



Good day Worthy Knights, in this part 17, we consider reports and passwords.

Reports at the conclave opening:

The Sovereign declares the Conclave opened * ***

The Eminent Viceroy * ***

The Herald * ***

The Sentinel * ***

From Richard Calile's Manual of Freemasonry p291 et al. (first published 1832).

Q. Why do we open and close in this degree with sixteen reports?

A. In allusion to the sixteen stars, surrounding the sixteen letters composing the Grand Words: In Hoc Signo Vincens, in the form of the cross of Constantine, in the heavens.

Q. How do we prepare our candidates for this degree?

A. In the clothing of a Roman soldier: the cross of Constantine in his right hand and in his left a New Testament.

Q. For what reason?

A. To hold in commemoration the miracle that brought the conversion of Constantine and his enemies, his pious zeal for Christianity, and to denote that he was the first Roman Emperor to embrace the Christian faith, and to propagate the same by the force of arms.

Q. Why do we enter the conclave with two reports? (Junior General and Sentinel ?).

A. In commemoration of the famous cross and vision seen by Constantine in the heavens.

From Dr Trevor Daff paper:

The candidate is firstly asked for the passwords: Constantine and Mathias.

The names 'Constantine' and 'Matthias' are used during the working of the Red Cross of Constantine degree; but whereas a full explanation is given of the import of Constantine - and the battle of the Milvian Bridge - nothing at all is said of Matthias.

Who then was Matthias, and what is his connection with the Constantinian story?

Matthias

Mathias was the apostle chosen by the drawing of lots to take the place of Judas Iscariot who had committed suicide following his betrayal of Jesus. Two names were put forward: Joseph called Barsabas, and Matthias. Whoever was chosen had to have been present from the baptism of Christ until the Ascension, and thus have been a witness of the Resurrection.

Like most of the Apostles, however, Matthias drifts from history very quickly.

The only mention of Matthias in the Bible occurs at his selection; from then on the Bible is silent about him. It is assumed that he received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He was supposedly among the 72 disciples who were paired off by Jesus and dispatched by Him to preach the Gospel, but the dates of his apostolate are uncertain.

He probably preached first in Judea and there also exists a tradition linking him with Ethiopia. Matthias is said to have worked in mountainous Cappadocia - now in central Turkey - and near the Caspian Sea. In Colchis, now in Georgia, he was martyred by crucifixion, his body afterwards being chopped apart. Hence his symbols are those of the axe or the halberd.

It is possible that there was once a Gospel according to Matthias, but if so, it has long since been lost. What we do possess is the 'Acts of Andrew and Matthias' but this appears to be one of many third century legends which were willed upon the Apostles retrospectively,

In the 'Acts' Matthias goes to the Anthropophagi, a race which ate human flesh and drank blood. He is captured by them and sentenced to death but he is rescued by Andrew and taken in a cloud to a mountain where Peter was teaching. The book is merely a romantic tale, with no doctrinal purpose.

Sometimes, tradition confuses Matthew and Matthias, as in the case of the Anglo Saxon poem 'Andreas'. There also appears confusion in art between the two of them: Matthias's emblem is an axe or halberd, regarded as the instrument of his martyrdom when he was beheaded in Colchis: Matthew's symbol is a spear, a sword, or a halberd, also the tools of his death.

Constantine

Constantine was the first Roman emperor openly to encourage Christianity, but contradictory claims have been advanced as to the actual date of his personal conversion, some placing it as late as his death-bed in AD337 whilst others put it at the time of the Milvian Bridge. There seems little doubt however, that Constantine's conversion occurred earlier rather than later.

Like his father, Constantine was a devotee of the Unconquered Sun. He had thus come to accept a monotheist approach to religion; to move from this to Christianity was not a large step to take.

The Scriptures themselves lend support to the idea of Christ and the sun being connected, since reference is made to Christ as the 'sun of righteousness'. Clement of Alexandria cAD200 had talked of Christ driving his chariot across the sky like the Sun god, and a tomb mosaic of 4th century Rome shows Christ as the Sun god mounting the heavens with his chariot.

Indeed, many pagans of the day really thought that Christians worshipped the sun, since they met on Sundays, and prayed towards the east. Early in the 4th century, also - but by whom is not known - there began in the west the celebration of Christ's Nativity on 25 December, the birth date of the sun following the Winter Solstice.

There is also some evidence that in fact members of Constantine's own family were practising Christians; his half-sister's name, Anastasia (Latin anastasis = resurrection) has been thought to show Christian influence. Christianity was especially attractive to women, and it was often through them that the religion penetrated the upper classes. There is, too, a tradition that Constantine was responsible for the conversion of his mother, Saint Helena.