

That Religion Which All Men Can Agree?
A Debate between Gentlemen, Albert Pike and JOHN THEOPHILUS DESAGULIERS
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Dr. James Anderson, most likely, with the assistance of John Theophilus Desaguliers, wrote the first Masonic Constitution in which he is quoted as saying, *“yet 'tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that Religion in which all Men agree, leaving their particular opinion to themselves”* (Andersons constitutions 1723)

This one phrase has enflamed the imagination of thousands of Masons and yet today, we do not truly comprehend the numerous and far reaching consequences of its meaning.

One of the main framers of this Constitution was the Rev. John Theophilus Desaguliers who was born in Rochelle, France. The son of a Huguenot clergyman, his reputation as a lecturer on experimental philosophy obtained for him a Fellowship in the English Royal Society. He was also the inventor of the planetarium. Elected the third Grand Master of England in 1719 and Deputy Grand Master in both 1723 & 1725, he would have had a profound effect on Anderson. Let us, however, examine the outline in which their world was framed.

Foremost, the European wars of religion, also known as the wars of the Reformation (and Counter-Reformation), were a series of religious wars waged in Central, Western and Northern Europe from circa 1522 to around 1700. These bloody conflicts pitted Christian against Christian with the resulting upheaval of the then natural order/control of the Catholic Church. Mix in a little intrigue surrounding the ascendancy of the English Monarchy and you have a wonderful recipe for murder, religious intolerance and suspicion. With this backdrop, did these two clergymen consider the choice of words so as not to inflame whomever was on the throne? Or, did they make this assertion as a way to facilitate the beginning of a world that was to include science and the direct impact science was to have on religion? Remember, Desaguliers was a member of the Royal Society and an inventor. Being prolific in his writings and experimental Philosophy would make him a natural catalyst for Anderson to draw upon when writing his Constitutions.

What if, as W.S. Davie asserts in his paper, the organization was established as an educational institution one allows that for lectures and dissertations, following the general concepts of the Age of Enlightenment: was this the glue which allowed the neutral religious assertions to be sustainable? Certainly, after a time, the fraternity lost interest in the deep study and became a dinner club. The ancients attempted to re-instate the initial concept of education and, undoubtedly today, Masons are interested in education both personally and within the public school systems of the various states.

Did Desaguliers own upbringing influence the course of Masonry? The intriguing issue here is that a neutral statement on religion would allow the craft to “draft” a noblemen to lead the craft and, in fact, that occurred with the 1721 John, Duke of Montagu, 1722 Philip, Duke of Wharton, 1723 the Duke of Buccleugh, 1724 the Duke of Richmond. 1725 the Earl of Abercorn and the list goes on. Note, Desaguliers served as the Deputy Grand Master in 1723 and 1725. These re-affirmations would imply that he was to maintain that suggestion, as to religion, and allow for the creation of charity. This reinforcement of a neutral religious theme was to dominate the fraternity until the American named Albert Pike challenged it. Or did he?

In our study of the Second Degree of Craft Masonry I have argued that the point of the Masters Lecture centralizes on the how science and religion can co-exist. Neither one “more important” than the other. This degree manifests the total embodiment of the enlightenment experiment.

Albert Pike, perhaps the best known Masonic Scholar of his time, wrote: *“Not that Philosophy or Science is in opposition to Religion. For philosophy is but the knowledge for God and the Soul, which is derived from observation of the manifested action of God and the Soul, and from a wise analogy. It is the intellectual guide which the religious sentiment needs.....”*

As to Science, it could not walk alone, while a religion was stationary. It consists of those matured inferences from experience which all other experience confirms....

“The purpose, therefore, of education and science is to make a man wise.”

“What is certain, even for science and the reason, is, that the idea of God is the grandest, the most holy, and the most useful of all the aspirations of man; that upon this belief morality reposes, with its eternal sanction.”

Finally, consider this quote from Pike, *“Let man but be, as he is, a living soul, communing with himself and with God, and his vision become eternity; his abode, infinity; his home, the bosom of all embracing love.”*

These quotations are from Morals and Dogma one of his more enduring desecrations on Masonic thought and philosophy. Did these assertions back up what was stated in Anderson’s constitutions of 1723?

Did Pike argue favorably for the clause, “that religion which all men agree”? There appears to be some conflict with this presumption. Based on an occurrence in 1875 at the International Congress of Supreme Councils held in Lausanne, Switzerland. The the Supreme Council of Southern Jurisdiction was not represented.

In discussion held during those sessions, a notion was advanced that a material alteration to the Grand Constitutions be made which would change the fundamental law of the Scottish Rite.

That amendment, as asserted by the liberals attending these sessions suggested that Scottish Rite Masons should only admit to the existence of a “Creative Principal” in lieu of a personal God.

Albert Pike was in absolute opposition to this discussion and in his letter of March 20, 1876 wrote, *“To accept this, in lieu of a personal God, is to abandon Christianity and the worship of Jehovah, and to return to the wallow in the styes of Paganism”*

Did he change the fundamental belief of over a 100 years of Freemasonry or did he interrupt his findings on the something else?

Putting this into perspective, he had just lived through the most brutal war imaginable. The Civil War literally tore at the fabric of society, uprooted long standing institutions replacing, them with corrupt new laws, while robing citizens of their rights guaranteed under the constitution. Pike had to deal with another kind of adversity, that of the “Industrial Revolution” which impacted all levels of society. This can best be demonstrated in “A Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens (1843) and others regarding the horrors of this new age. Pike would have been well aware of these issues given his background as a teacher, lawyer and philosopher.

So what does Freemasonry subscribe to “that religion that all men agree”?

Or, is it solely based on the Christian belief system? Does it have other belief systems incorporated into it?

In this next section we suggest that the core belief as understood today is more encompassing than originally envisioned and exposed by Pike or Desaguliers.

The modern Mason has the ability to include all the various religious texts of the world making the fraternity truly global. Does this encompassing understanding translate to our own troubled world where Masonry is now 300 years old?

Are we in the “Information Age”? Does the opportunity to ground ourselves in the second degree offer the Freemason the unique ability to balance the difficulties of an ever increasing technologically advanced society with the un- shakable belief in a personal God?

What would Pike and Desaguliers think?

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