

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

Ecclesiastes

*Thou camest here thyself a Rose-from-Heaven,
Thou goest back, an ounce of perfumed dust.*

— *W. B. Forbush: Ecclesiastes in the Metre of Omar*

The Teacher and His Teaching

The Hebrew word Koheleth, which means "any who sits or speaks in an assembly," has been translated Ecclesiastes in the Greek Bible. In English the word has somewhat the same connotation as "The Preacher," yet this rendering also is not entirely adequate, for it pertains rather more to a teacher than to a preacher, in the sense in which it occurs in the original text; and to the esotericist, the word Teacher conveys all the subtle meanings which adhere to a sacred name or title. In academic circles, the word teacher no longer conveys any sense of sacredness, no longer awakens reverence and love in the hearts of the assembled students, due largely to the mere intellectualization which characterizes most of our institutions of learning. But among occult students the word Teacher (properly capitalized) retains its original sacred significance, and is spoken with reverence and love. It is in this sense that the word Ecclesiastes is to be understood, and not merely as "the Preacher," or even a speaker before an assembly, but

as a spiritual Teacher, who stands in a special relationship to his students, far more akin to the spiritual closeness of the parental relationship than to any other with which we are familiar. St. John called his disciples "little ones" to indicate this special tie; the words "brother" and "sister" are commonly used among confraternities of spiritual students. In certain of the orthodox communions, the sacred tie is intimated in the title of "Father" bestowed upon the priest, and "Mother" upon the superior officers of convents.

We therefore qualify the ordinarily accepted definition of Ecclesiastes as merely "the Preacher," and take this term to have reference to the spiritual Teacher who, presides over or instructs assemblies in the heaven worlds and Mystery Schools. His word is no mere aggregate of sounds, but a living word which speaks direct to the inward ear of the disciple not only in sound, but in form and color, It is. the speech of Angels permeated throughout with divine wisdom. Moreover it has this unique quality, that to every individual student in an inner-world assembly or Hall of Learning, it is as if the voice of the Teacher spoke to him only, and in words and ideas applicable to his distinctive problem. An incident illustrative of this Initiate power of universal speech is also described in the New Testament, when an assembled multitude heard the apostles speaking to them each in his own tongue.

To unillumined mortal mind it is difficult to understand that the Teacher sees nothing less than the Divine within each one, and that it is this Divine which he adores, and upon which he looks with supernal vision. Even so the Wise Men knelt before the Bethlehem Babe, seeing in Him Divinity made manifest in a fleshly form.

Ecclesiastes 12:9-10

And moreover because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge, yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.

The preacher sought to find out acceptable words; and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.

Many Bible students will be unable to reconcile the esoteric doctrine with the cynicism which is commonly read into this holy document of the Teacher, but as the student progresses on the Path his judgments are more and more in accordance with another and a higher set of values than those in current usage. To the man of the street, in whose eyes fame, wealth, power and personal love seem greatly to be desired, the words of the Teacher have little attraction. To him this world and its prizes are regarded as the very prime realities, and hence to speak of them as vanity of vanities is meaningless negation and pessimism. The measure of the physical senses is one; that of the soul is another. The one belongs to time, the other to eternity.

Moreover, since soul experiences are far from being less intense than physical sensation, mystics are sometimes caught up in a fiery whirlpool of ecstasy in which the mortal consciousness swoons and is lost. Yet, returning once more to normal consciousness, such mystics find themselves unable to explain in human language what they experienced "out of the body". In occult schools due preparation is made to safeguard the aspirant from being swept into such transcendental states apart from the complete and conscious control of the ego. The difference between the mystic and the occult path lies chiefly in this, that the mystical evolution of consciousness is spontaneous and unplanned whereas the occult evolution is planned in advance, and scientifically worked out from stage to stage. It is the difference between the lightning which falls from heaven, striking where it may, and the electricity which is directed along prescribed channels to the specific tasks it is designed to perform. The mystic Illumination is demonstrated in the lives of great saints, such as Teresa of Avila, St. Francis, St. Catherine of Siena, St. John of the Cross, St. Raamakrishna of India, Rabbi'a of Basra (Sufi), Jacob Boehme, Jane Leade, and many others too numerous to mention here. Sainthood centers in the heart and appears, as it were, spontaneously in any time or any place.

Master occultists are associated with the Mystery Schools which are the supreme achievement of the scientific method of soul growth. They appeal to the scientific temperament, and they take into consideration the difference of race, climate and civilization which are so likely to affect the development of the aspirant when he deliberately and of his own free will aspires to Liberation. Love has no boundaries. But science must recognize the laws which govern the mortal man, at least until the mortal has been utterly supplanted by the immortal, as Light supplants the darkness which seems to be but is in truth a mere negation of being. Love preaches one doctrine only in every land and in every age. Science changes from age to age, and must adapt itself to many varying conditions within the same age.

On the path of science, or knowledge, inevitably the time comes when the mortal intellect has reached its uttermost bounds. It must be laid off as a serpent sheds its skin, or as the phoenix is burnt on its nest of frankincense and myrrh, to rise into a new consciousness; and so this very path of knowledge by which man achieves God must itself some day be left behind. "I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven". The Teacher does not say above Heaven, but under Heaven, the meaning being the mortal

consciousness. "This sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith."

As the mystic comes to the place of the cross, the Hill of Death, where he casts off the personal life for the impersonal, so the occultist comes to his particular Hill of Death where knowledge no longer satisfies him: "I communed with mine own heart, saying Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yes, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge". And what did he learn from all his wisdom and knowledge? He learned at last that "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow". "Behold, all is vanity".

Other books of the Bible are primarily mystical in nature, for the Bible of the Hebrews in its present generally accepted form is a book of the heart. But Ecclesiastes, like Job, is a book of the mind. It shows the path of knowledge, and its final end in Spirit when man has gained the wisdom that transcends intellect and contacts directly the divine Knower within.

Ecclesiastes 1:7-9 All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and

that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

Beyond the ebb and flow of evanescent phenomena in time and space, is eternal, boundless and unconditioned Being. "That which is done is that which shall be done", applies to the Absolute state in which exists the unchanging Now.

Because King Solomon is called the wisest man and wisest king, it is natural to attribute to him this great overcoming; for who better than the Wisdom King would know the emptiness of all mortal attainment, howsoever great?

Although written in the name of Solomon, Ecclesiastes was composed comparatively late in Hebrew history. Some scholars have drawn attention to a strongly Hellenistic influence in its philosophy, and also a marked Egyptian touch. A comparative study of Ecclesiastes with the Egyptian Book of the Harper and also with the famous Gilgamesh Epic of Babylon reveals that the knowledge deemed essential to the soul is the same in all three. All revolve about the mystery of dualism, which is also reflected in the parallel verse structure and in the cantillation. Ecclesiastes has aptly been termed the Book of the Two Voices: the voice of the Eternal which forever negates the false voice of the time-space world.

Every chapter speaks of the experiences of the sense world which, achieved, are found by the ego to be dead-sea fruit, bitter to the taste and without satisfaction. In every human pleasure is the seed of sorrow. Every human success germinates ultimate failure. Even the pursuit of wisdom, highest and best of all human pursuits, must in the end prove wanting: "I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness," and yet, "one event happeneth to them all", to the fool as to the wise man; all are stricken by death. "As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? ... This also is vanity" (emptiness). The ultimate knowledge is that knowledge itself is of no avail without Spirit.

— ***Corinne Heline***