

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

The Mysteries of Greece

I swear by him whom the Tetractys found
Whence all our Wisdom sprung and which contains
Perennial nature's foundation, cause and root.

The Mysteries represent a new departure in the history of Greek religion. Greece had no state religion, but the Mysteries were state supported and were hedged about with many restrictions. With the passage of time, however, these rules were largely relaxed. By the final centuries of the Greek Period the Mysteries had ceased to enjoy the high esteem of the Classic Age because so many unworthy people had become "initiates" — that is, they were pseudo-initiates, having received the Rituals of Initiation without experiencing their spiritual equivalent in power, purity and wisdom. The Mysteries thus became an empty shell, though many of the ceremonials found their way into orthodox Christianity. Only in esoteric Christianity did the Mysteries themselves find continuance.

Informed as they were with the Initiate knowledge of their philosopher-founders at the time of their origin, the various Mystery Schools were in very truth earthly representatives of spiritual Hierarchies of Wisdom. There were several great Mystery Schools in Greece. The two

greatest were the Orphic and the Eleusinian Mysteries, and Pythagoras represents the Orphic tradition.

Orphic Mysteries

Those innumerable souls, which spring from the Great Soul of the World,

How they roll about and seek one another throughout the mighty universe!

They fall from planet to planet, and in the abyss of space lament the home they have forgotten.

These are Thy tears, O Dionysus!

The Orphic Mysteries were based upon the writings of the Hierophant Orpheus. Most of these books have been lost. Only fragments remain which, together with the titles of a few of the lost books, constitute the Kabbala of Greek religion. Some of the missing volumes are The Argonautic, consisting of Hermetic works; The Demetriad, cosmogony centered in the Mother of the Gods; Sacred Songs of Bacchus; the Theogony; The Veil or Net of Souls, pertaining to the art of the Mysteries and their Rites and ceremonies; The Book of Mutations on chemistry and alchemy; The Gorybantes, concerning terrestrial mysteries and earthquakes; Anemoscopy, the science of atmosphere, natural and magical botany, and so forth.

The Orphic movement had two branches; the Apollonian and the Dionysiac, as shown in the Temple at Delphi where both Apollo, the Sun of the Summer Solstice, and Dionysus, the Sun of the Winter Solstice, were worshipped. Apollo and the nine Muses represent all branches of scientific, philosophical and aesthetic knowledge. Apollo was incarnate in Orpheus as his Avatar, and the Hierophant played upon Apollo's lyre to induce the ecstatic mood necessary to certain states of Illumination.

Obviously, this department of the Mysteries would correspond to a Modern University education; for the most part, women were excluded as being intellectually unfit for such studies — a situation that Existed in our own civilization until recent times. Pythagoras evidenced a spirit far in advance of his time by recognizing feminine capacities; he even accorded them a place in his community.

The Orphic Cult was universal in scope and gradually drew to itself the best minds of Greece. Together with the philosophy of the Stoics, it dominated Alexandria in the Christian era, flowing directly into Christianity through early Alexandrian Church Fathers. And inasmuch as the Greeks revered Egypt, her Gods and her Mysteries, and traced her own Mysteries to them, Egypt also poured her treasures

into the Christian religion by means of the Hellenistic Church Fathers.

That the Orphic Mysteries taught rebirth is shown in a verse by Empedocles:

For surely both youth and maid I was,
And shrub, and bird, and fish from ocean strayed.

Although Orphic cosmogony gradually absorbed everything rational in Greek thought, it had points of difference from the cosmogony of Hesiod and is curiously similar to the modern nebular hypothesis. According to the Orphic Mysteries Time, who had no beginning, was the beginning of all things, thus referring to The Eternal of Hebrew-Christian lore. From Time proceeded Chaos, the bottomless abyss holding within itself night, mist and fiery aether. Father Time caused the mist to spin around the fiery aether until it assumed the form of the World Egg. The Egg then flew into two halves, the upper half becoming heaven and the lower half earth, while from its center (the spiritual planes) proceeded Eros (Love) and other splendid Beings. Eros was, therefore, the Spirit first-born from the Cosmic Egg. "God so loved the world that He gave His alone-begotten Son." The Chthonian Eros was also identified strongly with Dionysus in the Orphic Mysteries, as the latter's fundamental attribute or aspect. The story of Psyche and Eros, obviously an Initiate legend from the

Mysteries, reveals that death, which seems to mortal sense a terror and a tragedy, is in reality a gift bestowed by the Blessed Lord of Love Himself.

The most profound esoteric wisdom of Greece was that which emanated from the Orphic tradition. The Mysteries of Eleusis, perhaps the most famous and far reaching in influence of any initiatory School the world has known, owed its inspiration to the Orphic Fragments-as did also the renowned School of Pythagoras at Krotona, which so strongly influenced the course of European thought.

Orpheus was first of the "human gods" (Initiates of Aryana) sent to bring spiritual light to early Grecian peoples. He was overshadowed by the Archangelic Sun Spirit known to Christians as the Solar Christ. The time of Orpheus' appearing has been entirely lost to earthly records; also most of his written words. It is usually considered, however, that the historic Orpheus appeared in Greece approximately the twelfth century before Christ. Even the few fragments extant of Orphic books reveal how profound was the wisdom this solar Initiate imparted for the illumination of the Greek world.

The Temple at Delphi always remained faithful to the Orphic tradition. This native Greek School succeeded in amalgamating with the Asiatic Mysteries of Dionysus, and in reducing both to the order and rationalism characteristic of

Greek thought at its best. When the Greeks had perfected the art of reason and turned it upon solving problems of the material universe, they realized at once that reason might lead them to a solution of the mysteries of death and the grave. This emphasis upon reason is the factor that particularly distinguishes the Hellenic from the Oriental Mysteries. The Greeks laid no claim to originality in spiritual matters; they admitted borrowing much from the Orient. But they did claim, and rightly, pre-eminence in the scientific and philosophical treatment of religions. In their hands that which came as faith teachings from Asia became science, art and philosophy, comprehensive through reason.

Thus, Orphic Masters imposed science upon the mysticism of the Dionysiac Cult without in any way bruising the delicate wings of the latter's soul-wisdom. To our day the differentiation between Apollo and Dionysus is recognized, and nowhere is this differentiation more clearly defined than in the dance—always a sacred service to these Gods. Stravinsky writes in his Autobiography: "Here in classical dancing, I see the triumph of studied conception over vagueness, of the rule over the arbitrary, of order over haphazard. I am thus brought face to face with the eternal conflict in art between the Apollonian and the Dionysian principles. The latter assumes ecstasy to be the final goal — that is to say, the losing of oneself—whereas art demands above all the full consciousness of the artist. . . . If I

appreciate so highly the value of classical ballet, it is not simply a matter of taste on my part, but because I see exactly in it the perfect expression of the Apollonian principle."

But the Orphic Initiate saw no conflict whatever between Apollo and Dionysus, between ecstasy and order, between science and mysticism, between faith and knowledge. In the Orphic Mysteries reason was exalted, but that ecstasy which the Mystic experiences in union with God also received its full and proper consideration. The combination of mystical faith with reason and knowledge remained characteristic of Orphism until it melted away into Christianity, whose Founder was designated "our new Orpheus."

The life and works of Orpheus are shrouded in obscurity. Many legends describe his majestic appearance and his magical powers. He was a god of music and the lyre or harp is the instrument usually associated with him. This was invented by Mercury, God of Wisdom. He gave it to Apollo, the Sun God, who later presented it to Orpheus. Because the divine Apollo had played upon this magic harp it responded to the touch of the beautiful young Orpheus in tones so pure and heavenly that savage beasts were charmed into losing their ferocity, wild birds were tamed, and great monsters came out of the sea to hear him play.

With his seven-stringed lyre he was able to govern the phenomena of Nature, calming storms, causing flowers to bloom and trees to bend attentively to hear his enrapturing music. Orpheus was an incarnation of Apollo and his music was the music of the spheres that circle around the Sun.

The God of Music had a bride whom he loved devotedly, Eurydice, the daughter of the Sea God, Nereus. While wandering in the fields one day, Eurydice was fatally struck by a serpent concealed in the tall grass. Orpheus filled groves and valleys with his sorrowful lamentations, the music of his grief. At last, finding himself unable to live without Eurydice, he bravely walked into the cave entrance to Pluto's underworld. Here he wandered among shades (disembodied entities) playing music so divinely beautiful that it brought surcease from pain even to those in purgatory.

Zeus, moved to compassion, granted his prayer that Eurydice return to earth with him, adding the one condition: "If you once glance behind you to see if Eurydice is following, you must lose her again." Striking notes of triumph and rejoicing, Orpheus climbed back up the steep ascent in the darkness, followed by Eurydice. But just as he was about to pass the extreme confines of Hades he grew fearful. To convince himself that his beloved was safe he looked back, only to see her, arms outstretched, floating

slowly backward into the realms below. Half crazed with sorrow and remorse, Orpheus wandered for seven days and nights without food or, drink. Then the Gods changed him into a swan and placed him in the heavens as Cygnus, the Swan, near Lyra, the constellation of the Harp. This glorious Harp floats across the heavens on summer evenings with the great star Vega blazing like a blue jewel in its heart.

Its celestial keys,
Its chords of air
Its frets of fire.

According to another mythological account, Orpheus was slain by Bacchantes in their wild frenzies. "Eurydice! Thou Divine Light!" he cried with his last breath. "Eurydice!" moaned the seven strings of his lyre as they snapped asunder. After death his head, severed from his body, continued to sing "Eurydicel Eurydice!"

This legend of Orpheus' death hints that, like Zoroaster, he was slain by representatives of an old cult that rejected his reforms. In The Fragments it speaks of "his rolling head borne along on the stream of time" — a reference to the Sun rolling along its zodiacal circuit for, as previously noted, Orpheus is the Solar Heirophant, the Sun God in human form.

The lesson inherent in the story of Orpheus and Eurydice is that when man sets his feet upon the Path, he may not turn back to ways of the world. The Christian Bible duplicates this teaching in the story about Lot and his wife fleeing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. They received the same command not to look back, but it was disobeyed by Lot's wife, and she became a pillar of salt — i.e., became crystallized in her sense consciousness.

Esoterically, the initial bliss of union between Orpheus and Eurydice points to the divine happiness of early androgynous man. Eurydice's descent into Hades marks the descent of human consciousness into the darkness of materiality. The descent of Orpheus into purgatorial realms in search of his love, the beginning of their upward climb together, and Orpheus' glance backward resulting in the loss of, Eurydice, vividly portray the divided state existing between man and woman in the world today. The eternal quest of Orpheus is the quest of all mankind; his continuous lamentation for Eurydice is the cry of every soul for the reunion of the Mystic Marriage.

Every great Initiate Teacher is sent to earth with a specific mission. That of Orpheus was to bring to humanity the magic power of music. He was credited with healing human ills with his music. The seven-stringed lyre of Apollo-like the harp of David, the sweet singer of Israel

who, by the power of his music, healed the madness of Saul — contains a veiled reference to the mystic powers of musical Initiates and to the unfoldment of the seven spiritual body centers which, when awakened, become luminous Roses or Stars.

During the last century another inspired messenger was sent to earth in an endeavor to build a School of Initiation by Music for the Piscean Age. He was the inspired Richard Wagner who founded his Festival House in Beyreuth. However, he met the fate usually meted out to pioneers, the lot of veritable crucifixion. But the imperishable dream brought to earth by Orpheus, further inspired by Pythagoras, and much later partially externalized by Richard Wagner, is not dead but only latent. In the approaching Aquarian Age it will be brought forth and quickened until it reaches heights of attainment far surpassing anything of the past. As man ascends the ladder of spiritual evolution, this Mystery School of Music will be expanded and glorified by the power and presence of the ever-living Christ.

— ***Corinne Heline***