

A MASONIC MINUTE

Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est. ~
Where Charity and Love are, God is there.

Latin Antiphon for Maundy Thursday from the
Medieval Church

When a man petitions a Lodge to become a Freemason, he is asked three questions, the first of which is, “*Do you believe in the existence of a Supreme Being?*” All too often this conjures up an image of a white-bearded, paternalistic figure in flowing robes such as that painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564). While this image is undoubtedly great art, it is not helpful to the modern, rational thinking man in framing an answer to the essential question.

Why, if Freemasonry is not a religion, as we are quick to affirm, is a belief in the existence of a Supreme Being a prerequisite? This is often the most searching question raised by a serious inquirer during Friend to Friend or Masonic Open House presentations. We are not in the business of teaching Theology. However, as mortals in this universe, we must readily admit that there are many things beyond our control: the most obvious forces of nature being the weather, floods, earthquakes, tornados, volcanoes. The question really asks that we acknowledge the existence of a greater power. Indeed, science is still searching for the answer which would explain the origin of the universe.

Bro. Albert Pike explains: “*To every Mason there is a God ...How, or by what intermediaries He creates and acts, and in what way He unfolds or manifests Himself, Masonry leaves to creeds and Religions to inquire.*”¹ Such is the genius of Freemasonry.

Man is a meaning-seeking creature. Curiosity is an innate quality of the human intellect. *Where did I come from? What am I doing here? Where am I going from here?* These are questions that everyman in times of serious, intimate personal reflection asks himself. Freemasonic Ritual paraphrases them: “*Whence come you? Whither are you directing your course?*”

“*We are a mystery encompassed with mysteries.*” (Albert Pike)

From the earliest civilizations – *time immemorial* – man has sought to explain his existence through many and varied ‘creation myths.’ “*A Mason’s great business with life is to read the book of its teaching ... The old mythology is but a leaf in that book; for it peopled the world with spiritual natures; and science, many-leaved, still spreads before us the same tale of wonder.*”² As Freemasons, we have the great intellectual advantage of interpreting these mysteries and understanding the importance of symbolism and significance of allegory.

The Sun to rule the Day – the Moon to rule the Night.

¹ Pike, Albert. **Morals and Dogma**, p. 524

² Pike, Albert. **Morals and Dogma**. p. 216

Little wonder that ancient peoples worshipped the Sun as the giver of Light and Life, governing the Seasons, the cycle of seed time and harvest, providing food and sustenance, upon which existence depended – all controlled by an external force over which they had no control – a higher power. Thus the concept of a ‘Supreme Being’ found expression in the gods of antiquity. As Bro. Pike observed, “*The conceptions of God formed by individuals varied according to their intellectual and spiritual capacities.*”³

We must remember that Speculative Freemasonry emerged during the Enlightenment of the 18th century which was defined by rationalism and characterized by scepticism based in scholarship and learning. The Age of Faith was succeeded and replaced by the Age of Reason, which in turn gave birth to such institutions as the Royal Society, modern science, and Freemasonry. Even today Freemasons are encouraged to explore “*the hidden mysteries of nature and science.*”

It is often stated that ‘*the fundamental tenets or principles of Freemasonry*’ are **Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth**. With this in mind, let us look back at the quotation cited at the beginning of this note: ***Ubi caritas et amor, Dei ibi est.***

Amor – Love

³ Pike. p. 208

Brotherly Love is defined as “fraternal affection” extended to all mankind, regardless of race, religion, social class or educational status. Freemasons consider that there is only one race – the human race, and all men are ‘Brothers.’ This is what is meant by the oft quoted definitive statement: *The Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God.*

Caritas – Charity

The word ‘charity’ has many shades of meaning: being kind to others, assisting those in need, benevolent, etc. Simply stated it is an act of goodwill or affection – “*honest, heartfelt, disinterested, inexpressible affection.*”⁴ This is often stated as *The Mystic Tie* that binds us in bonds of friendship as Brothers. Freemasons apply the Golden Rule in a variety of ways, giving of themselves, both within and without the confines of the Order.

Dei ibi est – God, The Supreme Being

It may be instructive to note that ‘*supreme*’ (from the Latin ‘*supremus - superus*’ – higher) is defined as being ‘*highest in rank, power, authority.*’ Based upon *Love and Charity*, this ancient text implies that *God* is to be found in ‘*the divinity of service.*’ It is this concept that is fundamental to the universal nature of Freemasonry, and helps to explain why Freemasonry demands a belief in a Supreme Being.

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⁴ Pike. p. 213