

Theosophy and the Hebrew Scriptures

by Anonymous

The Theosophical Publishing Services [T. P. S.] has been requested by many of its subscribers to publish the following paper, and, having no dogmas to uphold, does so, without prejudice. The paper is of interest, showing as it does that the Theosophical Teachings maybe found in the Scriptures accepted by the Christian Church as well as in the Sacred Writings of India and the Far East

Reprinted from "Theosophical Siftings" Volume 5

The Theosophical Publishing Society, England

[Page 3] ALTHOUGH representing the Church, I write the following, not so much from the point of view of a priest confined to the cut and dry letter which killeth, as from the standpoint of a prophet of the Lord, who sees the inner meaning of the letter, viz., the spirit which maketh alive, and who discerneth the signs of the times: — times, not only foreseen and provided for, but prepared by the occult power which brought about and controlled the revolution of Luther, and the reaction of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century. The object of that power was not the destruction, but the reformation, of that great body — said to have been founded by Jesus of Nazareth on S. Peter — the Roman Catholic Church. And here I may say, that if the Roman Catholic Church be the body of the historic Christ, then those of us who are outside its borders, but yet are men of good will towards God, who desire to do all the Divine will without exception or reservation, stand in relation to that Church, and the historic Christ, as the astral body (mentioned by Mr. Stead in his Christmas and New Year numbers of *Review of Reviews*', ghost stories), stands in relation to our physical body and to our spirit respectively. As our astral body was prior in time to our physical body, so were men of good will, as the peri-soul or astral body of the Church, prior to the Church, and now more extensive than the Church, more spiritual than the Church, and invisible to men not sufficiently spiritually minded to possess the faculty of seeing or recognizing them as the astral body of the Church, just as is our astral body in all these points in relation to our physical body. And as we cannot blame our physical body for being coarser, grosser, lower in the scale [Page 4] of being, and more imperfect in relation to our spirit than our astral body is, so in like manner we cannot blame the Roman Catholic Church, Christ's body, for being coarser, grosser, lower in the scale of being, and more imperfect in relation to Christ's spirit than the astral body of Christ (men of good will) is; for it is the absolute necessity of anybody to be thus, as long as it remains a body, and it is equally necessary for the astral body to be superior, and to be working for the purification, renovation, and perfecting of the physical body of which it is the archetype and pattern.

Each body has its own plane to work on, and its own duties to discharge towards the spirit; and in England nobly and successfully has the work been done by Protestants during the past three centuries, so that now the Roman Catholic Church in England is perhaps better than it was in the sixteenth century, but until the mystic meaning has been restored to its symbology and teaching, and all dogma has been discarded, it would be dangerous to allow it to regain its ancient position of power. But what can hinder it regaining its power so long as Protestants are disunited? — and they can only be united when they put away all dogma, and reject the literal for the mystic teaching of the Bible.

As the Protestants have nobly and successfully done Christ's work, as His astral body, so also the Roman Catholic Church has nobly and successfully done its work as the outermost body of Christ, for it has carried on His work, speaking, like Christ, in parable to the multitude, and putting before them a very high ideal to act up to, conserving with devoted care the letter of the Bible, sacrificing their lives rather than deliver it up to the Pagans, and causing a large army of monks to transcribe it before printing was invented, and showing by its Damians and its Mannings its love towards humanity; but as Jesus of Nazareth, the historic Christ, was not the second Person of the Trinity, His power was not infinite so far as to over-ride the free will of men, and therefore, though His spirit may yet animate His body, the Roman Catholic Church, yet that Church is not therefore infallible, though in the main it teaches by symbol and parable the ancient mysteries, the inner meaning of which it has lost, or almost lost, and about the application of which it errs. The time is now at hand for the restoration of the inner meaning, just as it was formerly at hand for the restoration of piety and spirituality; and as the English Protestants were the instruments in the restoration of piety and spirituality, so now in the restoration of the inner and mystic meaning to the outer letter and symbols, the English Protestants are to be again the instruments [Page 5] of the said restoration, and I believe the Unitarians, or more accurately Free Christians, will play a more prominent part in this restoration or reformation than any other Protestant Christian body. And it is not to be wondered at, in these days of clairvoyance and clairaudience, that the lost inner and mystic meaning of the letter of the Bible, and the symbols of the Church, should be restored, since the book was, says the Bible, to be closed and sealed only for a period, and the end of that period is at hand; besides, Christ said there is "nothing hidden that shall not be revealed." Then mystic meaning will unite Christian, Jew, and Pagan in one universal brotherhood free of dogma.

I take for our consideration the words, "We shall be like him" — words taken from I John iii. 2.

Three questions seem to suggest themselves: first, What is Christ? second, How did Christ become what He is? and third, How are we to arrive at the same stage of existence as Christ has arrived at? Now to understand the third question, we ought to know something about existence and its stages — and how are we to know about existence? If we go to the Bible we shall find many statements, the intention of which is spiritual and mystical, implying principles, processes, and states belonging to the soul, and these statements have been applied instead to persons, events, and things belonging to the body, by a self-interested and materializing priesthood, which, not content with crucifying Christ, must needs crucify His doctrine also, by preferring the letter which killeth to the spirit which maketh alive. And in consequence of this, much of what the Bible says about existence and the soul is hidden from view as effectually as if the Bible had never been published, for the Bible has been interpreted by materialists for materialists, and from the materialistic standpoint, whereas it was written by mystics for mystics, and from the mystical standpoint, the Bible itself repeatedly and emphatically declaring its real meaning to be interior, hidden, spiritual, and therefore neither literal, nor in the ordinary sense historical. The Bible urges the necessity of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding as a matter of first importance for all seeking to satisfy their highest needs and aspirations, while it sternly denounces those, who are negligent in this matter. Moreover, in the margin of the revised version of Nehemiah (viii. 8) we read that the Jews, read the book of the law with an *interpretation*, and gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading. All of which statements would be superfluous and devoid of meaning if the letter of the Bible represented its sense, and the meaning lay on the surface. [Page 6] The Jews could not have done to the Christians whom they hated a more cruel thing than they did when they saw the Christians take their Jewish scriptures, and stood silent while the Christians read them literally instead of mystically. The Jews were most ingeniously clever in embodying the ancient mysteries about existence and the soul in the garb of history, just as some years ago Ignatius Donnelly's alleged cipher existed under the garb of

Shakespeare's poetry, of just as John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim's Progress and Holy War* uses persons, things, and events only in order to illustrate spiritual verities.

The following instance at once exemplifies this usage and affords a distinct affirmation of the principle contended for. Translating the names as well as the narrative, Joshua xv. 15-19, reads thus: "And the heart, well disposed and sagacious (Caleb) said, Whoso shall smite the 'city' or system of the letter (Kirjath-sepher), and take it, to him will I give my daughter, the rending of the veil (Achsah) to wife. And God's good time (Othniel) took it, and received the rending of the veil for wife . . ." (verse 19). And she brought him as dowry the "springs upper and nether" of the knowledges, spiritual and mental, which bring all blessings to their possessor. And thenceforth, the place was no more called the city of the letter, but the Word (Debir), in obvious token that not the letter, but the meaning veiled by the letter, and this alone, is held by the Bible to be the Word of God. Again we read (in Genesis) about Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt for looking back towards Sodom, which mystically means that the soul of a man (Lot's wife) becomes a support of matter (salt-matter) when it looks towards the body (Sodom), instead of towards the spirit of the man to which it ought to give its support with the view of becoming one with it, and thus effecting the atonement within that man. That man has Christ in his heart — the Christ within, and he lives up to his highest ideal. Again, the story of Adam and Eve is mystically about energy and substance on one plane of interpretation; and Paul explicitly declares of certain narratives in Genesis (e.g., Ishmael and Hagar), apparently historical, that "these things are an allegory", while by pronouncing as either "babes" or as "having a veil upon their hearts", those who accept them literally, he ascribes their conduct in so doing either to intellectual or moral deficiency, besides clearly implying that the "veil" with which Moses is said to have covered his face, after receiving the law, was no other than the veil of symbol and allegory in which he wrapped its expression. He also expressly admits that his teaching was of two kinds: — one which he calls "wisdom", for the spiritually mature, and the other milk for the spiritually [Page 7] immature. And he positively affirms that "the letter kills, and the spirit alone has life".

Similarly with Jesus. Not only does He teach in parables, reserving the interpretation for His own private circle of initiates, and withholding even from these certain knowledges on the ground that they were not yet sufficiently advanced in their perception of spiritual things, to be able to receive them; but He frequently reminds His hearers that He is speaking with a mystical meaning and to an interior faculty, by exclaiming, "He that hath ears to hear let him hear"; by reproaching for their dullness of apprehension those whom He describes as "having eyes, but seeing not, and ears but hearing not", and vehemently, charging the official guardians of religion with having taken away the key of knowledge, and neither entering in themselves nor suffering others to enter. He further directly affirms that His kingdom is not of this the outer sensible world, but of the world within man. All these utterances are intelligible only on the supposition of an interior and hidden sense in scripture, whose appeal is to an interior and spiritual, faculty in man, and therefore to the soul as distinguished from the external reason. For were the meaning literal and superficial, no special gift of understanding would be requisite for its apprehension, and understanding is the rock on which Christ builds His Church otherwise it is if literally taken, Peter, and his successors the Popes and the Roman theory logically necessarily follows, and all its dogmas, including eternal torments for the wicked, which scripture does not teach, but only that the state of punishment is eternal into which state the wicked go for a longer or shorter time. "These shall go into everlasting punishment, but not remain there.

The late Cardinal Newman relates in his *Apologia* how he had at one time been, "carried away" by the idea suggested by the Holy Fathers, especially of the second century, of a system of doctrine concealed

beneath the Christian symbology, and differing of course widely from that in vogue. It was also customary in corresponding cases in all ancient systems of religion and schools of philosophy to veil the ancient mysteries in mystical language and symbology, and why should the Jews alone prove the exception? Who can believe that Balaam's ass spoke, or that the patriarchs lived hundreds of years, or that the sun stood still for Joshua, or that the walls of Jericho fell flat by marching round them, or that the Red Sea stood like stone walls on each side of a passage to let Israel pass, or that God commanded Moses, to institute bloody sacrifices, when Jeremiah said thus saith the Lord, the Lord commanded them not, or that any man was ever [Page 8] born of a virgin? Who can believe these things except mystically? Having premised that the Bible is mystical and not literal, it will be evident that the fact of any doctrine being undiscoverable in the literal text is no proof that it is necessarily undiscoverable in the mystical sense of the scripture. I will now proceed without further delay in this part of the subject to give an imperfect, because a very brief and condensed account or summary of existence and its stages, or an outline thereof to some extent. All things are God, in virtue of their constituent principles; but all things are not God in the condition of God. That is to say, that while God is Being, Being is God only when in a state of perfection.

The limitation is due to creation. Creation represents and occurs by means of the projection — mystically called the fall — of the divine substance into conditions and limitations, and without such fall or projection creation could not be. For creation, which is manifestation, involves and implies degrees and opposites and contrasts. And occurring necessarily in time and space, and being conditioned by these, it is necessarily gradual. And whereas these limitations of what in itself is absolutely good are the cause of "evil", and arise through matter, matter is the cause of evil. But this is not to say that matter is itself evil. On the contrary, matter is the mode of manifestation of spirit, and spirit does not become evil by becoming manifest. The idea of a purely spiritual evil involves a contradiction of terms. In thus making spirit the one original being, and evil the result of the limitation of spirit, the Bible vindicates the logical superiority of its philosophy. Before the beginning of things there must be the potentiality of things. Things are not conceivable of as self-subsistent. Only the unlimited, undifferentiated and homogeneous can be also the eternal. And whatever fulfils this description is God. Hence, according to the Bible, God is the potentiality of all that has been, that is, and can be, and of God's energy and substance all things consist, or as the Bible states it, "In him we live and move and have our being; and of his fulness we have all received".

Now these two, energy and substance, are the two terms of the duality regarded by the Bible as subsisting in the unity of original being, and by virtue of which creation alone is possible. For the Bible recognizes creation, which is only manifestation, as occurring through generation — as when it speaks of "the generations of the heavens and of the earth" or worlds spiritual and material. And generation is not of one, but of twain, the two subsisting in the one, as the two sexes in one humanity. Energy and substance moreover are by their nature of [Page 9] masculine and feminine potency respectively; *He* is the "Father", and, *She* is the "Mother". But in themselves they are unmanifest, no matter what the plane of activity concerned, the visible or the invisible, and can be known only through their mutual product, expression, or, to use the Bible term, their "Word" or "Son" — not, however, Jesus of Nazareth, who was not that son, but the son of earthly parents just as any of us. Through this word or expression it is that what in itself is unmanifest, and therefore unknowable and unknown, becomes manifest, knowable and known; a truth mystically enunciated by Jesus of Nazareth — the typical man regenerate — in John iii: 3 and xiv. 6. And as this law holds good for every plane or sphere of being, unmanifest or manifest, it follows that every entity which is manifest is manifest through the evolution of its trinity. And these three — energy, substance, and their resultant expression or phenomenon — are not three entities but one

entity.

Such and so simple is the explanation of the doctrine, which, representing a necessary and self-evident truth, the Church has exalted as an incomprehensible mystery, and the Agnostics, on the strength of the Church's presentation of it, have rejected off-hand as a monstrous absurdity, without taking the trouble to look deeper, forgetting that the best and most effectual way of fighting and destroying the priest is to explain him and his dogmas. The Mosaic synonyms for substance, whether in reference to the invisible "heavens" or the visible universe, are the "deep" and the "waters". In man it is called the woman and also "water," and implies the soul, this being the substance and "mother" of the real as distinguished from the apparent man. Hence the Church also as representing the soul collective of man, is called the "woman". And throughout the Bible, whenever Deity is exhibited as operating on behalf of any cosmic entity, be it the universe, a system, a planet, or an individual person, and whether for its physical generation, or spiritual regeneration, the process is always described as in some mode the moving of the spirit, or energy of God, upon the face of the waters, or substance of God; the resultant, which completes their trinity and accomplishes their manifestation, being according to the plane of activity concerned. Of the various planes of activity, the last and lowest, the physical, occurs through the coagulation, exteriorly, of the substance assigned for that plane — viz., the astral ether — in such wise that it becomes outermost matter. And this is occultly indicated in the saying, "by the gathering together, or coagulation of the waters, the dry land — earth or matter — appears"; though the same words are forthwith used in a different and more [Page 10] obvious sense. And inasmuch as energy and substance are, whatever the plane, modes of Deity in operation, and Deity in operation is called Holy Spirit, all things consist of Holy Spirit.

The constitution of things is fourfold, and this fourfold existence constitutes what is called the "vehicle" in which Deity descends into manifestation, and is implied in the fourfold river of Eden, the four men in the ark of Noah, the fourfold car of Ezekiel, the four living creatures of Ezekiel and the Apocalypse, and the number and character of the gospels, the four elements also being sometimes implied. And in accordance with this manifold nature of existence the mystical scriptures have a manifold meaning and application. While fourfold as to composition, every cosmic entity — whether, an individual or a universe — owes its elaboration to a sevenfold cooperation, that, viz., of the seven divine potencies who subsist in the original unity as the seven rays of the prism in light and, like light, they find manifestation on their emergence from the prism constituted by the trinity, on the passage of Deity into activity, or procession of the Holy Ghost, of which they are the immediate differentiations. These are they who are represented in Genesis as saying "Let us make man in our image" after they had previously accomplished the earlier stages of his construction (viz., from the time when the most rarefied manifestation of God became denser, and from gaseous matter became solid, and from solid, in which the spirit was in a diffused condition, became individualized in plants, until from the lowest form of vegetable life it reached the highest, and then entered the lowest form of animal life, and from that ascended to the highest stage below man). And as each of the Divine spirits or potencies has a part to perform in the elaboration of man, and only when built up of them *all* is he made in the Divine image, the work of each spirit constitutes — whatever the actual period — a day or stage in his creation, and the whole work constitutes a week. It is from these spirits that the number seven originally derives its sanctity, and it is to these that reference is made in the Bible, whenever that number is used in describing the process of man's spiritual elaboration, under the name of Israel. They are at once the seven creative spirits of God, the seven judges of Israel, the seven angels of the churches, the seven golden candlesticks, the seven planets of the solar system repeated as octaves in a scale, and the seven great gods of the mythologies. And concerning them the sacred scriptures of antiquity, the basis of the Bible, in a ritual now miraculously

but none the less orderly recovered — the method being the rare, but not unknown, one of intuitional or psychic recollection — discourse sublimely. [Page 11] Matter in any stage of its progress from the rarest to the densest of what is called inanimate matter is always *conscious*, being made up of living microbes so small that millions of them close together as possible could not be seen through the strongest microscope. The evolution of man took 300,000,000 years. This progressive elaboration of life goes on until that stage is reached at which Jesus of Nazareth has arrived, and thus is answered, the second question.

Jesus of Nazareth needs no further incarnation in matter to perfect Him, and now we can answer our first question, What is Jesus of Nazareth, the historic Christ?, He is the highest development of man, now absorbed in the great God as a single microbe is absorbed among millions of others in the smallest germ seen by a microscope – not that He loses His individuality in thus being one with God, for the fact of not losing His individuality is the precise reason why, though made of God's substance and possessing all the powers of that substance in some degree, He is yet not infinite but finite, and hence though animating His Church yet the Church is not therefore altogether infallible. We consist of nothing but microbes, and if we imagined each microbe in us to be a human being, not differing from ourselves except in one respect, viz., in a different individuality, we should then realize how Jesus of Nazareth, and all other similar Christs whether known to history or whether dying unknown, exist in God as gods, but not as the second person of the Highest Trinity, nor in any position not equally open to any man, who (and this answers the third question) exactly follows the discipline which Jesus of Nazareth underwent, viz., we must look to our soul which stands midway between the Divine spirit within us, which urges us to high and noble thoughts, words, and deeds, and absolute unselfishness, knowing in the words of Jesus "He that hateth his lower life shall save it" (his higher life). We must look, I say, to our soul which stands midway between our spirit and our body, which tends to drag the soul down, from the spirit to its own materiality, its sensual, low, grovelling, selfish and mortal nature.

When a man's soul favours the body and turns its back on the spirit, it has fallen, and that is the *fall* for that man, who then needs an atonement before he can be saved, and that atonement takes place by reversing the process so that the soul turns its back on the body, and unites with the spirit, becoming one with it, and by its power ruling over the body, and bringing it into subjection. He then is a Christ born of the Virgin Mary, viz., the soul, called *virgin* because *pure*, and Mary because substance as distinct from energy which conceives, and is called Holy Spirit. The atonement implies also the resurrection from [Page 12] the fall in that man, or Christ, and so on with other dogmas of the Church. When thus mystically understood they are the truth, and the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her assumption into heaven and other such dogmas are only false when applied exclusively to some particular person, and understood literally instead of mystically. Would we be like Christ? Let us then always live up to our highest ideal, and with this moral I conclude.

[Those, who feel interested in the above sermon are advised to read Mr. Maitland's *The Bibles Own Account of Itself*, from which much in the above has, been obtained. *The Perfect Way* and the *Secret Doctrine* are also recommended.

All interested in Home Reunion of all Protestants should circulate this among their friends.]