



Scientia Coronati Research Lodge No. 4 F&AM

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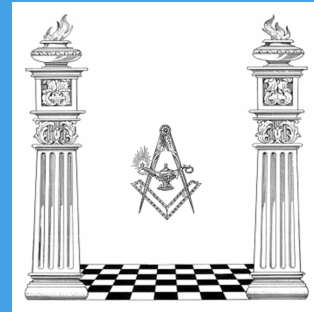
# Essays, Papers & Articles

Masonic Topics

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## And the Earth was without

form and void, and darkness was 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'



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## **The Masonic Altar**

By George Weil, Flagstaff Lodge No. 7

The most important article of furniture in a Lodge-room is undoubtedly the altar. It is worthwhile, then, to investigate its character and its meaning. The definition of an altar is very simple. It is a structure elevated above the ground, and appropriated to some service connected with worship, such as the offering of obligations, sacrifices or prayers. In Freemasonry, the altar is an important symbol.

Symbolism is part of everyday living. From his book, *The Craft and Its symbols*, Allen Roberts explains further on symbols. "Symbols are sometimes described as the universal language because they present the message in a way that is understood by all and do not depend on words that are different in various languages. The word "symbol" is defined as a thing that represents something else by association; in Freemasonry it might be defined as a material object that represents a basic moral truth or lesson."

**HISTORICAL NOTE:** Among the ancients, altars were of two kinds — for incense and for sacrifice. The sacrificial altars were always erected in the open air, outside and in front of the Temple. Animals were slain, and offered on the altars as burnt offerings. Altars of incense only were permitted within the Temple walls. On the altars of incense, bloodless sacrifices were presented and incense was offered to the Deity.

The Masonic altar, which, like everything else in Freemasonry, is symbolic, appears to combine the character and uses of both of these altars. It is an altar of sacrifice, for on it the candidate is directed to lay his passions and vices as an obligation to the Deity, while he offers up the thoughts of a pure heart as fitting incense to the Grand Architect of the Universe. The altar is, therefore, the most holy place in a Lodge. The form of a Masonic altar should be a cube, about three feet high, and of corresponding proportions as to length and width, having, an imitation of the Jewish altar, four horns, one at each corner.

A Masonic Lodge is a symbol of the world as it was thought to be in olden times. Our ancient brethren saw the world as a Temple, over-hung by a starry canopy by night, lighted by the journeying sun by day. Wherein man goes forth to his labor on a checkerboard of lights and shadows. The visible world was but a picture or reflection of the invisible, and at its center the ALTAR of sacrifice, obligations, and adoration.

**Summary:** The Altar can be envisioned as having three purposes:

1. An Altar of Faith. Faith in God is the cornerstone and the keystone in Freemasonry. The deep, eternal faith which underlies all creeds and over arches all sects; faith in God, in the moral law, and the life everlasting.

2. An Altar of Freedom. Not freedom from faith but freedom of faith. Allowing each man to think of God according to his experiences of life and his vision of truth.

3. An altar of fellowship as if to teach us that no man can learn the truth for another, and no man can learn it alone.

**Final Words:** Let us never forget . . . that the most sacred Altar on earth is the soul of man — your soul and mine. That the Temple and its ritual are not ends in themselves, but means to the end that every human heart may be a sanctuary of faith, a shrine of love, an altar of purity, pity, and unconquerable hope.