

THE WAY OF SACRIFICE

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One of the most potent symbols we encounter in our Liberal Catholic Church is that of the Latin cross. In our way of looking at things, this cross is not adorned with the suffering figure as is customary in many other churches, but is plain and takes a central place on our altars. Positioned to the left and right of this centrally placed cross are six ray candles, representing six of the seven rays or streams of life force that inform our sevenfold world. Each of these seven rays has an especial keynote; strength, love & wisdom, adaptability, harmony, knowledge, devotion and ordered service, and it is the second of these -love and wisdom- for which no candle but the cross is provided. One may therefore pose questions such as: "Why is this second ray not also symbolised by a candle?" or "What makes the cross so important that a candle for the second ray is superfluous in the arrangement of our churches?" This article explores these questions and ties this in with the so-called way of sacrifice.

Bishop Leadbeater in his book, *The Science of the Sacraments*, explains that when censing the cross with three triple swings -indicative of our dedicating spirit, souls and bodies to the three persons of the Trinity- the celebrant should concentrate on the "light before the cross, which may be regarded as an extension of it". In the same passage he mentions: "In this act we show the highest honour in our power to all that the cross typifies - the Christ Himself and the great Sacrifice which brought forth the universe". Alice Bailey in her book, *A Treatise on the Seven Rays*, (p.265) refers to the life of our Logos: "The rays stream forth in a solar cycle, such as the present one, in which the second Ray of Love-Wisdom is the major ray, and all the others are but subsidiary to it". In *The Masters and the Path*, bishop Leadbeater also says (p271): "In the universe there are forty-nine such Rays, making, in sets of seven, the Seven Great Cosmic Rays...in our chain of worlds and perhaps in our solar system, only one of these Great Cosmic Rays is operating, and it's subdivisions are our Seven Rays". Taking these quotations into account, it becomes apparent that this second ray has a very special place in our Church and in our world. The Latin cross being the symbol of this second ray, points to a deeper study of this symbol and perhaps an attempt at understanding why this cross is adorned by a figure -predominantly suffering in the Western Church and triumphant in the Eastern Church- in other Christian denominations.

In the esoteric tradition, the evolving human takes many lives of preparation and brings this evolution to fruition in taking five initiations. This esoteric tradition is apparent in glyph and symbol in all the major religions of the world -as we know it- including the Christian tradition. The festivals of Christmas, Baptism of Our Lord, Transfiguration, Easter and Ascension, forming the first half of our church year, may be viewed as symbolic representations of these initiations. The two most important of these are Christmas and Easter, the former being the birth into the life of the soul as an active instrument in the work of God, the latter being the final triumph into life eternal. It is

in this glorious festival of Easter that the symbol of the cross is most potent, as it also is in the Egyptian tradition in one of the final initiations in their Mysteries. In both cases, the symbol is primarily one of Life, not physical life but the reality behind it, and triumph - over the illusion of separateness.

The triumphant figure adorning the Eastern churches' cross can be seen as emphasising the glory of sublimation, whereas the suffering figure of the Western churches seemingly places the emphasis on the suffering which is to be endured to reach this state. It is this latter connotation that has emphasised the pain aspect of sacrifice in our Western world. The word sacrifice in its root form (look at the word *sacred*, for example) means *to make holy*, which in the Liberal Catholic view is something to be done with joy and a positive attitude. The question of the cross as symbol of the great Sacrifice that brought forth the universe remains unanswered. Perhaps one could apply the Hermetic principle here too, by considering the Life of our Solar Logos, whose Great Sacrifice may be inferred in the constant massive explosions on the surface of our sun, thereby creating the solar wind. Innumerable particles are ejected from the physical sun into our solar system to a distance measuring approximately three times Pluto's orbit. These explosions make immense sound, which is the Word that holds the entire solar system in His Light. The continuous sacrifice of His Life is the intonation of this Word -the explosions and solar wind on the physical plane- and the cessation of this Word would cause the cessation of our world too: Truly, the *One in Whom we live and move and have our being!* Astrophysicists predict that at the current rate of burning, our sun will last for a fair number of billion years to come. If one does the sums, one comes up with roughly the period given by H.P. Blavatsky as making up a manvantara.

Two images taken from the Bible may assist in elucidating further. One is the story of the Prodigal Son, which Geoffrey Hodson explains in detail in his book *Hidden Wisdom in the Holy Bible*. The other is the passage from the Revelation in which the red dragon sweeps a third of the stars from the skies with its tail and casts them onto the earth. Madam Blavatsky explains this symbol by telling us that in times gone by a constellation existed in the skies called Draco -the dragon- and that this constellation was at the centre of the heavens and covered seven signs of the zodiac. She goes on to explain that these stars are the monads that choose to take a full cycle of incarnations during a manvantaric period.

In essence the symbology of the Prodigal Son's claiming his inheritance and leaving his Father's house is the same. The inheritance does not mean worldly goods but it is consciousness. The Father and the elder brother remain at home -two thirds- whilst the Prodigal Son -one third- leaves home. The tail of the dragon -about one third of the stars in the heavens- is cast down to the earth while the remaining two thirds remains...

Note that the Father does not force the Prodigal Son to take his inheritance and go, but the Prodigal Son, of his own volition, chooses to ask his Father for his inheritance, which request is honoured. The Father does not try to convince his son to stay, but in

absolute, unconditional love grants him his request, in the knowledge that his son will waste this inheritance. The keynote of Love and Wisdom is thereby already placed as underlying qualities of this Father and it is possible that this also alludes to the great Sacrifice to which Bishop Leadbeater is referring. After all, when viewed from the point of view of the great plan of evolution, it is consciousness that needs to *fall* from the highest realms into the physical plane. It is consciousness that is crucified in matter and needs to free itself by evolving through the various kingdoms -mineral, plant, animal and human- until it returns as a servant in the House of the Father. The tail of the dragon casting one third of the stars to earth is yet another symbol of the fall of Adam, as is the war in the heavens between Michael and Satan.

An important aspect of the story of the Prodigal Son that is frequently overlooked is the fact that the Son who leaves is not the same as the Son who returns to the House of the Father. Though by birth a King in his own right, the departing Son has his eyes closed. Only by leaving home and wasting his inheritance can he come to the realisation of what he truly is. Even the servants in his Father's house are "better off" and his decision to offer himself as a servant points to the true sacrifice of kingship. The Son returning has his eyes fully opened, understands and has experienced the sacrifice and is a King with the aspects of kingship fully manifested and is therefore welcomed by his Father in pomp and glory.

This presupposes that the whole process has a purpose. Even though, to our limited minds, God is seen as perfect, omniscient, omnipresent, etc, the whole process points to an expansion of consciousness, to growth. This is probably the mystery of mysteries and the basic question facing every thinking human being: Why? Viewed with the eyes of the personality, all suffering -within oneself and in the world- seems so pointless, so difficult. Couldn't an easier way have been thought out? Viewed with the eyes of the soul it all makes a little more sense: We can intuit that all of it has a purpose. In our Act of Faith we even say: "...that perfect justice rules the world...".

The cross has, through the ages, taken differing forms but has somehow always been a symbol of life. The *Secret Doctrine* tells us that the Egyptian cross, the Tau, whose symbol forms the first and last letter of the name of Thot, was considered the closing letter of the Egyptian and Hebrew alphabet, Thot being the creator of the former alphabet. The Tau was therefore regarded as the beginning and end, the Alpha and the Omega. It is also considered to be linked to the decade, which is the unity and the nothingness, in symbol the same as the Master Mason's grip (two handed, therefore with ten fingers) and often depicted by the circle with the horizontal line. The Master Mason's grip refers to the *grip* that the soul has over the personality - the development of which is the whole point of our evolution in the human kingdom. The career of the Mason is symbolic of this evolutionary path, during which the grip of the soul becomes ever more dominant, until the grip is complete; the personality is wholly absorbed into the soul and is a pure instrument in her hands. No individual portion of the personality remains - all is soul and soul-infused.

The Kabbalists also speak of the *Ishim*, the tenth order of angels, the preceding nine being mentioned in our Preface in the Holy Eucharist. These *Ishim*, we are told, are the perfected human beings, again making the decade, the symbol of perfection and the (Egyptian) cross.

The cross is most apparent as a symbol in our celebration of Easter. One theory is that the Latin cross is derived from the Ankh, or the Tau with the rising sun on it. The similarities between the highest Egyptian initiation and its symbolical rendering in the biblical story of the Passion seem to concur with this supposition. The whole purpose of the five initiations that are taken in leaving the human kingdom is to gradually place the soul and personality in the grip of the Spirit. One could picture this as a veil between soul and spirit becoming ever thinner, finally being destroyed at the fourth initiation, symbolised in the Crucifixion drama by the rending of the temple veil from above to below. The middle principle (soul) is finally merged with the personality and the great duality now exists (spirit and soul). No longer is the triplicity (spirit, soul & personality) holding sway. The mediating principle of soul is no longer a *veil* - direct contact is established with the Monad (spirit).

The cross as a symbol of sacrifice -freely given- is a symbol of life. The way of sacrifice is the way that one third of the consciousness chooses to go. This is the portion of the consciousness (i.e. the monads) that chooses to take a full manvantaric cycle of incarnations. In other words, it is the portion of *God* that *puts itself down* and *still remains* - as mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "Having pervaded this whole universe with a fragment of Myself, I remain". As all matter in manifestation is alive, all life in manifestation is consciousness, which is all part of the divine. However, only one third of the total consciousness is able to go this Way of Sacrifice (God immanent), the remainder being the Father (God transcendent) and the Angelic Kingdom (the elder brother in the Story of the Prodigal Son).

We, not as personalities, even not as souls, but as Spirit are collectively that one third. Our way is the way of sacrifice. It is our prerogative and privilege to be allowed to make this sacrifice -sacrifice in terms of making holy, or making whole, or creating the decade- the unity in the nothingness. The mystery is symbolised in the cross, centrally placed on our altars, symbol of our Logos and symbol of the Life of which we are the custodians.