

THERE IS ONE LIFE

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"The Liberal Catholic Church teaches the existence of God, infinite, eternal, transcendent and immanent. He is the one essence from which all forms of existence are derived" (Statement of Principles, 1986)

"Esoteric philosophy teaches that everything lives and is conscious, but not that all life and consciousness are similar to those of human or even animal beings. Life we look upon as 'the one form of existence', manifesting in what is called matter; or, as in man, what, incorrectly separating them, we name Spirit, Soul and Matter. Matter is the vehicle for the manifestation of soul on this plane of existence, and soul is the vehicle on a higher plane for the manifestation of spirit, and these three are a trinity synthesized by Life, which pervades them all" (Blavatsky, 1888 a)

In our Liberal Catholic Church we often precede the celebration of the Holy Eucharist with a Meditation on the Wisdom. The words of this meditation are taken largely from the Old Testament, to wit, from the eighth chapter of Proverbs, verses 23 - 35. This meditation has as primary purpose to direct our attention to the feminine aspect of divinity and forms a foundation upon which the work of the Holy Eucharist may be done. In our church, this feminine aspect is symbolised by the Holy Lady Mary - not so much as the historical mother of the historical Jesus who walked the earth some 2000 years ago, but as an archetypal expression of a cosmological process that is older than time itself.

On reading and rereading the text from Proverbs, one cannot but come to the conclusion that implicitly is being referred to one of the basic postulates of our doctrine, as also is alluded to in the quotation from our *Summary of Doctrine* above: There is One Life. The cosmos in which we exist is an expression of this One Life. Many images in several traditions have been used in an attempt to explain the cosmological occurrences that lead to the manifestation and eventual absorption of our universe. Let us consider a few of these.

Breath

The Great Breath breathes out, thereby bringing a universe into being; the Great Breath breathes in, thereby returning the universe into Its bosom. This image points to the no-thing that exists before the act of manifestation, implying that nothing exists outside of That which is the Great Breather. In our liturgy, following the biblical text of Acts 17:28, we express this concept with the words *"in him...all things live and move and have their being"*. The image of breath is important in several traditions, also the Jewish tradition from which Christianity draws extensively. In the Jewish tradition one often speaks of

Ruach, loosely translatable into both spirit and breath or spirit-breath, as being the reality or Divine Breath underlying all existence (in contradistinction to *Nepesh*, which also has a "breath" connotation but seems to imply the individual soul life, for lack of a better way of putting it.). The idea from the opening verses of *Genesis*, of the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters, immediately springs to mind. In the Christian tradition the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady is a symbolisation of the Great Breath breathing out and the feast of her Assumption symbolises the inhalation by the Great Breather. The period between the Immaculate Conception and the Nativity of Our Lady could in this sense be seen as the gestation period that precedes the actual appearance of manifestation.

Egypt

The Egyptian tradition tells of Osiris, Isis and their divine child Horus; but Osiris and Isis, Isis being the daughter, wife and sister of Osiris, are born of the "virgin" Noot (Blavatsky, 1888 b) - in Egyptian imagery depicted as the firmament out of which all the gods (of which the stars are a physical manifestation) are born and to which they all return. It is the image of Noot that was often painted on the inside of the lids of the sarcophagi representing the sky over the deceased, with the view that all came from and returned to her.

Immaculate Conception and Virgin Births

So too in the Christian tradition, Mary is said to be born immaculately of Anna (Blavatsky, 1888 c). The whole idea of virginity and virgin birth or Immaculate Conception becomes difficult to understand when these images are literalised and limited to the realm of the physical acts of sexual union, as is the paradoxical concept of simultaneously being daughter, wife and sister. The explanation of this concept is further exasperated when applied strictly and literally to the birth of historical personages. Virginity in the sense of cosmology implies "as yet untouched", or not yet vivified, just as a virgin forest is a forest not yet trodden in by human feet. Similarly, the image given to us in John 1 about "In the beginning was the Word..." continues a little later with the phrase "...the darkness comprehended it not". The word comprehend in its root form means to grasp. It points to the fact that even though "darkness" makes use of the "word" (in John's image) it does not actually grasp, or "corrupt" it. This is another way of depicting a "virgin" birth.

Star of the Sea

Perhaps the most beautiful -yet most abstract- of the images is that of the title given to the Holy Lady Mary: The Star of the Sea. This image is often used, yet seldom seems to raise the question as to what this symbol actually means. The best way to understand it is by visualising it. A visualisation is meant to give an understanding without necessarily being entirely accurate. Visualise hovering above the clear ocean on a moonlit night. A delicate ripple in the water

reveals its surface and just below this surface appears a silvery, translucent, star. It is this shimmering that is the Star of the Sea. Add to this image that Mare is the Latin word for seas. Add to this that traditionally Mary is born immaculately. In this image the sea becomes the virginal sea of nothingness; the Spirit of God moving over the face of these waters brings into being the Star of the Sea. Here we have three elements, the sea, the spirit and its progeny the star. The star is, in symbol, the whole of the manifested universe, pulsating with life.

Father, Son and Holy Ghost

We often refer to the three persons of the Trinity in the Christian tradition with the aspects they embody: Will, Wisdom and Activity. These three aspects are present microcosmically -in the human being- as the triple spirit in the soul, as well as macrocosmically -the transcendent divinity. This reflection of the divine in the human being is indicated in the opening verses of *Genesis*: "Let us create man in our image". The "creation" of a human soul is normally explained by the three outpourings, which is a mixture of cosmological and evolutionary processes. Of course, these processes cannot really be viewed in isolation, as they are interwoven and together express the processes of manifestation.

The first outpouring is cosmological: Darkness, root substance or whatever one wishes to call it is vivified by the action of the third aspect of the Trinity - Activity. This sets up the ring-pass-not in which the manifestation is to be created; one could say the formation of the Star of the Sea. In the words of the Proverbs text mentioned above: "when He gave the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment". Subsequently, the second outpouring sees to it that forms are created using this "vivified darkness". This occurs via the agency of the second aspect of the Trinity - Wisdom. This second outpouring is partially cosmological and partially evolutionary, as forms gradually evolve to mirror their ideal prototypes that exist in the divine mind, so to say. When these forms, entrapping consciousness, reach the stage of development that rational thought starts to develop, the third outpouring, from the first aspect of the Trinity -Will- causes the birth of a human soul. This last outpouring may be attributed entirely to the evolutionary process.

Imagery and the Systems of Triplicates

We see that in the themes above the number three plays a prominent role. This system of triplicates may also be found in other world religions; Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, for example. We may also note that we seem to have traditions that fall into two major categories. For simplicity we call them the Father-Mother-Child and the Father-Son-Holy Ghost categories. The Egyptian Osiris-Isis-Horus tradition falls in the first category whereas our Christian Trinity falls in the second. The difficulty is in answering the question as to what became of the Mother-aspect in the Christian tradition. This becomes further frustrated when attempting to translate directly the Egyptian symbolism into the Christian

symbolism. This tendency to try to one-on-one translate may originate in the fact that many of the Madonna and Child statues have their origin in the Egyptian tradition of Isis with her son Horus sitting on her lap.

Of course, we should remember that these are all images that are meant to depict a portion of the process underlying the divine drama. The image is not what is important, the process that it is trying to depict is. G.R.S. Mead says this very poetically and succinctly in his book *Thrice-Greatest Hermes* (1906): *"The interpretation ... was conditioned by the 'matter' of each seer; he it was who had to clothe the naked beauty of the Truth with the fairest garment he possessed, the highest thoughts, the best science, the fairest traditions, the most grandiose imagination known to him"*. A little later he continues: *"It was left to those without the sense of illumination to stereotype the forms and claim for them the inerrancy of verbal dictation by the Deity. Those who wrote from personal knowledge of vision could not make such a claim for their scriptures, for they knew how they were written, and what was the nature of hearing and sight"*.

It is the replacement of the reality by the image which may be referred to as dogmatisation and it is this tendency to literalise images that has created more havoc on this earth than anything else. Wars and schisms have been the result of pitting myth against myth... As the cosmological events and processes cannot be communicated other than by analogy and correspondence using every-day events and processes, we need to remember that an image may only be used to understand that portion of the reality of which it is a symbol and thereafter the image should be released!

Father-Mother-Child

The image of Father-Mother-Child can best be described as indicating that the marriage of spirit and matter brings forth the divine child; it does not mean that spirit is masculine and matter feminine - the images of the sexual intercourse between man and woman generating a child are used to explain the relationship between spirit, matter and its progeny. The child is a synthesis of both its parents and displays the Life of its father in the Appearance created by its mother so that the Quality of the divine may be expressed. The image attempts to depict more: It is the penetration by spirit of matter that is the active agency. This is consistent with the image, where the role of the male is the inseminating agency and the female the receptacle. In other words, the image would not illustrate the same process if the roles between father and mother were reversed. Summarising and changing their order to place the child between its parents, Father-Child-Mother is synonymous with Spirit-Soul-Matter or Life-Quality-Appearance. Again, desist from assigning matter the property "feminine" or spirit "masculine" - this would be literalising the image.

The Trinity

The image of the Father-Son-Holy Ghost shows **how** Life informs Appearance. It is not the same image as Father-Mother-Child and should not be forced to fit the same pattern. This would lead to the misconception that the Holy Ghost is synonymous with matter or that the Holy Ghost is feminine. The Trinity is an image of the three aspects of "spirit", this "spirit" being the "father" in the Father-Mother-Child category. Neither should we fall into the trap of labelling the Trinity -nor the first two persons thereof- as masculine simply because two of its persons are named after male members of the family.

As a digression, it is quite interesting that we use the word "persons" for these three aspects. The word person comes from the Greek "persona", which at the height of Hellenic civilisation meant the mask of an actor in a play. The Hellenic plays were always about the world of the gods and the divine heroes. One actor could play many parts and it was the mask -through which the sound came- that indicated which role was being interpreted. So too the "persons" of the Trinity can be regarded as the roles being played, or the masks through which God expresses, irrespective of what exactly we understand by the name "God".

The Unity

The Trinity explains different aspects of a unity - we say the three in one and the one in three. Can this concept of unity be found elsewhere too? In *Poimandres*, a Hermetic text, an initiate is shown how the cosmos and the world came to be: In the beginning all was Light and out of this Light Darkness appeared. This Darkness, or the Shadow of the Unknown, gradually changes to what is called moist-nature. This is similar to the image used in the *Pistis Sophia* text of Sophia creating her progeny without her divine consort. What is important, however, is the fact that the shadow (or Sophia, or darkness) comes forth from the Light, that is, it is (before its separation from the Light) also part of that Light. This is corroborated in the text from *Proverbs* by the repeated use of the word "before" and the phrase that at this "before"-stage "I was with him". Even in the gestational period, all is already present.

God -and Its depiction as a Trinity- is sexless. The human being is created in the image of God and is also sexless. The human being is neither male nor female but only makes an appearance in the phenomenal world in a male or female body!

The duality of the human being lies not in the sex of the body in which it is incarnated but in the fact that it is a true synthesis of mortality and immortality. That is, the human being has a dual nature: mortal in the taking of a body and divine in its inhabitation of that body by its divine life. What we have in common with all other human beings -nay, all creation- is Life. There is no such thing as dead matter. All is expression of life, dead or inert though it may seem to be.

Returning to the verses from Proverbs, we see a consistent theme of creation - cosmogenesis- as may be found in many other creation myths; the same progressions, the same elements, similar images, yet seemingly in simplified form. What is apparent, however, is that all was in the beginning -is now and ever shall be- in the Divine from which it issues. We see that God is sexless - is both male and female and at the same time neither male nor female. This is not a negation of the sexes, but an affirmation that all is part of the one Life - There is but One Life.

References:

- 1888 a, H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Theosophical University Press, ISBN 1-55700-002-6, Vol. I p. 49
- 1888 b, *"In their primitive characters these two were the first Cosmic Duad, Noot, 'space or Sky' and Noo, 'the primordial Waters', the Androgyne Unity, above whom was the Concealed Breath of Kneph", Kneph being the Egyptian 'Eternal Unrevealed'"*, *ibid*, Vol. I p. 353
- 1888 c, *"...that Anna... is derived from the Chaldean Ana, heaven, or Astral Light, Anima Mundi"*, *ibid*, Vol. I p. 91
- 1906, G.R.S. Mead, *Thrice Greatest Hermes*, Theosophical Publishing Society, Vol. II p. 21
- 1986, *Statement of Principles and Summary of Doctrine*, St. Alban Press, 8th Edition, p. 14