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The altar of today, as used in various churches, is as old as man's belief in God, as the Masonic altar of obligation is as old as Masonry itself. As man began to acknowledge the existence of the Supreme Being, he also began to improvise his altar, that he may conveniently kneel on his knees before it, to adore Him and offer sacrifice to His Holy Name. The first altar, as recorded in the Book of the Law, was built by Joshua on Mount Ebal out of rough and unhewn stones without the use of any tool of iron, where "they offered holocausts and peace offerings to the Lord." As man progressed and his skill developed, he began to hew cubical stones for his altar. Later, beautiful designs were intricately laid out and carefully carved, in true manifestation of love and care for this divine symbol. As faith became deeper and the idea of sacrifice grew in meaning, lavish jewels and priceless gifts were showered upon the altar to adorn the place of prayer. Nothing was regarded too expensive for the purpose. Temples and cathedrals began to be built, at times ancient caves were utilized instead, and for purposes of adoring Him, two altars were contrived — one inside the temple called the altar of incense or adoration and the other in front of the temple, called the altar of sacrifice, where man burned slain beasts and the products of the soil, to offer up his thanks to Him, for the bountiful graces which He had surrounded men on the surface of this planet.

The altar of adoration which is placed due East of the temple is held

sacred by everyone, that during the ancient times, it was conveniently used as the peaceful sanctuary of the hunted criminals, fugitives, slaves and the forlorn, for it was then regarded as an act of sacrilege to forcibly drag them out of that sacred place because they were, while there, deemed under the protection of God. Farther behind the altar, is the Holy Place, wherein only the High Priest may enter.

Man is generally known to be the only being on earth that prays — either alone or together. How impressive, indeed, it is to see a group of human beings gathered together in the most orderly and meek manner, their heads bowed with reverence towards the altar, united in prayer. Still more pathetic and rather compassionate is the parting desire of criminals condemned to die, in their last will, to ask to be allowed to have a last supplication with God through a Priest or any other Minister of the church, to invoke His blessings, during their last moments of desperation. There is no doubt that among God-believers, even the hardened criminal, the brute, the cruel and tyrannical, and even the sadistic, in their enlightened moments, remember God and pray for His aid and support in times of distress, danger, persecution, suffering, terror or tragedy.

The altar, inside the house of God, used for religious worship, plays a great beneficent influence in shaping the life of a man. Before it, all the various holy sacraments are administered from the time a child is baptized

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till the time he receives the last sacrament in death at old age. During ancient times, even covenants and treaties between nations were oftentimes signed before it, invoking the presence of God as a witness in the transactions. Up to this day, vows are being taken before the altar sanctioned by our customs and traditions and are binding to the honor and conscience of the individual. And, above all these, the place is held so sacred, that in front of it, while in deep meditation and prayer, one acquires the unusual feeling of the presence of the Great Creator blessing His creatures and can visualize the winged angels hovering tenderly and graciously over the heads of the devotees. Coming out of the door of the temple one feels spiritually refreshed as a new and better man, because of his communion with God. He returns to his home with a heart teeming with joy and a self-assured outlook in life.

On the other hand, there had been cases of wanton desecration of the sacred altar, by being tainted with the sinners' blood and their misdeeds. Cases of double suicide by pairs of frustrated lovers, suicides by spurned lovers and others who were desperate in their lives and had lost faith in society, have been committed before the altar. A Judge had been shot and killed while taking communion before the altar. Altars have been robbed of priceless ornaments and countless valuables by malefactors. Churches were used as prison barracks and dungeons of death of war prisoners during the war. All these, despicable as they appear to be, tend to show contempt for the symbol of the throne of God, and are visible signs of moral degeneration among men in this modern age — only to return to the folds of Godliness later, when confronted with danger, when in distress, while suffering or agonizing in

pain and when the shadow of death is visibly reflected upon the walls around their lonely places of abode.

The Masonic altar, on the other hand, is significantly different from the religious altar. While the religious altar is situated due East of the temple in conformity with the rising of the sun, the Masonic altar is situated at the center of the Lodge. While religious altars are dedicated along sectarian lines and are as varied as there are differences in religious sects, in Masonry there is only one common altar, where differences in religious beliefs are cast aside and people are unified in one common prayer acceptable to all, in adoring the Great Creator of the Universe.

The Lodge is said to be a petit representation of the universe canopied by the star-decked heaven with the journeying sun providing light to the other heavenly bodies revolving around it. The altar, therefore, situated in the center of the Lodge, is similar to the sun that diffuses light to all the activities of the Lodge. It is not meant to be just a piece of furniture to support the Great Lights, or its position in the center of the Lodge merely accidental. It has a far deeper meaning, in that it has a religious significance, although Masonry is not a religion. Masonry, by its very nature, is interwoven with religion as to require its initiates to pay homage to the Deity, but not to the extent of being involved in sectarian conflicts or the interpretation of religious beliefs. Truly translated, the Masonic altar is an altar of freedom — "freedom of faith, not freedom from faith." All Masons throughout the world, if they be true Masons, have knelt before a common altar, to be obligated and to receive light from the Master of the Lodge, regardless of creed, racial differences and stations in life.

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that may come to another brother or any member of his family. If some accident befell a brother or a member of his family, gets sick seriously or dies, the brethren should be the first group of people to come and share with the sorrow and to offer financial help automatically, because this is a part of our sworn obligation before the Altar. When every Master Mason does his sworn obligation to all concerned, more especially to a brother, we encourage everybody to be active in the Lodge and be conscious of their duties.

11. A well-to-do or much-better-off brother having a car, a pick-up or a jeep, should go out of his way to find out if some brethren are ready to go to Lodge meeting and can be accommodated in his vehicle. This, in-

deed, is an ideal which we might call real Masonry in action and a fine gesture of brotherly affection and love existing only among individuals with such a close fraternal relations. No doubt this system will improve and promote attendance in Lodge meetings.

Brethren, how about giving a try of these solutions to poor attendance enumerated above? Is it not inspiring to hear and to note that in some Lodges, attendance is "overflowing" so to speak, and that if some brethren happen to be a little late in coming, seats and spaces become a problem? If it can be done in other Lodges, why can it not be done right in our own Lodges, too?

Brethren, here is a real challenge for you and me. As for me, I accept the challenge. Do you? △

**PHILOSOPHY IN . . .** From page 6  
complete gentleman. . . And the complete gentleman is the man passionately devoted to friendliness. . . When you see two friends, you see two bodies with a single soul.

The 13th century philosopher and theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas maintained with "pagan" Aristotle (4th c. B.C.) that "every man has within him the form, or the urge, to turn himself into an angel, just as every acorn has within it the form, or the urge, to turn itself into an oak tree."

Saint Thomas played a central role in the assimilation of Aristotelianism in Christianity. There was a time when Church officials warned against the teaching of the Aristotelian treatises — probably because of the Mohammedan route by which it had come. Eventually, they decided that the thing to do was not to outlaw Aristotle or to burn his books but to study him with all due care. Thus, Christianity has been enriched with his philosophy since the thirteenth or fourteenth century. △

**THE ALTAR** From page 10

To both Religion and Masonry, therefore, the altar is indispensable, it being the pivotal point and source of divine light for all the activities in both. It symbolizes the throne of the Supreme Being, whereupon He presides over and oversees all the labors taking place around Him. Finally,

it will undoubtedly be for the best interest of the Order, if only the brethren, especially those whose interest in Masonry are waning, will come to recall what they pledged before the altar of obligation, that they may once more fully realize the important duties they owe to God, country, the Lodge, the brethren and mankind. △