

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

The Labors of Mithra

The twelve zodiacal signs were revered by the Persians as twelve great sidereal Divinities whose guardianship marked the boundaries of our universe. Each month had its own particular ceremonial in harmony with the sign through which the Sun was passing at the time. The three months preceding each Equinox and Solstice were preparatory to the great Initiations celebrated at these crucial points.

There is a famous statue known as The Four Horsemen symbolizing the Solar Mystery. It is described thus: The god drives a chariot, drawn by four steeds, which turns ceaselessly around a fixed circle. The first horse bears on its shining coat the signs of the planets and constellations. Sturdy and agile, it traverses the circumference of the fixed circle with extreme velocity. The second horse is less rapid, less vigorous in its movements. It wears a robe half illuminated by the Sun. The third proceeds still more slowly while the fourth turns ever in the same spot, restlessly champing its bit while its companions move around it as around a column stationary in their midst. The unimpeded quadriga turns slowly, regularly completing its eternal course. But at a certain moment the fiery breath of the first steed falls upon the fourth, igniting its inane. Its neighbor,

exhausted by its efforts, inundates it with torrents of perspiration. Then the appearance of the quartet is transformed. The steeds interchange their natures in such wise that the substance of all passes over to the first or most robust of the group — in a manner like to a sculptor who, having modeled figures in wax, borrows the attributes of one to complete the others and ends by merging them all into one single form. The conquering steed in this divine struggle, his triumph having made him omnipotent, is now identified with the charioteer.

These four horses represent the four occult elements. The first is the spirit of Fire, the second of Air, the third of Water and the fourth of Earth. The accidents which befall the fourth horse are reminiscent of floods and conflagrations that bring tribulation upon earth. The victory of the first horse symbolizes the ultimate triumph of Spirit, for Fire is the symbol of Spirit. But it also refers to the old Persian prophecy that the earth will be consumed by fire when it has come to the end of its course. The charioteer is Mithra, who drives the ages of the Earth and governs time in all its courses.

Another familiar sculpture is the Triple Mithra, also of astronomical significance. This group consists of three figures; Mithra in the center, symbolizing the Sun, is flanked on either side by a god bearing a torch. In the

hands of one the torch is uplifted; in the hands of the other the torch is inverted. The first signifies the ascent of the Sun at the Spring Equinox; the second, its descent at the Autumn Equinox. In the Taurean Age the Vernal Equinox was in Taurus; hence, the symbol of the Bull was associated with Mithra at the resurrection of the year and with the Scorpion at the year's imminent death in the autumn.

The Persian Magi conceived of the heavens as a solid vault from which the Sun burst forth daily in a circle of golden glory. This belief gave rise to the tradition that Mithra was born from rock. As he came in a flame of light from the Generation Rock (i.e., the Rock of Ages) his birth was witnessed only by a band of shepherds who did him homage, bringing of their flocks and harvests as gifts for the holy child.

The exploits of the Sun God were emblazoned upon the walls of Temples wherein he was worshipped. Twelve in number, they represented the twelve initiatory steps familiar to Bible students in the story of Samson and in the life of Christ. They form the background for the seven Initiations of the Mithraic Mysteries. As the seven spheres, each with its ruling planet and Archangel, move against the backdrop of the starry heavens, so do the seven Initiations move against the background of Cosmic Consciousness represented by the eighth sphere.

The first and most important of Mithra's exploits appears to have been the conquest of the Bull. This animal was said to have been the first living creature created by the Supreme God, Ormazd. From the flowing blood of the slain Bull sprang seeds of all herbs and verdure that grew upon the earth. This again refers to the fact that the old Persian religion was inaugurated when the Vernal Equinox was in Taurus, the season when Nature was resurrected from the seeming death of winter. Taurus is a sign of great fecundity, of earthly abundance, and those who feel its impulses strongly are never satisfied with a mere intellectual service to mankind. They must see that the body of humanity is provided with all the good and beautiful things needed for its more perfect functioning. This was characteristic of the ancient Persians who as a nation were ruled by Taurus.

When the human race had to be created, its guardianship was delegated to the Sun God, Mithra. Ahriman, the Spirit of Darkness, tried to desolate the land by droughts but Mithra foiled his efforts through producing living water from a great rock. Again, Ahriman brought upon man a universal deluge which depopulated the earth as seas and rivers overflowed their banks and no land could be seen. One man alone, secretly instructed by the Gods, constructed a boat in which he, together with his family and cattle, was preserved. A third time did Ahriman ravage the earth, this time by fire. A great conflagration consumed both men and

beasts. But once more, through the intercession of Mithra, a remnant was saved and the human race immediately multiplied, thriving in peace and plenty. So was accomplished the terrestrial mission of Mithra.

In such wise Persian myths repeat the story known of old in Chaldea and Egypt, in China and India, the story of the destruction of ancient Lemuria and Atlantis and the continuous work for man's salvation performed by the Cosmic Christ through successive messengers whose mission it was to further the Christ Impulse throughout the earth. It was this great archangelic Being from the Sun who assumed guardianship of ancient humanity in the hoary beginnings of evolution, when the earth was still part of the solar nebula. All races and people retain some hint of this story in their spiritual histories, for the Lord Christ belongs to the entire earth and to the whole solar system. This is the keynote of the Mysteries.

The Seven Degrees of the Mithraic Initiation

The Mysteries of Mithra were divided into seven steps or Degrees, correlated to the seven planetary Lights known to antiquity. Each Degree pertained to its own particular sphere and was governed by its own planetary Archangel.

Down through the ages Seven has been revered as a holy and mystic number by all occult fraternities. It is

composed of the Four of matter and the Three of Spirit, thus typifying the union of man's lower and higher natures. Seven is the number of completion, for this union of the Three and the Four is the amalgamation constituting the supreme initiatory work of human evolution.

The Seven Degrees of Initiation — or Grades of Dignity as they were sometimes called — admitted a candidate into the Mithraic Brotherhood. They were as follows:

1. Corax or Raven: the Degree of the Servant
2. Cryphius or Occult: the Degree of the Neophyte
3. Miles or Soldier: the Degree of the Worker
4. Leo or Lion: the Beginning of Deeper Work
5. Parses or Persian: the Human Degree
6. Meliodromus: the Degree of the Messenger
7. Pater or Father: the Degree of the Sun

St. Jerome refers to these seven Degrees as Sacramentum. They are the source of the seven Sacraments of the Christian Church.

The first three Degrees were entirely preparatory. They were Degrees of the novitiate. The first refers to the Sun, of which the Raven was the symbol and messenger. The second three were concerned with inner-plane work and were deeply esoteric. The seventh was the Degree of

Liberation or Attainment. The purpose of all was that the aspirant should become pure and passionless,

The novices of the first three Degrees did not participate in the real Mysteries; they were like Christian catechisms and were called Servitors. The Leontics were the first participators, hence the frequent references to the grade of Leo on inscriptions.

A bas-relief discovered in Bosnia depicts two Mithraic communicants seated at a table whereon lie two wafers of bread, each bearing an emblem of the cross. On one side of the table, apparently as cupbearers, stand a Raven and a Persian. On the opposite side are a soldier and a Lion.

Children might be admitted into the preparatory Degrees; but with the ascending Degrees the requirements became more difficult and the oaths more binding. Discretion was indispensable. Tests for the succeeding grades were increasingly severe, consisting in part of exposure to the elements for protracted periods of time, severe floggings and long, arduous journeys on foot. Women were barred because they were not physically able to endure the trials designed primarily for masculine candidates. This proved to be one of the weaknesses of Mithraism when it came into opposition with Christianity, for Christian Masters welcomed women into the Mysteries of Christ. It seems clear that in the latter the rigors of discipline were adapted to meet the

need of the candidate, whether man or woman. The purpose of the trial was to overcome matter by the powers of Spirit, and this a woman candidate might do in the Mysteries of Christ, albeit by somewhat different methods.

The Second (Occult) Degree of the Mithraic Mysteries was termed "inner" or "hidden" work. Members of this group performed their labors "behind the wall," that is, concealed from others. Their appearance during a certain part of the ceremonial was observed as a sacred act. The Third (Soldier's) Degree carried an oath of loyalty to the Order such as a soldier makes to his nation. As a recruit in the Persian army had a mark of his fidelity burned upon his flesh upon taking his oath, so the sign of Initiation was set upon the forehead of the aspirants to this Degree, accompanied by the chant "Thus Mithra marks the forehead of his own soldiers." At one point the candidate was presented with a crown resting upon a sword. This had to be put aside with the declaration "Mithra is my crown." Thereafter he referred to his sword as belonging "not to me but to my God." This Degree carried renunciation of all worldly ambitions.

In the Degree of the Lion (Leo) no water was used, for this grade belonged pre-eminently to the element of spiritual Fire. Honey, sacred food of the Persians, was poured over the candidate's hands and placed upon his

tongue. Porphyry states that marvelous properties were attributed to honey which was believed to have been produced under the benign influence of the Moon; it was thought to be the perfect food for an Illumined One. Its use helped a neophyte to rise above all corporal desires and into the purity of spirit.

In the Fifth Degree (Persian or Human) the Sacrament of the Eucharist was celebrated. There are only three purely human figures in the Zodiac. Virgo, the Virgin Goddess who bears a sheaf of wheat; Gemini, the Twins; Aquarius, the Son of Man. The Degree of the Persian related to these human signs, with particular reference to Virgo.

Wheat and the "blood of the vine" possess the highest vibratory rhythms of all earth's food substances. They are in very truth the body and the blood of the indwelling planetary Christ, the visible representation of the invisible Solar Essence which pours down through the ethers. Without them life could not exist on earth for, as modern science has demonstrated, the life energy of the Sun is turned into the very substance of these plants which, when eaten by human beings, becomes the energy whereby they live. Hence, the use of Bread and Wine in the Sacraments of all Mystery Schools. The Mithraic Initiate was taught that from the spinal cord of the Sacred Bull sprang the wheat, and from its flowing blood grew the vine. The spirit of evil,

Ahriman, tries in vain to destroy these "seeds" but to no avail. He is powerless to impede the outflow of the Sacred Force.

All who have ever partaken worthily of this Sacrament have been for the moment en rapport with the Blessed Lord Christ and His supernal Glory. It will one day be that mankind will draw sustenance directly from the Sun without the mediation of food plants; he will then know literally that he lives by the Life of the Christ. There is also an earth force, but that earth force is essentially of the Solar Essence specialized in the aura of our planet. The Christ Force raining down upon earth is electrical in nature and can be seen by those with etheric vision. It is used in all magnetic healing. Strictly speaking, no healing of any kind is accomplished except through it.

Scholars are agreed that the Mithraic Eucharist is more closely analogous to the Christian Eucharist than anything else of the kind found in antiquity.

Among early Christians the Sacred Supper was called the Agape, or Love Feast. In Mithraism this is a high Degree commemorating the celestial feast by which the Light God celebrated the successful conclusion of his terrestrial labors in anticipation of his coming ascension.

The Seventh and highest Degree of the Mithraic Mysteries, the Father, which is culminated the inner series, is the supreme Solar Rite beginning with the fourth. It is known in the Christian School as the Rite of the Transfiguration. A candidate of this exalted Degree was "clothed with the Sun" and received the benediction of the Master in these words: "His Rays shall be turned upon thee and thou shalt be in the midst of them."

Having completed the Seventh Degree the Initiate was a "Father" to lesser Degree members, presiding over the Initiations of his aspiring brethren and caring for their welfare in every particular. Terullian informs us the chief pointiff of the Mithraic Cult bore the title "Father of Fathers." This rank was his for life and it appears he had complete jurisdiction over all the Initiates of his city.

Mithraic communities were not brotherhoods devoted solely to spiritual meditation. They were also judicial bodies invested with power to hold communal property. Overseers of material activities were known as "Trustees" and were wholly separate and distinct in this capacity from officiating priests, Fathers of the highest Degree. At their head was a council or miniature senate, of which the first was endowed with special privileges pertaining to general and official management. There were also masters (magistri) upon whom devolved the dispensing of finances. Finally, there

were the "Patrons" who served the Order as their means and position best permitted, affording it civic protection as well as financial stability.

Each day had its sacred ceremonial in which the planetary deity (Angel) governing that day was invoked appropriately. The Sun's day was esteemed above all others. Monday was also sacred in the Manichean system, but to a less degree than Sunday, Sunday being sacred to the Christ, Monday to Mary. As previously mentioned, the Sacred Seasons were the great festivals; at such times, when the earth's atmosphere was surcharged with spiritual force, certain Initiations were conferred upon worthy candidates which could take place at no other time of the year.

At the Spring Equinox, the Rite of the Resurrection, with its Crucifixion Ritual, taught the immortality of the soul as exemplified in the spring renewal of Nature. In the ecstasy of this divine experience, where all played their part, a new Initiate, overwhelmed with the glory of the new knowledge, chanted, "I have transcended the boundaries of death and having traversed all the elements I am returned to earth. In the middle of the night I have seen the Sun scintillating with pure light. I have approached the gods below and the gods above and have worshipped them face to face."

Thus, in a glory processional, the supreme culmination of the pre-Christian era, the Magi of Persia pointed to the

wonder of that midnight Mystic Sun which St. Paul said was no more to be seen "as through a glass darkly but face to face."

The Virgin Goddess of the Mysteries

The feminine Goddess of the Persians was Anahita. She was the Divine Mother, immaculately conceived and conceiving, born in purity and light. She was one with Isis of Egypt, Ishtar of Babylon, Athena of Greece, Mary of Bethlehem. Artaxerxes Ochua erected numerous statues in her honor at the various capitals: Babylon, Damascus, Sardis, Susa, Ecbatana and the holy city of Persepolis. She was accorded the supreme honor of a place beside Mithra in the homage of the people, and the Sacred Bull was dedicated to her. She figured with Mithra and Ahura Mazda in the inscriptions of Artaxerxes. These three Beings constitute the Holy Trinity of Persia.

Emanating from the Trinity, and inseparable from it, was that Mystery of the Cross which related exoterically to the passage of the Sun through the Zodiac on its annual course. Esoterically, it related to the advent of the Cosmic Christ at the end of the age. This Mystery was deeply concealed in Mithraic esotericism. Only with the coming of the Christ was the fullness of its truth revealed to the world. After His coming the ancient Mysteries that prefigured His labors were shortly brought to a close in

accordance with the Law of Cycles. They were completed and justified in Him.

The Cosmic Cross is the signature which Christ set upon the earth at its most ancient beginnings, proclaiming it among all celestial Hierarchies as particularly His own. Formed of the Equinoxes and Solstices, this Cross denotes the four primary events in the Master's earthly sojourn for the emancipation of the human race. The Winter Solstice marks His Birth; the Autumn Equinox, His Crucifixion; the Spring Equinox, His Resurrection; the Summer Solstice, His Ascension. Thus, the ancient

Mysteries, entwining the Cross of the Sun like wreaths of flowers, foretold the coming of the World Savior and the nature of His work.

Our Christian Bible recapitulates these ancient Teachings. The Books of Moses summarize the esotericism of Egypt and Chaldea. The Books of the Prophets hint of the Mysteries of Persia and Babylon. The four Gospels and the Book of Revelation recapitulate the Mysteries of Greece.

The great Master of Masters, the Blessed Lord Christ, is the focal point of all world religions. All were projects under His guidance. High and holy is their inception, each according to the need of those to whom it was given. From Him all emanated; unto Him all shall return.

I am the Alpha and the Omega.

No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.

— ***Corinne Heline***