

*One of the favorite critiques of anti-masons lies in Pike's words discussing Lucifer in the context of the Apocalypse. Write an essay outlining how you would explain this passage.*

### Splendors Intolerable

#### **Lu·ci·fer**

##### **noun**

1. a proud, rebellious archangel, identified with Satan, who fell from heaven.
2. the planet Venus when appearing as the morning star.

##### **Origin:**

before 1000; Middle English, Old English < Latin: morning star, literally, light-bringing, equivalent to *lūci-* (stem of *lūx*) light + *-fer* ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com))

I am doing two things at the very outset of this paper that my high school English teacher taught me never to do. The first, beginning a paper with a dictionary definition, I have already done. The second, relying heavily on cliché, I am about to do. (Sorry, Mr. Knight!) We've all heard the phrase "One bad apple can spoil the whole bunch." That old proverb, whether it's true or not, can, at least in its spirit, apply to Albert Pike's *Morals and Dogma*. This happens on two levels, and it all centers on page 321, in Pike's essay for the Nineteenth Degree, Grand Pontiff, in which he calls Lucifer the "Light Bearer" and the "Son of the Morning." First, this single passage has been used by many to simply dismiss the entire volume of *Morals and Dogma* (at best) and even accuse it of being an anti-Christian and Satanic work (at worst); and second, that dismissal and accusation has been generalized to the entire Masonic Fraternity by those who consider Pike to be the "Voice of Freemasonry" to the world.

As Masons, we all know that no individual Brother can speak for all Brothers on the topic of Freemasonry. So the idea of Pike as some sort of Masonic Pope is patently absurd. As Scottish Rite Masons who have made it this far in our studies, we also know that the offending passage, if read superficially, is quite out of character for Pike, a philosopher and practitioner of comparative religion who never lost sight of his own strong Christian faith.

To use the "Lucifer Passage" as a blunt anti-Masonic cudgel and scare tactic ("Look! They worship Satan as the 'Light-Bearer'! It says so right here in *Morals and Dogma*, the Masonic Bible!") is not only a weak strategy of small minds, but it doesn't

make any sense if one generalizes that standpoint to the rest of life. Here are a couple examples:

- I consider myself a strong Christian. Does that mean I believe and agree with everything that Christians have done in the past? Do I agree with everything Christian leaders say in the media today? Do I agree with a literal reading of each verse of the Bible?
- I support and cast my vote for certain politicians, both locally and nationally. Does that imply that I agree with every single statement they've ever made? Must I agree with every point of my political party's platform in order to vote for them?

The answer to my questions, of course, is an emphatic No. Any thinking person knows that supporting a church, an institution, a candidate, a political party, etc., cannot be contingent upon never disagreeing with them. So from that standpoint alone, it would be nonsensical to disregard all of the thoughtful, tolerant, sincere, and just plain good passages in *Morals and Dogma* for the sake of one passage. Likewise it would be foolish to ignore the beneficent influence Freemasonry has had on the world, and continues to have, all because some (mis)read one passage as "satanic."

The above is my general response to the question of how I would explain this passage. Now on to the specific response, which will include my opinion of the purpose of myths, with a quick look at the origin of the concept of Lucifer, and, finally, a re-writing of the passage in my own words, which I believe is in keeping with the character and spirit of Albert Pike.

To put it very simply, myths were (and are) a way to describe the world. Often, natural phenomena are either anthropomorphized—that is, given the qualities of a sentient being—or ascribed to the efforts or actions of a sentient being. An example of the former might be the Greek/Roman god Poseidon/Neptune for the sea. When the wind blows hard and the waves wreak havoc on ships, the god is angry; when the sea is calm, the god is happy. An example of natural wonders resulting from the actions of a super-being can be found in our own American tradition of Paul Bunyan, who piled rocks on his campfire to put it out, thus creating Oregon's Mount Hood.

The same impulse that invented the ancient gods and the more modern folktales also invented the concept of the morning star as a being. As the brightest star in the east before sunrise, the planet Venus was thought to be the light-bearer who ushers in the day, much like a herald trumpeting the arrival of the king. The Greek term for this was “phosphorus,” while the Latin term was “Lucifer,” literally “light-bringer.” To simplify it greatly, for the ancients, if the sun is the life-giving god who makes his appearance each day to shine his life-force and blessings on the earth, then this herald of his—this “light-bringer”—who is second in brilliance only to the sun, must be the highest of the angels.

This leads us to the myth of the “fallen angel,” which seems to center primarily on Isaiah 14:12-15. This passage begins “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!” in the New Revised Standard Version. The wording is very similar in the Revised Standard Version and the New International Version. Indeed, the only translation in which I could find the term “Lucifer” was in my Masonic Bible (King James Version), which I received upon being raised.

This passage in Isaiah actually refers to the fall of a great Babylonian prince. Just as the morning star’s light is diminished by the rising sun, this prince was conquered by one much greater than him. But, Elaine Pagels argues, it was primarily due to political infighting among Jewish factions during the sixth to second centuries BCE that the passage was first used to “demonize” one’s enemies (Pagels, 39-49). The Christian tradition took this idea further, confounding the term “Lucifer” with the notion of Satan as a fallen angel and enemy of God. Indeed, most Christians probably could not read this passage and *not* think of Satan, even though it predates our modern notion of Satan/Lucifer by centuries.

This Christian tradition even suggests that it was Lucifer who inhabited the serpent in the Garden of Eden myth (speaking of bad apples!), despite absolutely no evidence of that in the text. Yes, “the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal” (Genesis 3:1), but nowhere in the Bible does it say that it was Lucifer who told Eve to eat the fruit. If one strictly examines the text, in fact, there is no indication that the serpent had evil intentions. Eve, of course, trying to deflect blame, tells God that the serpent “deceived” her, but he was actually pretty straight-forward about what eating the fruit would do. If one reads the Garden of Eden story as a myth, the purpose of which is

to explain the physical world, as noted above, one sees that it explains 1) why snakes have no legs, 2) why it's so hard to raise crops, and 3) why childbirth hurts so much. The idea of Lucifer as a character in this story, while not supported by the text itself, is a received tradition that many Christians buy into.

Which brings us back to Albert Pike, who, railing against this tendency just to accept what others have thought, writes, "What other men in the Past have done, said, thought, makes the great iron network of circumstance that environs and controls us all. We take our faith on trust. We think and believe as the Old Lords of Thought command us; and Reason is powerless before Authority" (Pike, 315). This open-mindedness, this willingness—nay, imperative!—of Pike's to examine and dissect even his own traditions, rather than simply accept them as Truth, is what, in my opinion, causes him to write his "Lucifer" passage. Let us, then, move on to a brief analysis of the passage itself.

I have read this over and over again, and can come up with only one explanation that makes sense, based on my studies of Pike, my feeling for how his prose flows (which is best read aloud), and his sense of humor. Here, Pike is busy discussing the septenaries found in the Book of Revelation (what he calls the Apocalypse), "that sublime Kabalistic and prophetic Summary of all the occult figures" (320-321), when he is suddenly interrupted by his own thoughts and digresses briefly. Here is the passage in full.

"The Apocalypse is, to those who receive the nineteenth Degree, the Apotheosis of that Sublime Faith which aspires to God alone, and despises all the pomps and works of Lucifer. LUCIFER, the *Light-bearer*! Strange and mysterious name to give to the Spirit of Darkness! Lucifer, the Son of the Morning! Is it *he* who bears the *Light*, and with its splendors intolerable blinds feeble, sensual, or selfish Souls? Doubt it not! for traditions are full of Divine Revelations and Inspirations: and Inspiration is not of one Age nor of one Creed" (Pike, 321).

He then gets back to his main train of thought about the Book of Revelation. “The Apocalypse, indeed, is a book as obscure as the Sohar,” he begins, and continues his point about it appealing to the intelligence of the Initiated (321).

Thus, we can see that the offending passage is almost parenthetical, as if Pike were in the middle of a thought about the Apocalypse, mentioned Lucifer, and then was distracted by his own knowledge of Latin, which made him stop and think, “Hmmm. Isn’t it strange that Lucifer’s name means ‘light-bearer.’ Why might that be?” I will now paraphrase this passage in my own words, with the digression set off in parentheses.

For a Nineteenth Degree Mason, the Book of Revelation is the ideal example of that pure religion which hates the displays and handiwork of Lucifer. (Luci•fer! Ha! That means “light-bearer.” How ironic to call Satan the Light-Bearer! Satan, the Son of the Morning—right! Well, perhaps he is the Light-Bringer for weak, lustful, self-centered souls. Makes sense! After all, every kind of person can have his own inspiration.) Revelations, a book as obscure as the Zohar, conceals its secrets behind numbers and symbols. It appeals to the inquisitive mind of the seeker...”

Read this way, it is obvious that the most often quoted section—“LUCIFER, the *Light-bearer!* Strange and mysterious name to give to the Spirit of Darkness! Lucifer, the Son of the Morning!”—is taken completely out of context, without the benefit of the passages that come before or after it. Far from glorifying Lucifer, Pike is trying to explain that, well, maybe he *is* the light-bearer from the perspective of a certain unsavory type of person, in much the same way that, say, a drug dealer might be considered the “savior” to an addict.

Of course, Pike himself also accepts on faith the tradition of Lucifer and Satan (or the Devil) as the same being, but even his examination of received Authority only goes so far.

In conclusion, I hope that I have shown how I would respond to the charges by some anti-Masons regarding the “Lucifer Passage” from *Morals and Dogma*. First, I would point out that to dismiss an entire organization or movement based on one or two sentences is absurd. There are plenty of needlessly violent and abhorrent passages in the Bible, and yet I overlook them and embrace Christianity—as do all Christians. Second, I would note that “Lucifer” actually does mean “light-bringer” and refers to Venus, the last star in the sky before sunrise. This naming of the star led to a myth, which led to a verse, which led to the use of that verse as a way of condemning one’s enemies and explaining the presence of evil in the world—the “Fallen Angel” narrative. Third, and most importantly, I would implore one actually to read the text, out loud. Hear what Pike is saying: isn’t it interesting that Satan’s name means “light-bringer”? Far from glorifying the “Spirit of Darkness,” he is trying to explain, to himself as much as to us, the apparent discrepancy between the name and the thing named.

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