

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

The Temple

House of Life Eternal

Nowhere is the Egyptian character more clearly portrayed than in its Temples. The tombs and monuments of Egypt have suggested to some that the ancient Egyptians were overwhelmingly concerned with problems of survival after death, and therefore morbid and dark of mood. On the contrary, writes Arthur Weigall in *The Story of the Pharaohs*, a monastic or the anchorite sort of life was scorned by Egyptians. Their religious teachings before the Ptolemaic era do not suggest that mortification of the flesh was a possible means of purifying the spirit. An appeal to the senses and to the emotions, however, was considered as a legitimate method of reaching the soul. He asserts that the Egyptians were delighted by ceremonial grandeur: "Their huge temples, painted as they were with the most brilliant colors, formed the setting of processions and ceremonies in which music, rhythmic motion, and colour were brought to a point of excellence. In honor of some of the gods dances were conducted; while celebrations such as the fantastic Feast of Lamps were held on the anniversaries of religious events." In these magnificent ceremonials no place existed for anything but joy and

gaiety, nor could the people have displayed any other temperament.

Nothing indeed was spared in making earthly Temples a reflection of paradise above earth. Temples were majestic, serene, radiant with life and color. Their walls were decorated with gold, silver, electrum and brilliant gems; the adytum was hung with curtains of gold tissue. All this coordinated with the course of nature rather than being set apart from it, and spoke to the Egyptian of the Eternal One in whom there is no death, but life only. Everything gave evidence of an eternity of beauty which might be enjoyed, here and hereafter, by all who lived the good life.

As in other ancient religions, water was the symbol of highest spiritual purity. By the Temple entrance was a font of holy water, as in the Temple of Isis at Rome. At Heliopolis priests performed their ablutions in a pool of pure clear water before ascending the sand hill to celebrate morning sacrifice in the Temple.

But Egyptian Temples were more than houses of worship. Surrounded by an impregnable wall, they could also serve as fortresses in times of invasion. They were, according to Sir Flinder Petrie, the famous pyramidologist, the heart of the city which lay packed around them like medieval cities around their cathedrals. Far from being isolated, they were the focal point of everyday life. Great multitudes visited

them on feast days, enjoying the peace and beauty of the groves and courts, the magnificence of the vast porches and colonades.

Nor was the priesthood set apart from the people in these early times. They served in courses like priests of the Hebrew Temple and lived a normal life in the community when their priestly duties had been discharged. Thus is it written in an old tale of an Egyptian woman: "She is the wife of a priest of Ra ... she has conceived these three sons by Ra, and the god has promised her that they shall fulfill this noble office (to reign) over all this land, and that the eldest of them shall be high priest at Heliopolis. And the three goddesses . . . (attending the birth) . . . came out and greeted the priest Ra-user: Rejoice, O Ra-user, for behold three children are born unto thee."

Heliopolis, a small city situated near Memphis and sacred to Ra, was called by the Egyptians An, On, or Onu. The priesthood of the Sun Cult was famous for its learning and the Temple at Heliopolis was, in fact, a great University. Its medical school was reputed the best in the ancient world; any doctor or occultist graduating thence was certain of favorable reception wherever he might go. But astronomy was the most favored subject, the high priest bearing the title "Astronomer Royal." Priests generally were termed "Mystery Teachers of Heaven."

Moses is among the many great who received their education at this Egyptian University and Mystery School. Ra's symbol, the Winged Splendor or Hudet, is forever impressed upon the Messianic tradition of the Old Testament in Malachi's prophecy: "But unto you that fear my name shall rise the Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings" — words pointing directly to the Mysteries of Heliopolis in which Moses was initiated.

From a Hymn to the Sun come words reminiscent of the Psalms of David: "Thou stridest over the heavens in peace and all thy foes are cast down; the never-resting stars (circumpolar) sing hymns of praise to thee, and the stars which rest (planets) and the never-failing stars (circumpolar) glorify thee as thou sinkest to rest in the horizon."

The Gods of Egypt

It was only natural that such a life-loving people as the Egyptians should be particularly anxious to know that existence continues beyond the tomb. Ra, like Apollo, was the shining light of wisdom manifested in the affairs of life; Osiris, like Dionysus, solved the mystery of death.

Throughout the land of Egypt two great symbols of the Eternal are found to have played a familiar role in both the religious and secular affairs of the people. These were the

cross, symbolic of the path of attainment, and the circle, symbolic of a completed life cycle when, the path having been traversed to its very end, it is merged in the Divine. These two symbols, the cross and the circle, were used as decorations on papyrus and in the wrappings of mummies, and they adorned in many ways interiors of houses of worship.

Immortality is the theme of the Book of the Dead, a compilation of texts that are the world's most complete manual of instruction on transition (called death) and the events which follow from the moment the silver cord has broken and the spirit rises smoke-like from its body until it reaches its resting place in the "Third Heaven," preparatory to re-embodiment. Numerous references in Egyptian literature to "divine memory" testify to a widespread and unshakable belief in the great Cycle of Reincarnation.

Although early Egyptian astronomy differed from the Chaldean, from the beginning their religious observances were harmonized with the movements of the stars. The heliacal rising of Sirius was a particular factor in determining the length of the Sothic Cycle, consisting of 1,460 Sothic years of 365 days, 6 hours each. Sirius is the "Star of Isis," the jewel of Egyptian skies.

Ceremonies and the rise and fall of various cults correspond to changing stellar cycles, but fundamental

spiritual teaching remained unchanged from first to last. Invasions by alien hords also affected the course of Egyptian history, but the latter's culture endured. It continued to be centered in life, Life Abundant, and eschewed all unhappy thoughts of death. Their priests demonstrated to them the unfailing truth that life persists, whether in a body of flesh or in a celestial body while enjoying the bliss of heaven and awaiting rebirth. The masses accepted these truths on faith, as having been taught by Thoth-Hermes; the few proved them for themselves in Halls of Initiation, where they travelled the same path as the "dead" and returned to tell their brethren what they had seen.

Certain Masonic rituals of our own time reveal their origin in the Mystery Rituals of ancient Egypt. The victorious chant of a successful Master resounding through a vast columned Temple of a long-past civilization echoes down modern colonnades in the jubilant and powerful incantation: "I am he that was dead! and behold, I am alive forevermore! And I have the keys of heaven and hell!"

The principal Gods of Egypt were Sun Gods. Each represented a different aspect of the Sun: disc, rays, heat, rising or setting Sun, noon Sun, midnight Sun, Sun at the Equinoxes and the Solstices, the intellectual and the spiritual Sun. In astronomy the Sun was Osiris; the Moon,

Isis; the planets, Horus. These Gods, however, were merely symbols of principles active in nature. While the masses did not, perhaps, distinguish clearly between an anthropomorphic God and the principle he represented, texts of the Book of the Dead show that they were not without instruction on the subject.

Osiris, Isis and Horns were the Holy Family of Egypt. Although priests taught that they once lived as human beings upon Earth, like the Christian Holy Family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, they never deified in the hearts and minds of worshippers. Those with understanding did not then, and do not now, worship personalities. To them the Trinity is the Triune Godhead, three divine principles or aspects of the One Supreme Being-designated as Will, Wisdom and Activity in esoteric teaching. They are symbolized by the triangle, perpetuated in Egypt by the pyramids and in Christian sacred art by the triangular nimbus. They also represent essential powers latent in every human being, powers awakened from latency through disciplines pertaining to Initiation.

In all of his aspects Ra was, like Apollo, the Wisdom Aspect of God. Hence, the great University at Heliopolis dedicated to Ra taught all branches of learning. Priests who loved divine wisdom looked upon Ra as that wisdom. As such he became the Logos of the Greeks and the Christos

(also the Logos) of the Christians. His chosen priests claimed that the blood of Ra flowed in their veins (that is, the wisdom-essence) while every king in Egypt claimed descent from Ra as Horus Incarnate. Amenaphis III is depicted as Ra in the Temple at Luxor. Priests "behold the beauty of Ra" before sunrise, but what they really saluted was the spiritual Sun, the Cosmic Christ, which shone before the illumined vision of their minds. Many centuries later members of the Cult of the Therapeutae saluted the rising Sun in a prayer like that which lovers of Krishna use in India: "May that Sun which looks into all the world ... illumine my intellect." The Therapeutae claimed descent from Moses. Egyptologists have discovered the ruins of cells at Heliopolis indicating that a contemplative cult of this kind may have existed there.

Although the Cult of Ra is very ancient, it did not achieve supreme power until the Fifth Dynasty. It retained preeminence during Aton-worship, after which it suffered a decline.

Ptah, chief God of Memphis, was Deity of the Invisible Fire of Creation: his similar was the Greek Hephaestos. (After Hephaestos fell or was cast from heaven to earth, his place on Olympus was taken by Dionysus.) Like Hephaestos, Ptah was the Master Craftsman, the Divine Artificer, the Creative Fire within and behind nature, and a

priest was titled "Commander of Workmen." He was the great God of First Dynasty invaders. The cosmic masculine of Ptah the Originator had as his complement the cosmic feminine, Hathor, Rhea, Nut or Neith. Her name varied according to the location of the Temple where she was worshipped. Rhea, in blessing to Ra, says: "Live forever, born of heaven!" And again, "Conceived of Nut who spreadeth herself, thy Mother, over thee in her name of Mystery of Heaven, she granted that thou mayest exist as a god."

Amon-Ra, the Sun God of Thebes, rose to power during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Dynasties. Followers of the older divinities, Ptah and Ra, never accepted him wholeheartedly. Ra worship had come particularly close to the highest forms of monotheism, but the most venerable of the Sun Gods were Atum, the hidden or unrevealed Sun, and Amun, the Invisible Creator and Ruler of Eternity who is shown as a blue human figure, or as a man with his head covered by the head and horns of a ram. The ram means concealed. Egyptian priests taught that Amon-Ra was the unknown power which causes conception in all beings; thus, his nature approximates that of Jehovah. Illustrative of this fact is an annunciation scene depicted in a room adjoining the sanctuary of the Luxor Temple built by Amenophis III. The story relates that as the Queen, his mother, lay sleeping in the most beautiful room of her

palace, the God Amon-Ra appeared to her and predicted the birth of a son who should reign over Thebes; then he vanished in a cloud of perfume. Amenophis III fulfilled the prophecy. He ruled over the Ethiopians, the Syrians, the Phoenicians, the Islands of Cyprus, Ninevah and Babylon. He repaired many of Thebes' old Temples and built new ones. The Temple at Luxor commemorates this annunciation.

The God Amon, conjoined with Ra as "The God Amon, One who has no second," for a time held highest power. Amon also means "hidden." The word is mantramic, having great power,, and indicates the conjunction of the four elements of which all physical things are composed. Christians revere the two great Beings of their Trinity as Jehovah and Christ. Esotericists do not confuse them with the Supreme Being, however. Egyptians paid homage to these two Illustrious Ones under the names of Amon and Ra. It is written that so marvelous was the occult power possessed by the great priesthood of Amon-Ra that all heaven and earth obeyed their commands.

— ***Corinne Heline***