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Memento Mori: Remember You Will Die

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Editor-in-Chief



Memento Mori (c. 1680) by Evert Collier.

Masons from the blue lodge and a large assortment of appendant bodies are not shy of using symbols. The most recognizable are the square and compasses, but some brothers may be familiar with the majestic double-headed eagle. As any Master Mason knows, these symbols are not just aesthetically pleasing representatives – they have distinct meaning. A symbol that some Masons consider taboo is the skull. When skeptical brothers question why a Mason would wear such a symbol an old phrase may come to mind: “Memento Mori.”

“Memento Mori” means “Remember you will die” and literally translates from Latin to “Remember Death.” This old Latin phrase originated in the Middle Ages, possibly even before, and was used by both Christian theologians and secular philosophers alike to remind an audience that they are mortal and their time on Earth is guaranteed to come to an end. We, as Masons, should have a clear recollection of the significance of death from the blue lodge. However, the notion of “Memento Mori” and consequences of finite life are not alien concepts to the Scottish Rite.

In the magnum opus of Illustrious Brother Albert Pike 33°, *Morals and Dogma*, the word “Death” is used over 250 times. His references range from the tales of death among ancient gods to metaphorical concepts surrounding death. He also states that the fear of death should not cause a Mason to do wrong.

In the closing pages of *Morals and Dogma*, when discussing the

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Wanderer above the Sea of Fog (c. 1818) by Casper David Friedrich.

The Clash of Individualism Versus Standardization

Researched By SETH D. HUDSON 32° KCCH
Contributor

Standardization is a system peculiarly characteristic of our present age. Practically everything touching our mechanical world is standardized. In the U.S. Department of Commerce is the National Institute of Standards and Technology, whose chief function is to see that every tool, utensil, implement, or mechanical appliance – big or little – meets certain uniform requirements as to shape, size, strength, and composition. This accomplishment, no doubt, serves an excellent purpose for the public in general from the utilitarian and economic point of view. For when a part of any standardized machine is needed it may be had by name or number almost anywhere at a regular uniform price.

But when one thinks of standardizing human life and conduct, and casting the natural diversities of man in a uniform mold, he may come to the conclusion that such an achievement might not be so feasible or so good. The standardization of mechanical devices is a new development, but that principle as applied to human thinking and conduct is a very old one.

In totalitarian states the subject must standardize his thought and conduct to meet the requirements of the dictator. The ancient Greeks had a story of a well-known bandit by the name of Procrustes, the stretcher, who lived in the hills of Attica. This giant robber had an idea that every man should fit the same sized bed.

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last few degrees, Brother Pike wrote: "And the Chivalric Degrees have led you on the same path, by showing you the excellence of generosity, clemency, forgiveness of injuries, magnanimity, contempt of danger, and the paramount obligations of Duty and Honor. They have taught you to overcome the fear of death, to devote yourself to the great cause of civil and religious Liberty, to be the Soldier of all that is just, right, and true... No base fear of danger or death, no sordid ambitions or pitiful greeds or base considerations can tempt a true Scottish Knight to dishonor."



Vanitas (1675) by Evert Collier.

Once men accept that "To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering," as Friedrich Nietzsche said, they realize that vices are distractions. It is an unquestionable reality that we will die, just as the hundred billion who came before us did. But men are offered an entire lifetime to build themselves and to accomplish great things. Remember that you will die, so that you take advantage of your time here on Earth to do something with your life. You will die, so you must live!

Announcements

416th Reunion Rescheduled

The 416th Reunion will be held in honor of our departed brother, Patrick G. Lovitt. The reunion has been rescheduled by the Valley of Houston to the Saturdays of: April 29, May 6, and May 13, 2023. The 4^o - 17^o shall be conferred on April 29; the 18^o - 29^o shall be conferred on May 6; and the 4^o, 14^o, 18^o, 30^o, 31^o, and 32^o shall be conferred on May 13. Breakfast will be available each day.

School of Instruction

At 10:00 a.m. on March 25, 2023, the Houston Scottish Rite School of Instruction will meet in the Valley Board Room. Coffee and doughnuts will be available.

"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^o KCCH at: acompass@yahoo.com

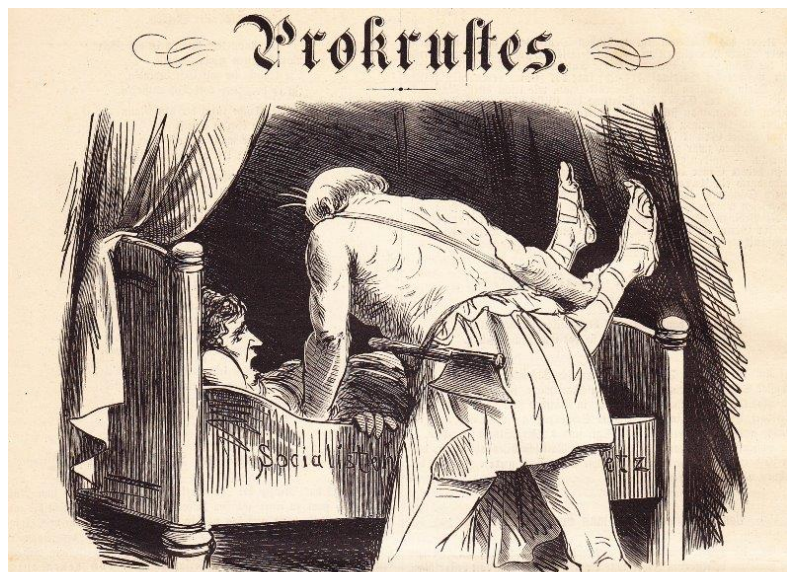
The Houston Valley Herald Email List

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Anyone is welcome to receive this publication via email as well. To join our mailing list, email acompass@yahoo.com

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He possessed an iron bed of just the standard length according to his conception, and if his captives did not fit its length, it was not the fault of the bed. If one of them happened to be too short, as most of them were, he resorted to the cruel method of stretching them to the proper length even though it pulled many joints apart. If, on the other hand, he found one of them too long for the bed, he chopped off its lower limbs, or it may be his head, in order to make him fit the measurement.



„Wie ich sehe, ist die Freiheit etwas zu groß, — das wollen wir gleich zu ihrer Zufriedenheit abändern!“ (Er haßt ihr die Beine ab.)
Caricature by the *Berlin Wasps* satirical magazine on the "Socialist Law" (1878). Otto von Bismarck forces Lady Liberty into the Procrustean bed; he has a hatchet to cut off her legs.

There have been Procrustians in every age. They have sought to standardize human thought and conduct in church and state, and when they had the power, every individual, even at his own peril, had to fit the iron bed. Statesmen have literally had their heads severed from their bodies in order to fit the beds of political bandits. Sainly men have been actually torn limb from limb so that they might fit the standard bed of religious fanatics. The block and the rack of the Middle Ages were veritable Procrustean beds upon which great, good, and honest men suffered even unto death.

While those instruments of torture and death are mostly things of the past, other agencies may be used to suppress the expression of people's convictions and to curb their individuality. Rugged individualism may be a term not so popular nor so applicable in our complex society as it was in pioneer days, but the loss of individualism means weakness in our democracy. Its loss means standardized thinking, or not thinking; it means a preponderance of "yes men;" it means mediocrity.

The institution of Freemasonry is fundamentally individualistic but also cooperative. It dictates to no man what he shall think — religiously, politically, or otherwise. It accords every man the privilege of directing his conduct as he pleases so long as it is in keeping with his duty which he owes to himself, to his country, and to his God. It endorses the intellectual and spiritual development of every man to the fullest extent of his capacity. It endorses the intellectual and spiritual development of every man to the fullest extent of his capacity. It honors every individual for the sterling qualifications that would recommend him to be a Mason. It hates the Procrustean law, which forces uniformity upon individuals by harsh and severe methods.

Freemasonry believes in making the bed fit the man and not the man fit the bed.

A Note From The Editor

The Houston Valley Herald thrives when contributors are willing to share more light with the world. We welcome contributions from any Scottish Rite Mason in good standing, especially those from the Valley of Houston of the Orient of Texas.

If you wish to contribute to *The Houston Valley Herald*, contact Brother Adam B. Olivier 32^o at HoustonValleyHerald@gmail.com. To view all previous issues, visit the Houston Valley's website and click on the "Newsletter" tab on the right.