was universally considered an honor desired by most men of success and substance, and was often necessary if a politically inclined man wanted to be successful at the polls. Further, political success at the state and national level was enhanced by such membership and activity among those seeking office. Today this is not the case at all. Why has this loss of influence transpired and what does it have to do with the 18th Degree and the faith/reason dyad? One can speculate that as the fraternity has matured and became more "member numbers" focused, rather than member quality focused, loss of member quality has ensued. Persons have been and continue to be voted into the fraternity who have not been successful in their professional lives. As these individuals became members and moved into the offices of higher order, accomplished men who were members, or who became new members, perceived the diminution in leadership quality, and thus dimitted or ceased being interested in the fraternity. This fact has thus increased the relative number of such individuals as members of the fraternity and decreased the number of men of substance who seek or maintain membership.

Many examples of the effect of unsuccessful men occupying leadership positions could be stated herein, and I will use only one such example which is: The man in the East who cannot speak or write acceptable English, and who therefore fails in ritual and leadership roles. Such men, when viewed in exalted roles in the fraternity, repel others who are professionally successful and highly educated, as such accomplished men quickly no longer desire to associate with such banal men. Across the years, this tenancy has continued to accelerate geometrically so that today few social leaders, politicians, highly educated and professional men seek membership in the fraternity. For those few who do seek membership, such membership is often short lived as these men of substance view the less substantive leadership in the fraternity and desire to leave it. A frequently heard statement today concerning the definition of what the fraternity is includes the axiom, "a group of old blue collar workers seeking ego gratification and pseudo titles and recognitions after a life of mediocre professional performance". In the Masonic context where all members are "on the level" this is a disturbing thought brought to the fore by the content of the 18th Degree.

As we continue to research and write concerning the importance of the degrees of the Scottish rite, I am reminded of the need to revitalize the fraternity world wide, and particularly in the United States. As the foregoing discussion indicates, perhaps the College of the Consistory can serve as a major vehicle in that direction. The truths included in the degrees about which essays are being written can, if promulgated widely in the fraternity, increase unique knowledge which may become more common among members, with the

result that membership quality may be gradually improved. The 18th degree is a key to such increase in knowledge which is relevant to improvement in fraternal quality in that faith and reason as a dichotomy can be dispelled via the understanding provided through study of this critical dyad in the Masonic context. Men who read and study the meanings of the degree will perceive the Masonic light provided by the amalgam of these two opposed concepts into the internal Masonic ideal. Given this understanding of the 18th Degree such men can then lead the fraternity to new heights. The Scottish Rite can become the vehicle for renewed quality and quantity in terms of membership, if the essays, and consequent understandings provided in the Scottish Rite Degrees can become common knowledge among Masons.

Perhaps the faith/reason based 18th Degree of the Scottish Rite could be a basis for the fraternity, at the Blue Lodge level, to begin more strongly encouraging all Blue Lodge Masons to seek correct and in depth light in Masonry by moving through the Scottish Rite to the 32nd Degree. If all Blue Lodge Masons would choose this route after becoming Master Masons, many of the misunderstandings which are now rampant in the fraternity, and in society at large, could be mitigated. Thus, as the College of the Consistory is considered for national acceptance by the Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite, the potential exists for profound improvement in the fraternity at large. I believe that if we, as Adepts of the College of the Consistory, will develop our essays so that they relate to current Masonic challenges as reflected in the time honored degrees, we may have a positive impact on future Masonic development. The personal congruence that is espoused in the 18th degree has the potential for such positive impact if the meanings of the degree are promulgated to Masons at large, with consequent understanding and adherence by members.

In summary then, the 18th degree includes personality and behavioral congruence potential for all Masons who understand its faith and reason basis. With renewed interest in, and knowledge of the duality presented in this degree coming to the Masonic fore, the Scottish Rite is enhanced, and the fraternity improved. The personal internal equilibrium of all men is important, and within Masonry it is a necessity. The 18th degree of the Scottish Rite is therefore a major key in our study and reporting of the initial, and ongoing rationale for continuing the promulgation of all Scottish Rite Degrees in perpetuity.