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*"Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees the others." - Aristotle*

#### Fellow Soldiers of Christ:

Most Worshipful Arthur Weiss's recent reopening pronouncement has created stress in the minds of many of us asked to recite ritual in our various Masonic bodies: to wit, *where is my cypher book; why can't I find the black Commandery book; and, I used to remember what to say, why won't it come back?* As one charged to do so in several groups, I was, perhaps like some of you, apprehensive about all the upcoming degrees and my inability to recall essential details such as the explanation of the four Cardinal Virtues. So, I've dusted off my manuals, attempted to dust off my brain, and began rereading ritual.

One of the curiosities that's puzzled me appears is the legend of Constantine in the Order of the Perfect Knight Mason. We are told that Constantine may have received training in the *Collegium Artificium* that inspired him to desire greater knowledge of the unknown God. The lecture explains that the worship of God formed the core of one of the Ancient Mysteries. What, I wondered, were those Ancient Mysteries?

Turning to the most authoritative source of collected knowledge, I clicked on *Wikipedia*, searched for "ancient mysteries" and learned that Leonard Nimoy hosted a TV show back in the 1990's about ancient aliens building Stonehenge and the Great Pyramids. This, I reasoned, was not likely related to the worship of God.

Looking further, I discovered an article on the "Greco-Roman mysteries." *Wikipedia* explains that these were religious schools of Late Antiquity whose teachings were confined to initiates who had received secret rites. The better known were the Eleusinian Mysteries, rites associated with gods of fertility and agriculture, the Samothracian Mysteries, associated with the sea and sailors, and the Mithraic Mysteries, celebrating the Persian god-hero Mithras's adventures. interesting reading, to be sure.

Still puzzled by why Constantine's initiation into one of these rites would predispose him to inquire about the nature of God, I read further in my Black Letter Compendium of Philosophy (namely, *Wikipedia*) to discover that Marcus Terentius Varro, 116–27 B.C., a learned and prolific Roman author [best remembered by our Masonic peers as the originator of the classification system of the 7 liberal arts and sciences - grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy], classified theology into 3 types: *civil theology* (the state religion and its effect on societal norms); *natural theology* (philosophical speculation about the nature of divinity); and, *mythical theology* (concerning myth and ritual). Thus, it was possible that an initiate into one of the Ancient Mysteries might adhere to the holytheistic state religion of the Roman Empire, recognize its myths but still speculate about the nature of divinity. We are told that this was true for Constantine.

How does this relate to Christianity? In the historical context of the time, Christianity was a newcomer. Traditional Romans and their Greek counterparts had assembled an extensive collection of established myths and rituals that supported their strongly held devotion to polytheism. The very success of the Empire was thought to validate their beliefs. Christian values posed a threat to the settled norms of Rome's state religion. Because of these conflicts, Roman emperors engaged in systematic purges of Christians. Beginning with Nero, the persecutions continued in varied intensity over time but culminated with the Great Persecution under the Emperor Diocletian (anointed 284 A.D.). Diocletian stripped Christians of their property and insisted on adherence to the Roman deities, on penalties of public disfigurement, dismemberment, and death. These spectacles proved popular with the masses.

History records that the Divine miracle preceding the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 A.D. led to the conversion of Constantine to Christianity. But the Roman world at large remained committed to the state faith and all its practices. This attitude, adopted and enforced by Imperial decree, made recognition and tolerance of Christian beliefs challenging. Against this backdrop, Constantine, with the Emperor Licinius, issued the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D., which granted the freedom to celebrate Christianity openly without fear of reprisal. His courage in acting against popular and well developed sentiment is particularly impressive. Would that it were still so..

Courteously,  
 David Studley

"Fear Not: Proclaim and Celebrate Our Faith."