

WHAT IS “MORE LIGHT”? by John Schroeder

“A mind that is stretched to a new idea, never returns to its original form.”

_____ Oliver Wendell Holmes

"The spoken word is powerful because it brings forth a thought and a thought is the start of every manifestation."

I hope that some of my words tonight may bring forth some thoughts on your part. If not, then, as The King’s lecture says, “have I labored in vain and you have spent your strength for naught.”

Companions, your High Priest has asked me to speak to you this evening on the question, “What is ‘more light’?” I have probably lost more sleep over this topic than any other paper I have ever worked on. Where to start? How to approach the topic? Should I talk about me or talk about you? One speaker who asked that last question concluded, “What’s the difference? We are each of us persons searching and seeking.” An early Christian teacher, in his manuscript, *Testimony of Truth*, asked, “What is the light? And what is the darkness? And who is the one who created the world? And who is God? And who are the angels? And what is the governance (of the world)? And why are some lame, and some blind, and some rich, and some poor?” So you see, this is an ancient, important but unresolved question.

More Light is both a physical/physiological concept and a very deep philosophical concept. The Royal Arch Degree King’s lecture refers to Masons as “sons of light.” How many of us feel qualified for that approbation? John Milton wrote, “Virtue could see to do what virtue would by her own radiant light, though sun and moon were in the flat sea sunk. And wisdom’s self oft seeks to sweet retired solitude, where with her best nurse

Contemplation she plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings that in the various bustle of resort were all to-ruffled, and sometimes impair'd. He that has light within his own clear breast may sit I' th' centre and enjoy the bright day; but he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts benighted walks under the midday sun." Milton also wrote, expressing the Hebraic doctrine, "Hail, Holy Light, offspring of Heaven first-born, Or of th' External, co-eternal beam! May I express thee unblamed, *since God is light.*".

The Bible doesn't often use the phrase, "God is..." but the Book of John does say "God is light." The second century A.D. church fathers circulated a collection called the "Apostolic fathers" in which they included a *letter of Barnabas* invoking a traditional Jewish teaching of "two ways" – the "way of light", consisting of a list of actions that are good, and a "way of darkness" "consisting of evil actions." Although the Bible gives us the words of Jesus, "Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you, ask and it shall be given unto you," Tertullian, a Carthaginian Christian convert of the second century, felt that the doctrines and dogmas of the Apostolic Church were adequately established and wrote, "Away with the one who is always seeking, for he never finds anything; for he is seeking where nothing can be found. Away with the one who is always knocking, for he knocks where there is no one to open; away with the one who is always asking, for he asks of one who does not hear."

The apocryphal literature of the first and second centuries, uncovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 is replete with references to light. In the *Gospel of Philip*, the author, a Valentinian, says, "Names are very deceptive for they divert our thoughts from what is accurate to what is inaccurate. Thus one who hears the word 'God' does not perceive what is accurate, but perceives what is inaccurate. So also with 'the Father' and 'the Son' and 'the Holy

Spirit’, and ‘life’ and ‘light’, and ‘resurrection’, and ‘the Church’ and all the rest – people do not perceive what is accurate but what is inaccurate.”

Valentinus himself wrote that apart from God’s grace, the human heart is a “dwelling place for many demons. But when the Father, who alone is good, looks upon it, he purifies and *illuminates it with his light*; thus, the one who has such a light is blessed, because he sees God.”

In the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*, when Jesus was asked, “What is the place to which we shall go?” He answered, “There is light within a man of light, and it lights up the whole world. If he does not shine, he is in darkness.” This directs us into ourselves for the source of light. Silvanus, whose manuscripts, *Teachings*, were also found at Nag Hammadi, urged his followers to resist unconsciousness saying, “end the sleep which weighs heavily upon you. Depart from oblivion which fills you with darkness. Why do you pursue darkness, though the light is available for you? Wisdom calls you, yet you desire foolishness. ...before everything else, know yourself.” The manuscript *Dialogue of the Savior* contains a similar thought when Matthew asks Jesus to show him the *place of life* which is, he says, *pure light*, Jesus replies, “Every one [of you] who has known himself has seen it” pointing the Disciples toward self discovery. These are concepts that have engaged the best thinkers of all ages. The manuscripts at Nag Hammadi were probably hidden because the Church had decreed that they contained *Gnostic* thought and were, therefore heretic. The Gnostics believed that self-knowledge (also the ancient dictum of the oracle at Delphi, “know Thyself”), was the highest wisdom or light. They also believed that God is within each of us and self-knowledge included awareness of this godliness deep within our souls. An early teacher put it thus about becoming a Christian and thereby discovering, “who we are, and what we have become; where we were and whither are we hastening; from what we are being released; what birth is, and what is

rebirth.” [Of particular interest to Royal Arch Masons is the Nag Hamadi manuscript *Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth* which must remind us of the Ninth Arch.]

It seemed to me that before trying to define “more light”, I needed to give thought to both the denotation and the connotation of “light” as it is requested in the degrees of Freemasonry. Certainly, our candidate receives physical light following darkness, when the hoodwink is removed as in a clap of thunder. There are probably as many ideas about the definition of that physical light as there are Companions in the room this evening. Some may be thinking of light as a physical force or energy, in which case, unless it’s been better defined than when I took physics, it is not entirely pinned down even by physicists. The word, light, is used daily to mean many different things: the sensation which our eyes receive, or the causes of that sensation, or even as a comparative description of weight. In 1704, Newton published his paper “Optics” detailing his 15-year-long study of the nature of light in which he defined light as a stream of high speed minuscule corpuscles flowing from a shining source to a receptor and passing through transparent items at different rates of speed. The small vacuum glass globe instruments with rotatable panels which are black on one side and reflective silver on the other and which rotate on a shaft when exposed to light but which do not rotate in the dark, would seem to support that contention. Newton suggested that differences in color of light were dependent upon the differing sizes of those tiny corpuscles. Although some investigators disagreed with this theory, they could not gain acceptance against such a giant as Newton. The Dutch philosopher, Huyghens, proposed a theory of light as waves and offered such convincing logic and experiments that his theory would likely have been widely accepted had it not been for Newton’s prestige. In 1815, Augustus Fresnel, a young French government engineer, supported Huyghens theory

and was able to support all the experiments to show his ideas correct under a great many different circumstances that had confounded Newton's theory. Brilliant physicists Maxwell, Hertz, Dolland and others continued experiments with refraction, dispersion, reflection, and the effects of magnetic and electrical fields on light and Einstein spent quite some effort on theories of light.

However, we want the candidate to understand that the physical light he receives, as in a clap of thunder, is one of our symbols or allegories, and that the connotation of light as an intellectual and moral force, as in the word, "enlightenment", is the true object of our efforts. In our school days, we contrast the "Age of Enlightenment", coming about the year 1500, with the "Dark Ages" to reflect an increase in learning and understanding of ourselves and of our world. Historians now tell us that the "dark ages" were probably not as intellectually vacuous as our earlier textbooks portrayed.

Our ritual repeatedly emphasizes the concept of light. Claudy wrote, "By the light of the lesser lights, the Entered Apprentice is led to see those objects which mean so much to a Mason, the Great Lights: The inestimable gift of God to man as the rule and guide for his faith and practice, the tools dedicated to the Craft and to the Master, the Alpha and Omega of Freemasonry." Those lesser lights, you recall, represent the sun, the moon and the Worshipful Master. As he is to give good and wholesome instructions to the Craft, it is appropriate that one light belong to the Worshipful Master. "Darkness rested upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters and God said let there be light and there was light" is taken from the very first verses of Genesis in what we term the Great Light of Masonry – again the use of the word "light". The Book of John says that "God is light, so walk in the light and anyone who claims to be in light but

hates his brother is still in darkness and will stumble but whoever loves his brother lives in light and will not stumble.” These are certainly fitting thoughts for our Fraternity which preaches brotherly love and affection. We hear that our ancient Brethren termed themselves “Sons of Light”, a title that we learn was also used by the Essenes, the exclusive and reclusive sect who demanded strict adherence to the letter and spirit of “the law”. Light is also associated with “truth”, with “knowledge”, and with “wisdom”, the better translation of *Gnosis*.

A professor of philosophy, Matthew Del Nevo has written of Boethius, a Byzantine philosopher who worked for the Ostragothic Emperor of Italy, Theodorus. Del Nevo says that Boethius was a Christian Platonist and explains that means that he combines the sense that we are all puppets in Plato's cave (i.e. living in illusion, including self illusion — sin) with the idea of one God, like Plato's one light of truth, goodness and beauty. But man, in the image and likeness of God, can know logic, which in a Dark Age, is akin to light and will carry him to the light by enlightening him from within. This light is the light that was in the beginning with God (as per John's Gospel). Boethius is Christological in the patristic sense in which Christ is 'logos' or word by which the world is made. This logos has its logic, which is that of reason as Aristotle learned it from Plato (he does not read these two in opposition). (You may see, now, why I found this paper so hard to prepare.)

A philosopher has written that “enlightenment is achieved when one is able to transform the illusion of certainty to the certainty of illusion.” This is an equally deep thought and offers a hint of the zen philosophy and is similar to the thought contained in the Book of Ecclesiastes which contains the prayer used in our Master Mason degree and also contains the thought that “all is vanity” and that we are striving for nothing more than wind. However,

Ecclesiastes, the Preacher, also says, “Light is sweet and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun” and concludes, “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man”.

From my readings on the subject of light, I have personally concluded that light, in the context of “seeking more light in Masonry”, may be equated with wisdom. This is not the same as knowledge for knowledge implies knowing things and wisdom implies gaining understanding and the ability to apply knowledge to seek one’s goals. To illustrate with a personal metaphor, data are the computer records about your account at the bank. Information or intelligence is the organized data in the monthly statement you get from the bank. Knowledge is what you can do with the money in your balance...and wisdom is discernment about the consequences of your purchases. Modern Western society is flooded with data and information, but it is woefully short on knowledge, and dangerously void of wisdom. A universal problem, as I see it, is that by the time people gain wisdom it is often too late for them to make much use of it.

The previously mentioned ancient dictum of wise philosophers was “Know Thyself”. The Gnostics felt that the ultimate wisdom was the illumined realization that the divine was contained within each of us. That is my personal concept of what more light means for me.

So, what wisdom do I believe that Masonry is encouraging us to gain? The philosopher and author Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “It is one of the great compensations of life that no one can sincerely attempt to help others without helping himself.” The Dalai Lama has said, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” Booker T. Washington came to the same impression, saying, “If you want to

lift yourself up, lift others up.” Albert Pike said that what we gain dies with us but what we give lives on after we are gone. These thoughts seem to me to contain a great deal of the wisdom that Masonry encourages us to gain for ourselves as we are told that the principle rounds of that ladder extending from earth to heaven are faith, hope and charity by aid of which we hope to arrive in Heaven: faith in God, hope in immortality, and charity toward all mankind. The greatest of these is charity for our Faith may be lost in sight, Hope ends in fruition, but Charity extends beyond the grave throughout the boundless realms of eternity. While we are born selfish creatures, Masonry teaches us that our duty to all mankind, more especially to a Brother in Masonry, is to extend our hands to sustain them. That is more light that I believe Masonry inculcates.

Sometimes personal growth, or “en-light-enment”, occurs in one or more giant leaps, and sometimes only in baby steps, and sometimes not at all. Can the individual control that personal growth or can we facilitate that growth? It seems to me that our system of degrees in the Craft Lodge which is continued into our York and Scottish Rites, is designed to facilitate the growth of that wisdom which recognizes that we, ourselves, are not the center of the universe and ego is not a suitable driver on the road to happiness. Albert Pike, in his *magnum opus*, *Morals and Dogma*, has written so extensively on the concept of light that there are some 86 references to light in the index (and an additional six references to lights in plural) tracing the imagery of light to the ancient concepts of deity, to Ahura Mazda and to the Kabbalah. (Some of you may recall the use of the word mazda for electric lamps.) *Morals and Dogma* says, about light, that light is the *ainsoth*, the first emanation from God (from the kabalistic explanation of the creation); that light is a symbol of hope to the candidate; that the lunar cycle is a contest between light and darkness; that light from the ethereal source is substance or

the active cause while the earth is darkness or the passive cause; that Plutarch regarded light and darkness as the source of primitive theologies; that light, as explained in the introduction to the Kabala, is the supremest of all things and lofty and limitless, and styled infinite and cannot be attained unto by cognition or speculation. He also says that Masonry is a search for light taking us directly back to the Kabala.

Brother Casanova advised all young men to become Freemasons but asserted that the real secrets of the fraternity were not in its symbols and words, but were to be found only in reflection, reason, comparison and deduction. He averred that the real secret of Freemasonry, discovered by the individual [for himself], cannot be imparted to another." Likewise, while I have tried to report to you some of the meanings of light discussed by some historic sources, I cannot impart to you a meaning of More Light in Masonry which will be suitable for your guidance on your path to wisdom. Each Brother and Companion has his own value-system or *ethos* and each must find his own way to regain his own paradise. There is an old spiritual you may have heard which goes, "Oh, Jesus walked that lonesome valley. He had to walk it by himself. Oh, nobody else could walk it for him. He had to walk it by himself. So we must walk that lonesome valley. We have to walk it by ourselves. Oh, nobody else can walk it for us. We have to walk it by ourselves."

I repeat, I cannot impart to you a meaning of More Light in Masonry which will be suitable for your guidance on the path to wisdom and self realization but I hope that my thoughts, probably poorly expressed and which may seem to you rather scattered this evening, may stimulate you to engage in your own study to find your own, very personal, meaning for "More Light in Masonry" and that you will then continue to strive to attain more inner light

while walking this lonesome valley so that you may, as Emerson said, “sit in the center and enjoy the bright day.”