

INTRODUCTION TO  
*THE DIVINE HUMAN IMPRINT ON MYTH*

AUBREY C. ODHNER \*

New Church scholarship in the study of mythology has been largely a product of the Nineteenth Century. The initial stimulus for that study was the light that the then newly revealed Science of Correspondences shed on our cherished Western heritage of myths and legends. The Writings themselves, in illustrating the use and existence of that science with the Ancients, alluded to countless Greek myths. The many references to the meaning of the Pegasus myth is one striking example of this.

The Writings were the initial stimulus but the flourishing study of comparative mythology was the encouraging environment for students like J. J. Garth Wilkinson, Andrew Czerny, Carl Th. Odhner. The scientific study of mythology had started in 1825 with the work of Karl Otfried Muller, but became really popular in the second half of the century with the writings of Max Muller. Comparative mythology with its recognition of striking similarities in myths of many cultures went hand in hand with comparative philology—as Max Muller put it, “Mythology is a disease of language.” There was stimulating research into—the roots of the Indo European language; the work of German scholars like the Brothers Grimm on the sources of fairy tales. Max Muller’s exhaustive work on Sanskrit literature, his *Chips from a German Workshop*, and his 51-volume edition of the *Sacred Books of the East* launched a tremendous search into what might be called a natural theory of the sources of myths at a mid point in the Nineteenth Century.

Max Muller stated that the ancient Aryans developed their myths around the sun, the dawn, and the sky, and that the diversity of deities is simply a matter of *renaming* these solar phenomena—a disease of language. The vehicle for the varieties depended upon

\*Part of the Introduction to Mrs. Odhner’s unpublished orientation thesis, *The Divine Human Imprint on Myth. A collection of recent archetypal studies, especially those made by Jungian psychoanalysts together with some correlations with New Church Doctrines*, Academy of the New Church, 1975. Mrs. Odhner teaches History and Mythology in the Girls School at the Academy and is the head of the Academy Museum Committee. [Ed.]

the spread of tribes and races and the theory was therefore sometimes called the Migration Theory.

Toward the end of the century the "Solar" and "Vedic" school was challenged by the new studies of the Babylonian Lunar school of Myths. While this was taking place in Germany an anthropological school of mythology was growing in England spearheaded by Sir James Frasier with his *Golden Bough*, Jane Harrison, and Gilbert Murray. They emphasized the idea that the myths were an outgrowth or natural development from ritual—that the ritual, magic, and drama involved in celebrations of fertility and vegetation cycles came first, and the canting and retelling of the priests or shamans came later, in explanation and reenforcement of the cult traditions. Out of this "Myth and Ritual" school came such developments as that of G. Widengren who explained the origin of the King or Father god as a natural development of the idea that, in early cultures, the king had been responsible for the well-being of all, including the growth of crops and therefore the weather and thence the Cosmos. This, he said, gave rise to the Iranian Savior ideology and to the Jewish Messianism.

Challenges to the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century astral, philological, and ritual explanations of the origin of myths came in many forms. So much archeological evidence had been uncovered and added to more recent knowledge of primitive man. H. Bronislaw Malinowski, a prominent anthropologist, states that myth is *not* developed to explain scientific phenomena but is a deep narrative resurrection of primeval reality.

The Nineteenth Century closed on a proud chapter in the scientific study of mythology. Tremendous collections and statistical studies brought out the many, many similarities in creation myths, flood myths, sky-gods, gods of the woods, etc. With their spiritual insights from the Writings, New Church scholars were, apparently, more inspired than discouraged by theories of the mythologists. Granted that they were critical and even contemptuous about the naturalistic, even materialistic, conclusions, by and large New Church students were stimulated and informed by these masterworks.

Looking back from this deplorably great time lapse since the New Church has made any major studies in mythology, the dogmatic statements by Muller and Frasier and their ilk look even more materialistic than I think they looked to our early New

Church scholars; the Darwinian influence is most pronounced. Perhaps this was simply dismissed as "Old Church" and taken for granted; their facts were of value, their theories were "bosh." But we can no longer dismiss *contemporary* "Old Church" theories on the science of mythology as "bosh." They are not. Current writers are casting giant spotlights into the heretofore dark and chaotic areas of possible birth places of myth, nowhere so dark and unknown as the realm of the Unconscious Mind. Perhaps it is from permeation of the truths of the Second Coming or perhaps it is the result of genuinely affirmative scholarship that the Freudian-Jungian schools of psychiatry have made their tremendous inroads into the roots of these mysteries; after all, the natural mind is explorable from without; it is only because it goes so deep that we tend to think of it as *only* explorable by means of Revelation.

So it is the twentieth century science of Psychology, more specifically Psychoanalysis, which I believe, will give that external but necessary boost into a new dimension of New Church mythological studies. In their studies of the unconscious mind the psychoanalysts have seen myths and myth forms being reborn in the minds of individuals. They have watched individuals going through the same quests as the Heroes of old, stopping by the same Fountain, mounting the Winged Horse, killing the Fiery Dragon. They have seen the same patterns that the Comparative Mythologists saw, but with an entirely new, dynamic point of view. They see a faculty in the human psyche that is the author of the myths, still externalizing the same themes as human beings did millenia ago. The ancients watched the sun rising, going through its course, setting, and returning again, and used this external phenomenon to express legend about a *Hero known to them* from the earliest revelation, but also recognized by something printed indelibly on their minds.

The analytic psychologists are seeing the profound relationship of the individual human being to the macrocosmic themes of mythology. Perhaps their perceptive insights will help to bring Twentieth Century New Church men closer to an understanding of the Divine Human relationship to the myths.

Early New Church mythologists saw the Lord as he appeared in the static form of this god or that symbol. I believe it is for this generation of New Churchmen to try to get some understanding

of the Lord in the ongoing, living story of the Hero and the Eternal Return of the Springtime. As we work with the living, dynamic recycling of these themes we will, I believe, begin to get a glimpse of the true science of *Correspondences* rather than just the science of *symbolism*.

Man is the highest form of the Lord's creation; certainly we will get a clearer rational picture of the Lord by watching *man* go through his regenerative cycles than merely to be content with watching the sun or the moon going through their phases. If we work with this we will have graduated from our Anatomy to our Physiology class, we will have moved from the dissection table where we separated, examined and labeled the parts to the gymnastic arena where we see the muscles, tendons, nerves tuned up and directed and used to some purposes.

## COMMUNICATION

To the Editor of THE NEW PHILOSOPHY :

I feel no need to defend myself against Mr. Prescott Roger's comments (NEW PHILOSOPHY vol LXXVIII no. 3 p. 288-290) since they were fair enough. Research in the field of ancient history is not a New Church minister's job. However, as Mr. Rogers seem to agree, any approach to investigating the pre-Hebrew Churches must begin from what the Doctrines say.

Now the evidence of secular science has a very subtle way of undermining what the Doctrines reveal. Especially would this be the case, were the "externals" of the pre-Hebrew Churches to be compared with secular scholarship on ancient man. There is a real need for caution, and I would thoroughly endorse the method Mr. Rogers proposes—namely of examining the two fields in juxtaposition, "in the hope of seeing how they naturally fit, *i.e.* without problems." (p. 290)

That was also my own endeavour. My two gauges, which would have matched the two fields of investigation, were the flood and the invention of writing (including inscriptions of all kinds). Only these two, in my view, could have left a sufficient historical imprint for modern scholars to discover. That led me to my conclusion of the 35000 to 8000 BC for the duration of the flood.

If any such juxtaposing of information be undertaken, however, I would warn against using the "externals" of the pre-Hebrew Churches in the same manner as the facts of secular scholarship. The externals of the former are to be regarded as the *externals of their own proper internals*. Unless