

K. Tyler Curtis

College of the Consistory

School of Philosophy

28° – Knight Commander of the Temple

Topic 1

“Codes of Knighthood - Marks of Masons”

Honor. Temperance. Chastity. Generosity. Humility. Such virtues are established by the Knight Commander of the Temple’s chivalric code. These virtues are indeed timeless. They are as relative today as they were in the days of medieval knighthood.

Yet a scan of the daily newspaper or evening news is rarely ripe with stories of character and honor. Rather, these “newsworthy” events often revolve around immoral behavior, tales of excess, and selfish motivations. Vanity seems to reign supreme.

A glance at Sunday’s *Kansas City Star* provides several such examples. A story entitled “E-I-E-I-Oh?” covers a scandal involving developers and corporations, including Wal-Mart, purchasing property zoned as farm land and paying the accompanying farm-based tax rate despite the significant discrepancy between the rate which farm land is taxed compared to residential or commercial property. Communities are losing millions of dollars in property tax collections while these property owners pocket the savings. Oh, and it’s “legal” (Dillon).

Another story discusses the surge in homicides taking place in communities around the Kansas City metro and throughout the nation. Already citing 2012 as the worst year for

homicides since 2008, the area has recorded 10 more murders this year compared to the same time last year. Homicides in Chicago are also up - by 60% (Rizzo & Everly). And we have yet to arrive to the summer months when kids are out of school and crime typically spikes. (Of course, the sub-story to this piece is one of journalistic appeal tactics. Perhaps the “worst year” for homicides “since 2008” isn’t really all that bad; however, it certainly sounds like a crisis upon first read.)

This being the 100th anniversary of the *Titanic*’s sinking, a story reminiscing a grand, 10-course meal graces the paper’s headlines (Levings). Most of us know the story of the *Titanic* – a story of greed, power, prejudice, and arrogance.

All of these above-mentioned examples, and the reader hasn’t yet moved beyond the paper’s front page.

Turn the page and read a news report about a Secret Service scandal in Cuba, a scandal involving prostitutes and security breaches (Nakamura & O’Keefe). Turn another page and learn about a \$1 billion settlement that the United States is paying to 41 different Native American tribes to compensate for admitted “fund mismanagement” (Williams). Page 12 has a story discussing Europe’s economic downturn and its effect on suicide rates. In Greece, suicides are up 24%; 16% in Ireland; 52% in Italy (Poveledo & Carvajal).

And the headlines go on and on.

Granted, you cannot believe everything you read in the paper and on the Internet – or watch on television. Perhaps Albert Pike was correct when he observed, “the press is the great sower of falsehood” (579).

Whether the media over-programs pessimistic stories or whether the world is truly as dishonorable as the news depicts, it is surely safe to say that the world could use some additional honor, a tad more temperance, an increase in chastity, a little more generosity, and a healthy dose of humility. Property owners should pay their land's appropriate tax rate; conflicts should be solved without killing each other; we are all God's children - equal in His sight – and we must realize there is only one Supreme Intellect; the President's protectors should be watchful and loyal – as well as reliable and moral; our country's past treatment of its Native people is disgraceful, and it need not continue today; losing worldly wealth is certainly no reason to take one's life. As a Knight Commander of the Temple, we are “soldiers of honor, loyalty, and duty;” we are promoters of truth, justice, and fidelity (Pike 578). In short, a Knight Commander of the Temple is true Mason.

The 28^o tells a fascinating story about a young squire in training to become a full knight. He has worked hard to learn the skills of knighthood and has proven himself as a man of faith and character. Now he comes to the evening before the day he's been waiting and preparing for – the day he will become a full knight. He is charged to keep vigil overnight; failure to remain at his vigil results in dishonor and disgrace. Upon completion of this seemingly easy task, he will be granted full knighthood. More tests of his character and convictions soon follow.

First, Constans is tempted to leave his vigil to act upon his emotional and physical desires. While he is keeping a solemn vigil, his fiancé is at a party. A former boyfriend is also at the party. She sends a messenger to inform Constans that if doesn't come soon, she will leave with her former lover and Constans will never see her again. Staying true to his duty and honor, Constans maintains his vigil and refutes a life of succumbing to his physical and sensual desires (Tresner 85).

Next, Constans is informed that a rival knight has taken the opportunity to attack his castle while Constans is away. Again, Constans maintains his duty and refuses to leave his vigil. Here, Constans proves that he is more concerned with his honor than of losing a temporal possession. The “practical, economic realities of the world” are less important than staying true to your word and maintaining faith and loyalty to God (Tresner 85).

Constans is tempted for a third time. Because of his refusal to leave for human love or worldly possessions, a monk encourages him to follow his devout faithfulness. Rather than become a knight, the monk invites Constans to join him in the monastery – to dedicate his life to prayer, study, and God rather than training, war, and service. Again, Constans refuses to leave his vigil and chooses the life of a knight over a life based solely on spiritual values (Tresner 85).

In the end, though, Constans does leave his vigil. When the city is attacked and innocent women and children are being threatened, he flees from his vigil and joins in the fight. In a story of heroism, Constans is the unknown savior of the day – the unnamed hero of the fight. Despite disobeying his orders and leaving his vigil, Constans is allowed to become a knight because he has proven himself as a chaste, temperate, and humble man whose generous nature and honor led him to serve the common good when needed rather than simply adhere to an order and refuse to act when duty calls. Constans proved that he is a man of honor and action – a man both loyal and practical.

The narrative of the 28^o is truly a great story. Yes, it is predicable at times. Yes, it has certainly been told before. Yes, it has some cheesy parts. However, it is a practical story with numerous applications, and Masonry is meant to be practical (Hutchins 240). Masonry is meant to teach lessons that can be applied to everyday situations. As Clausen writes,

“Our lives should scorn the base and selfish, and make manifest the knightly attributes of character and charity, truth and honor, rather than be examples of accumulations of wealth and worldly power. This is practical Masonry in action, as when we perform our duties to the poor and helpless, the weak and unhappy, the distraught and infirm.” (Clausen 165-66)

In this manner, Clausen defines what he calls “shirt sleeve Masonry,” the kind of Masonry that applies the philosophical lessons taught in the degrees to real-world situations (165). Many times this philosophy is manifested in acts of charity, or love, a concept which we are taught in the 18° is action. More accurately, in that degree we are taught that charity is the manifested action of faith and hope.

The drama of the 28° certainly teaches the Mason to be temperate, charitable, generous, humble, and honorable. Likewise, the colors used in this degree tell the same story. The use of the color red is again prominent. As we have seen previously, red reminds us of sacrifice – even the ultimate sacrifice – required of honorable men. Yellow reminds us to be charitable in the completion of our duties, to be loving and gentle with our fellowman. Temperance is symbolized by the color orange, which as a balance of red and yellow – a mix of action and compassion – logically symbolizes the virtue. We see green employed in the 28° as a color of rebirth and renewal, the kind of regeneration that springs from acts of charity and love. Blue is employed to remind men of honor to be humble subjects who are obedient to an omnipotent God. Finally, the colors black and white are again dominant and remind us of our eminent death, which is only made tolerable by the promise of immortality brought about by living a pure life, represented by the color of the Masonic lambskin and ultimate color of a Mason’s duty to his God, his country, his neighbor, and himself (Tresner 183-87).

Today's world awaits - and reflects - the values of honor, temperance, chastity, generosity, and humility. Though the majority of the media's attention is on disaster and scandal, stories of honor are presented: reports of valiant soldiers fighting for freedom, innocent by-standers helping a person in distress, fire fighters saving the lives of children, random acts of kindness and charity, and demonstrations of brotherly love and relief. In 2010, Americans gave over \$290 billion to charity – over \$290 billion – during an economic recession. Most importantly, it was American *people* who gave this money away. Over 80% of these funds were gifted by individuals (Center). Providing funds for underserved and needy populations is certainly honorable. As Masons, we learn that charity is love and action. “Shirt-sleeve Masonry” is demonstrated by the faithful husband, the loving father, and the kind neighbor. In this manner, Masons are the Knights of the 21st century. Knights and Masons are as needed today as they have been throughout time immemorial.

Honor. Temperance. Chastity. Generosity. Humility. Such virtues comprise the Knight Commander of the Temple's chivalric code. These virtues are indeed timeless. They are qualities of a Sir Knight. They are marks of a True Mason.

Works Cited

Center for Philanthropy. Indiana University. “U.S. Charitable Giving Shows Modest Uptick in 2010 Following Two Years of Declines.”

<http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/news/2011/06/pr-GUSA.aspx>.

Clausen, Henry. *Clausen's Commentary on Morals and Dogma*. San Diego: Neyenesch, 1985.

Pg. 139.

Dillon, Karen. "E-I-E-I-Oh?" *Kansas City Star*. 15 April 2012.

Hutchens, Rex R. *A Bridge to Light*. Williamston, S.C.: Electric City, 1995. Pgs. 194-97.

Levings, Darryl. "A Meal to Remember Titanic's Fate." *Kansas City Star*. 15 April 2012.

Nakamura, David, and Ed O'Keefe. "Secret Service in Scandal." *Kansas City Star*. 15 April 2012.

Pike, Albert. *Morals and Dogma*. Richmond: J.H. Jenkins, 1945. Pg. 353.

Poveledo, Elisabetta, and Doreen Carvajal. "Economic Crisis Leads to Increase in Suicide Rate." *Kansas City Star*. 15 April 2012.

Rizzo, Tony, and Steve Everly. "Surge in Homicides Perplexes." *Kansas City Star*. 15 April 2012.

Tresner, Jim. *Vested in Glory*. Washington, DC: Supreme Council, 33, Southern Jurisdiction, 2000.

Williams, Timothy. "U.S. Will Pay \$1 Billion to 41 Indian Tribes." *Kansas City Star*. 15 April 2012.