

# ***Contemporary Mystic Christianity*** **Bible Self-Study Supplement**

## **Eleusinian Mysteries**

In his *Morals and Dogma*, the great classic of Masonry, Albert Pike, High Priest of the Craft, ascribes to Cicero the appraisal that the establishment of the Eleusinian Mysteries was the greatest of all benefits conferred by Athens upon the commonwealths: "...their effect having been to civilize men, soften their savage and ferocious manners, and teach them the true principles of morals, which initiate man into the only kind of life worthy of him." The Masonic writer goes on to say that in the passage wherein Cicero apostrophizes Ceres and Proserpine he declares that mankind owes these Goddesses the first elements of moral life, as well as the first means for sustaining physical life; also, their knowledge and laws, the regulation of morals, and those examples of civilization which have improved the manners of both men and cities.

The Initiate in the Mysteries of Orpheus, after he was purified, was considered as released from the empire of evil and transferred to a condition of life which gave him the happiest hopes. He was made to say "I have emerged from evil and have attained good." Those initiated in the Mysteries of Eleusis believed that the Sun blazed with a pure splendor for them alone. As we see in the case of

Pericles, they flattered themselves that Ceres (Demeter) and Persephone inspired them, giving them wisdom and counsel. (Greek Persephone; Roman Proserpine)

The Eleusinian Mysteries were concerned primarily with the problem of the soul's survival after death and conditions prevailing in the soul world. Their teachings were conveyed to Initiates in the form of dramatic spectacles wherein an Initiate was both spectator and participant. The Lesser Mysteries dealt with the story of Demeter and Persephone; the Greater Mysteries with Dionysus and his resurrection from the dead. Greeks themselves believed the Eleusinian Mysteries had been founded by Egyptians in prehistoric ages, and they identified Demeter (the World Mother) with Isis of Egypt. Similarly, the Mysteries of Samothrace and the Cabiri of Thebes were associated with the cult of the God Ptah of Memphis in Egypt.

The great hall of the Mysteries was situated in Eleusis, a village near Athens. There was a path which approached the Temple and along which was located a number of "huts" or "stations." These were small houses, each one presided over by a Teacher; and before the aspirant could enter the Temple and take part in the Mysteries therein observed, he was required to pass through certain tests and examinations given in these stations. Some were able to pass only one station; others proceeded through several,

while only Initiates were able to pass them all. Only the latter were qualified to enter the Temple proper wherein they were first witnesses and later participants in the wonder-workings of the Sacred Rites.

The Mystery observances continued for a period of nine days. These included ceremonials and pageantry that took place outside the Temple for the benefit of the general public. Aspirants and neophytes took part in the colorful processions and rituals within the sacred precincts of the Temple. Only disciples and Initiates were admitted into the Temple for advanced instruction under the supervision of the Masters. This work was entirely secret, and it always reached its culmination at the mystic hour of midnight. The great majority of people, while having no understanding of what took place in these Temple Rites, nevertheless regarded them with the most profound respect and veneration. It is said that during the Golden Age of Greece no person was permitted to serve the State in a high official position unless he was a member of either the Lesser or Greater Eleusian Mysteries.

Triptolemus, a culture hero similar to Osiris, son of the King of Eleusis, ascended to heaven in a chariot drawn by serpents (symbol of wisdom). It is thought that the ascension of Triptolemus was also dramatized in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

When the Greek-trained Initiates of the Christ Mysteries wrote the Gospels that became the foundation of Christianity, they arranged the facts of Christ's life after the pattern of a Mystery Drama. The Gospel of John, in particular, reads like a mystery play in the life of Dionysus. Clement said that the life of Christ was a Divine Mystery Play, and he warned the neophyte that "faith must go hand in hand with inquiry." In view of perils to be met on the Path leading to Illumination, he also gave the admonition that "To put everything into a book is as bad as to put a sword in a child's hand." Hence, from the first there has been a secret tradition in Christianity. Together with special exercises and disciplines, it was designed to unfold psycho-spiritual powers making possible first-hand knowledge, gnosis.

The Grecian Mysteries and their early Christian successors were, therefore, very different from today's orthodox Christianity for the masses. The latter is based primarily on faith; its exponents do not recognize that there ever was or ever can be a science of spiritual unfoldment.

When religious development is reduced to a science, the forms of religion spontaneously resolve themselves into Art. Hence, drama and all forms of artistic creativeness flower in the Mysteries. The Initiate sees beauty as the handmaiden of Truth.

The Orphic Mysteries revolved around the life, death and resurrection of Dionysus, while the Eleusinian Mysteries were centered primarily in Demeter and Persephone-Dionysiac elements having been superimposed during later centuries.

Ambrosia and nectar were symbolical of Wisdom achieved in the Mysteries. Said Iamblichus: "If partaking of this divine food (knowledge or gnosis) cannot make men immortal, at least it will make them acquainted with matters of eternal import." As previously mentioned, the Orphic Mysteries were monotheistic, Dionysus Zagreus being identified with all of the Gods of the Greek pantheon who were looked upon as aspects of the One God. Christ proclaimed, "I and my Father are one." Even so, Dionysus, when taken bound before King Pentheus, declared, "My Lord God will unloose me when I speak the word; even now He stands close here and sees all that I suffer." Pantheus cried, "What? Where? ... Mine eyes discern him not." Whereupon Dionysus replied significantly: "Where I am. Thine own impurity veils Him from thee." So did the Initiate become one with Dionysus, was himself Dionysus, and both were one with God.

The Eleusinian Mysteries observed the Lesser Mysteries at the Spring Equinox with a dramatization of the descent of Persephone into the nether world. In the Greater Mysteries

the dramatization at the Autumn Equinox related to the descent of Dionysus to bring about the rescue and resurrection of Persephone. It is obvious that these were a re-enactment of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Persephone, like Eurydice, marked the downward course of mortal man. Dionysus, who came to the former's rescue, represents the Christ Principle latent in every human being, its resurrection from material consciousness being heralded at the time of the Spring Equinox.

The truths embodied in the ancient Mysteries and in modern spiritual concepts are one and the same. By careful analysis of ancient Greek religion we find that the true worship has always been associated with Dionysus and Apollo, these two being inseparably united and having as their noblest exponent the Hierophant Orpheus.

The magnificent ceremonials of all Mystery Schools down through the ages have been observed principally at the four turning points of the year, the Solstices and the Equinoxes, for they are reflections of the mighty workings of the Cosmic Christ relative to the spiritualization of man and the planet on which he lives. In its annual descent this tremendous Christ power touches the outer periphery of our planet at the season of the Autumn Equinox. By the Winter Solstice it has penetrated to the very heart of earth, a point in the Christ's Ministry which Christendom

celebrates as His birth. After having lightened and leavened the earth and humanity by this annually repeated impregnation of our planetary sphere, the Christ gradually withdraws, leaving its body at the Resurrection Season, the Spring Equinox, and its outermost auric envelope at Ascension Time, the Summer Solstice. Illumined Ones have always understood the deep spiritual significance of these four Sacred Seasons. Hence, these seasons were observed in the Mystery Schools as the most favorable times for tuning in with the spiritual forces which then flow earthward more freely than at any other. This same divine initiatory pattern was followed in the life of Christ Jesus, its four principal events being associated with the four Sacred Seasons.

According to Grecian legend, Virgo the Virgin was once Astraea, Goddess of Purity and justice, who lived among men during the Golden Age when only harmony and happiness were known. During the Silver Age contentment still prevailed and the Gods still lingered, though men were less perfect and the world less tranquil. By the time the Bronze Age arrived men had become evil and were no longer amenable to the influence of Astraea, so in sorrow she left earth and fled to the sky, where Zeus transformed her into the beautiful constellation that guarded the eastern horizon on Holy Night as the Master Jesus prepared for another earth life in preparation for His supreme mission.

In the constellation Virgo is found a beautiful silvery-white star called Spica, "the jewel of the Virgin." The ancients worshipped this constellation with its luminous star hovering above them like a celestial benediction.

The beautiful Madonna of the Skies still heralds Holy Night as marking the annual sacrifice of the great Christ Spirit who at this time each year gives of Himself for humanity. In times long past the luminous Spica seemed to embody the purity and goodness of Astraea; it shone with such exceeding whiteness that the whole constellation became known as Virgo, the Virgin. We vision this Goddess with wings, carrying a palm branch in one hand and an ear of sacred wheat in the other. In Christendom her emblem is the Easter lily because the appearance of the constellation is not unlike a lily-cup.

Astraea, the Celestial Virgin, was the Terrestrial Virgin Mother of Demeter (Ceres) and Virgo is identified with both her and the Egyptian Isis. Wise ones have always understood that the Holy Mother or Madonna of every religion — Isis, Ishtar, Ceres, Myrrha, Mary — were inducted into the Virgin Mysteries, or Madonna Rites, under the Virgo Hierarchy. The Ascension of Mary marked this Rite for her. Initiates of the Eleusinian Greater Mysteries, consecrated wholly to Ceres, the Grecian Madonna, knew this. To them the mystery of the Eternal Feminine — the

principal theme of Initiation as given in Faust — was revealed in all its transcendental sublimity and the Madonna Seeress was lifted above humanity just as Mary of the Christian religion has become one of the Angels. The Temple dedicated to Demeter, the Goddess of Harvests, stood in the sacred city of Eleusis; all those who were worthy came there to pay her homage.

One day while Demeter (Ceres) was watching the harvests, Persephone, her lovely daughter, disappeared. Ovid relates the charming story in his Metamorphosis:

While like a child with busy speed and care,  
She gathers lilies here and violets there  
While first to fill her little lap she strives  
Her grizzly monarch of the shade arrives,  
Sees her thus sporting on the flowery green,  
And loves the blooming maid as soon as seen.  
Swift as a thought he seized the beauteous prey,  
And bore her in his dusky car away.

Demeter, frantic with grief, searched nine days and nights, over land and sea, for her beloved daughter. The ancient poets inform us that neither Aurora, the Spirit of the Dawn, nor Hesperus, the Evening Star, ever saw her take any rest. In sympathy with her grief the earth ceased to bear. Leaves dwarfed, flowers fell, fruit failed to ripen. Zeus (Jupiter) fearing for the fate of man, sent Mercury to

beseech Hades to return Persephone. But the Fates gave the word that if she had eaten of the pomegranate, fruit of death, she must remain in the underworld forever. She had indeed eaten of the fruit, but only part of one, and Zeus, in compassion for the grief of Demeter, persuaded Hades to allow Persephone to return and spend six months of every year with her mother. In token of gladness for the lovely one's return, earth bedecks herself in fairest raiment. In this lovely poetic manner the Greeks envisioned the beauty of the season changing from winter to spring.

Occultists find herein the story of man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden and his fall into materiality, "coats of skin." In the Greek story the pomegranate takes the place of the biblical apple. The flower that Hades grew at the edge of the chasm leading down to his kingdom, and that also gave him access to the upper world, was identified by some ancient poets with a mystic narcissus having the fragrance of a hundred flowers, and the narcissus die with the Eastertide.

Persephone was the delicate and lovely feminine aspect of the spring season, the delicacy of early flowers and the appearance of the first dainty leaves on trees. The life-giving fire of spring makes for pure, soft, luminous coloring. In the narcissus the sword-like blades up-spring from its bulb in a rose-silver tone. This deepens as the plant

matures until finally it turns to brown as the life fire recedes into the underground chamber to await another resurrection.

The Persephone story varies from the Bible narrative of Eve's temptation in that the former is innocent of all evil. The narcissus blossom fascinated her beyond the point of caution, luring her to the chasm-edge where Hades captured her and carried her down into the underworld. But had she not yielded to the persuasions of Hades —

The gloomy god who never spares,  
Who feels no mercy and answers no prayers —

and eaten the fruit of the pomegranate, the only tree growing in that dark kingdom and therefore known as the tree of death, she might still have gone free. This myth does, however, give light on the Bible account.

While there is no factor of disobedience as in Genesis, it is the lure of sense pleasure that is Persephone's undoing. Sensation of itself is innocent, but the ego is responsible for its mode of use, the knowledge and power acquired thereby, and its reaction. When the lines of magnetic force flow downward the personality is precipitated into low-vibrating realms, the world of materiality, where it is subject to the limitations of time and death. As compared to the spiritual planes, the earth is indeed dark and dreary.

Demeter is the symbol of the fruits of the spirit, purity and regeneration, as she is of the fruits of the field. She is the Madonna of the Immaculate Conception, the ideal for all humanity. The Path of Initiation is the way of its attainment while Holy Night is the most propitious time for its realization.

Reference to the narcissus blossom calls to mind another legend, that of the beautiful youth Narcissus and how the flower of that name came to be so designated. Narcissus,, of godlike beauty, was beloved by the nymph Echo. But he scorned her and she faded away until nothing remained of her but her voice, which was heard as she wandered in lonely places ever repeating the last word spoken in her hearing. To punish Narcissus for his indifference, Nemesis (retributive justice) caused him to fall in love with his own image in a clear pool. Not realizing that he was seeing his own reflection, he languished above it, lost in admiration, until he, like Echo, pined away from unrequited love. The Gods transformed him into the narcissus flower, whose narcotic properties (which give rise to the name narcissus) make it an apt philosophical symbol for an ego's being drugged by the senses when it passes through the portals of physical birth. From an exoteric viewpoint, it represents the abode of the dead.

Esoterically, the pool of clear water is the Reflecting Ether. The image of himself seen by Narcissus typifies the personality through which the spiritual self is projected. Ofttimes the reality of the true self becomes enmeshed in the glamor of its personality. It was for this reason that Narcissus died of unrequited love. In other words, he lost sight of his reality and lived only in its reflection. The legend of Narcissus in which the personality takes precedence over the spirit conveys the same truth as does the incident in the legend of Persephone which tells of her loitering on the edge of an abyss, her senses steeped in the fragrance of the narcissus and while thus lost in the lure of outer personality, falling captive to Hades who carried her into the darkness of the underworld.

In its cosmic interpretation, the pool is the subconscious mind of Nature, usually called the "Memory of Nature." It is the etheric negative" which receives and holds the divine ideas of Gods (Angels) and men and then manifests them in material form. The Reflecting Ether is described as being so clear and transparent that when a Seer first looks into it, it appears to be perfectly blank. Considerable spiritual development is necessary before it will disclose the secrets hidden in its translucent depths. Like water it flows, passing consciousness in a stream of images which man knows as "time."

This accounts for the apparent efficacy of crystal-gazing. A crystal ball substitutes for the Reflecting Ether, its sole value being as a support for the user's concentration. A neophyte, however, finds it possible to gaze directly into the Reflecting Ether, although its clearness will vary with his mental and emotional state. Any disturbing emotion, good or bad, will affect the "crystal ball" of Nature, distorting or wholly obliterating images concealed therein. Initiation aims at the development of positive Seership, and calls for self-discipline plus freedom from reliance on external aids.

One of the most beautiful and interesting phenomena of inner planes are the reflection and images standing in the place of the ego to represent its states of consciousness. When a neophyte learns to direct his vision into the crystalline world consciousness, he discovers that personality images disappear. In their stead appear symbolic images of flowers, trees, birds, beasts and insects; landscapes and seascapes; the rising and setting of sun, moon and stars. Indeed, all the imagery of the universe is revealed in terms familiar to the consciousness of the evolving ego. The Buddha is beheld as a sunrise in spring; Jesus as an Easter dawn aglow with lilies.

On this plane the narcissus is a symbol for the ego's sleep — for relatively speaking, it is more asleep than awake in this present cycle of evolution, particularly during the

current materialistic age. When fully awakened consciousness has been achieved we shall see the physical world as it actually is, a reflection in a divine mirror of the Gods. Then the narcissus will be loved as a symbol of Eternal Life.

In Christianity the narcissus is sacred to Mary because it releases to our mortal senses a celestial fragrance characteristic of the Madonna consciousness on inner planes. Mary, the glorious feminine Adept, permeates the earth's aura with the fragrance of her "lily soul-body" at each of the four Sacred Seasons and to our physical senses the odor of the narcissus most nearly approximates her ethereal perfume.

It is said that many ancient peoples believed that one's image in a mirror or any other such reflection was the soul of the person. The Greeks also believed that to dream of seeing one's reflection was a sign of death.

To undergo an Initiation is to experience the essential processes that occur at death. They include a temporary detachment from the physical body and a panoramic view of the past. The latter appears in the form of symbolic narcissus-images. The vision of one's own bodily image, as in the case of the Rosicrucian Initiate Goethe, is very common; indeed, it is essential at a certain state of unfoldment. Thus, the narcissus legend, as used in the

Eleusinian Mysteries, serves to warn man against losing himself in a world of glamor; and it warns a neophyte against becoming enamored of self after having acquired the ability to perceive with the inner eye imagery of the soul world. These astral images are truly narcissan for they are the symbolic reflection of the neophyte's own states of consciousness.

— ***Corinne Heline***