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NOT OUT OF REACH



By Jason D. Rees 32° KCCH

FALSE: Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel while lying on his back. Now that we have that myth out of the way, let's get into the how, as well as the symbolism that everyone in the world has seen, but perhaps overlooked.

Michelangelo was commissioned (some say forced) by Pope Julius II in 1508 to paint the interior of the Sistine Chapel. It was a challenging four year experience for Michelangelo and his colleague Piero Rosselli. One of the biggest challenges was that, during entire project, services and ceremonies could not be delayed or stopped.

Michelangelo, before beginning, had to design and build scaffolding that would not interfere with the services and yet allow him to paint over sixty feet in the air during those ceremonies. Michelangelo and his colleague's system consisted of a mobile scaffolding to reach the distant ceiling through bracketed supports high up in the walls which would leave the floor free for worshipers and clergy. The amount of physical strain took a toll on Michelangelo and would affect his life for years after the completion of the work. It was so bad Michelangelo composed poems lamenting the process.

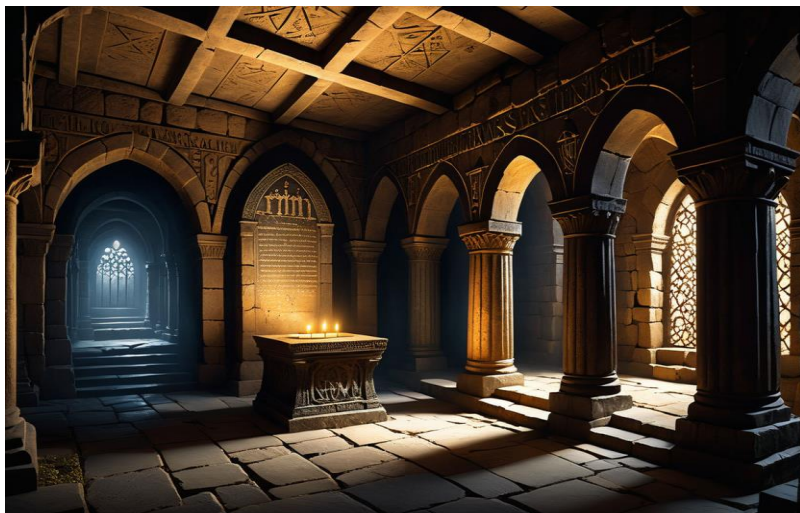
For the sake of this article we will focus on a particular portion of the paintings titled "Creation of Adam". Michelangelo painted two similar bodies which are in reference to Genesis 1:26 "And God said, let us make man in our own image, after our likeness". On the left we find Adam, and as Masons we are also taught that the left in all ages is considered the weaker side of man. Adam appears to be lying in dirt: Genesis 3:19 "For dust you are and dust you shall return." God is depicted as a man with gray hair and beard to denote wisdom and age, surrounded by angels coming down from heaven.

The "Creation of Adam" painting depicts the fingers of God and Adam almost touching. This portion of the painting is arguably the most overlooked and is very emblematic of man today. We see God's finger fully extended towards Adam, while Adam's finger is limp and slightly extended. Adam is barely reaching out to God, and could extend his finger out just a small amount but does not.

Isaiah 55:6 says, "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near." How similar is this painting to all of our natures and our relationships with the Great Architect of the Universe? Is it really that hard to go an extra inch in life in

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IN THE DARK WITH PIKE



By Jason D. Rees 32° KCCH

"Of some things I saw and heard, no one could give me an explanation at all; and indeed, it did not seem ever to have occurred to some of those of whom I asked light that they had any special signification." *Albert Pike (Esoterika)*

Brother Albert Pike, in his book *Esoterika*, was speaking frankly on the knowledge and education of the Craft during his time. Throughout history, our ceremonies have been passed down from mouth to ear and faithfully deposited into the heart of the brother where the Craft Lodge is to be built. However, there appears to be a huge flaw in this particular tradition: in most jurisdictions certifications are given to those brothers who have perfected the memorization of some or all of the work for our rituals, but do the Brothers teaching the work and/or receiving the certifications actually understand or know the symbolisms and meanings behind what they are teaching and saying?

Do not misunderstand; "memory work" is extremely important, but shouldn't we also be able to answer such questions as: Is the cable tow a symbol? What are the symbolisms in the weapons and blows of the assassins? What are the positions of the square and compasses, or are they just laid upon the Great Light haphazardly? Memorization is important, but so are the meanings behind the memorization.

Before initiation a man is in a state of ignorance and darkness. It is our job to bring him to light and instruct him in the meanings of our Craft. Do we not owe the candidate an explanation and education of the meanings? Should we progress with only focusing on memory work? If so, then we are insinuating that anyone with the ability to memorize and recount words for the ritual are the best of Masons.

Too many times I have been told by Brothers that they are not good at the ritual work and feel disconnected from it, causing them to either not participate much or to stay away all together. I also often hear queries from newly initiated Brothers such as "what is that?" or "who can tell me what this symbol means?" This is a missed opportunity because if a Brother cannot memorize lectures, perhaps they can learn and explain meanings of the different parts of our rituals. Are not the mysteries of our craft those that teach a man to be better, to grow closer in his faith, and grow in his family and community?

When you give your son or daughter a fishing rod as a gift, you first help them assemble it. Does your instruction end there?

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Order to be closer to God? Our actions do not save nor prove ourselves to the Great Architect of the Universe. It is our belief in our faiths that shows through our actions to want to be better in every way. Do we judge harshly those brothers who might not be as strong in ritual, or are we quick to be harsh and judgmental? This and many other things we are all guilty of.

I recently attended a Lodge meeting, wherein a brother was instructing the other members on some of the benefits the Lodge offers that could be useful by the membership. While speaking, another member from the back of the room yelled out a critical statement that neither promoted the Craft nor was a source of encouragement.

Let us all remember we are so close to the Great Architect of the Universe, and all we need to do is just move towards him and he will do the rest. Reach out in your faith and treat others the way you would want to be treated.



Something to Think About:

"It is necessary to keep one's compass in one's eye and not in the hand, for the hands execute, but the eye judges"

- Michelangelo

"Journey Passport" Program

The Houston Valley is participating in the "Journey Passport" program which includes 33 challenges that allow participants to earn six unique Scottish Rite challenge coins. The passport program is designed to take brothers throughout the Valley of Houston and the Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite. To learn more and get a passport, contact Brother Jason Rees 32° KCCH at: acompass@yahoo.com

The Houston Valley Herald Email List

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Cont'd from front, "In the Dark With Pike"

Of course not. You must also teach them how to cast, why they should do it this way and not that way, what types of lures work in different scenarios, and so on.

How much more important are our rituals and the corresponding explanations of the symbolisms? Some would say the symbols mean different things to different brothers. This is only true when looking at that symbol separate from when it is being used in a particular way and manner inside a degree. For example, the compasses and square:

The two points of the compasses symbolize moral sense and reason, while the two arms of the square are the indispensable inclinations and passions. Their progressive movements and placement before the Great Light show the growth of the Brother. When a Brother has been raised to that Sublime Degree, and the Compasses have reached their pinnacle and have rested, the Brother has elevated his Moral sense and reason above his indispensable inclinations and passions. He represents equilibrium with nature and qualifies a man to be a Master Mason.

This is all just food for thought; look for discussions such as this on our Houston Valley Scottish Rite podcast!



**Albert Pike's
ESOTERIKA**

The Symbolism of the Blue Degrees of Freemasonry

Transcribed and Annotated by Arturo de Hoyos

In this time of year where we give thanks for our family and friends and the bounty and blessings we have received from God the Father, I offer this prayer:

Lord we bless Thy Holy Name and thank Thee for all Thy Gifts, especially the Gift of Friendship. Lord, we here all are fit and able to enjoy this festive table, but ever mindful we shall be, of those that need our charity.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Editor in Chief

Jason D. Rees 32° KCCH

Copy Editor

Eric Wylie 32° KCCH

