

Both the Ancient Near East (through Israel) and Greece served Christianity. The beliefs and teachings from the Old Testament and the method of logic used in Greek thought were both present in Christianity. There must have been a reason or reasons for this great development of human thought, and that reason seems to be Divine in origin. It is the author's opinion, therefore, that the intertestamentum period deserves attention. He proposes to offer at a later time his thoughts about the important sixth century B.C. during which this development was strongly in process.

THE WORSHIP AND LOVE OF GOD

A STUDY IN THEATRICAL FORM

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PART TWO

THE CLEARING IN THE FOREST

I have referred in the previous article to the fact that the cosmology in *The Worship and Love of God* (and that of the *Principia* from which it is derived) seems to belong on a "line" of cosmologies running through Greek and Roman literature to a very early source. The image of the vortical movement of creation occurs all over the world: in megalithic design, in the Hindu myth of the "churning of the ocean" and in similar myths among the Pueblo peoples of the southwestern United States, and on the northwest coast of America, where it is usually symbolised as a whirlpool.¹ Our current knowledge of the pre-Greek literatures of the Middle East and the material collected by ethnographers enables us to trace this line with fair assurance; but this material was not available to Swedenborg. It is astonishing that he should have succeeded in finding this central line on the basis of a knowledge only of Scripture and of Greek and Latin literature.

It is clear that many peoples now dispersed over the face of the earth, peoples whom, in our arrogance, we have called "primitive," are heirs of a well-defined intellectual tradition. One finds such marked similarities among creation and flood traditions, cardinal-

* Second installment of a series of six articles.

¹ De Santillana, Giorgio, and Von Dechend, Hertha, *Howlet's Mill* (Boston: Gambit Incorporated, 1969), p. 319.

point symbolisms and theogonies that one must assume some kind of diffusion. The tradition which Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated to run through Amerindian mythology is in truth found all over the world. Intellectual matters must be taught, and the various psychologically-based theories which have been used to explain such similarities are clearly unworthy of serious consideration.

The problem so far has been that most "primitive" mythologies have come down to us in what is obviously an ossified form: they appear mere collections of stories and rituals. Informants have either been unwilling or unable to explain the rational system behind the myths, and thus the general tendency has been to assume that there is none. In other cases, and this is unfortunately common, a rational system has been perfectly evident but has been ignored or even consciously obscured by scholars.

A series of remarkable publications of the *Institut d' Ethnologie* in Paris has changed, or in all conscience should change all that. Since the 1930's, the wise men of the Dogon people of the Western Sudan, in their conversations with the Griaule mission, have gradually revealed the inner levels of their mythology. A system which, to the ignorant, appeared arbitrary, absurd and childish was seen to be rational and complexly intellectual and to contain a cosmogony which may be defined as a kind of "atomic theory".² One popular writer on these discoveries³ has come to the conclusion that the Dogon must have been taught their cosmology by visitors from outer space. How else, it is reasoned, could they have learned of the existence of a dark star Sirius, and discovered that it is made of extraordinarily heavy matter?

The real explanation, however, may be found in the *Minor Principia* (II: 408-411), where Swedenborg deduces the existence of dark stars and dwarf stars with great mass by logical extension of his theory of a space and matter formed by the super-vortical movement of a primary point. This theory is precisely the basis of the Dogon cosmology, as it is of *The Worship and Love of God*. In other words, Swedenborg has been proved right in believing that he had rediscovered the base of a very ancient kind of science, and given it poetic expression. The proof is in Dogon cosmogony, which is clearly a survival from ancient times, a system which,

² Griaule, Marcel, *Conversations with Ogotemmelé* (Oxford University Press, 1965), and Guerrier, Eric: *Essai sur la Cosmogonie des Dogon* (Paris Robert Laffont, 1975), Both *passim*. ³ Guerrier, *passim*.

having lost much of its philosophical base, survives as a series of potent images.

It would seem that Swedenborg deduced the former existence of a theory similar to his own by a study of Greek philosophy. For it is an easily ascertainable fact that the various schools of Greek philosophy contained or hinted at almost all the cosmological and philosophical systems of the world, including those of Amerindia. Greek philosophy and science seem to have eagerly absorbed all the knowledges of the immensely productive Near East and to have promulgated as exoteric science what its neighbouring cultures taught, in the temple schools, as esoteric wisdom. One can in fact find, in the surviving fragments of pre-Socratic philosophy, evidence for the existence of a theory that the world was formed from a primary nonspatial point, which extended itself into a vortex.

Students of comparative cosmology will have to trace out the relationship between Dogon ideas and those of ancient urbanised Africa. Have the Dogon preserved a version of Egyptian or Carthaginian cosmology? Eva L. R. Meyerowitz⁴ has found Carthaginian affinities in the religion of the Akan of West Africa, a system not unlike that of the Dogon. Or have the Dogon preserved, over millenia, a most ancient cosmology from which Egyptian or Phoenician/Carthaginian systems of a later date developed? One thing is certain: the elevation and high rationality shown in the Dogon myth is by no means unique in Africa.⁵

The Dogon system is labyrinthine in its complexity and indeed in its form; but one can at least say this: it concerns the creation of the cosmos from the tiniest imaginable point by the creator god, Amma, by means of a series of vortices. All the divine beings of the Dogon pantheon are created by and operate by means of vortical forms. It seems legitimate to recognise the Dogon cosmology as a product of the age of "smith-magic."⁶ Dogon symbolism

⁴ Meyerowitz, Eva L. R., *The Akan of Ghana* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), *passim*.

⁵ Nothom, D., *Un Humanisme Africain* (Brussels: Editions Lumen vitae, 1969), *passim*.

⁶ Eliade, Mircea, *The Forge and the Crucible* (London: Rider, 1962), p. 93 et seq. Also my article in *THE NEW PHILOSOPHY*, April-June, 1972, part III of a series on Northwest Coast mythology. The copper mythology of the Northwest Coast is related to that of Siberia and through Siberia to that of the ancient Near East. The smith-imagery of traditional African belief is also related to that of the ancient Near East.

is dominated by the figure of the ironsmith: the smith and the *griot* (who was at once sorcerer, poet and clown) were among the first two beings created by Amma.⁷ The combination of high cosmological speculation with degraded religious practices, such as human sacrifice, seems to be typical of the thought of this period.

The reader is now asked to consider the description of the earthly paradise of the vegetable kingdom in Paragraphs 19–21 of *The Worship and Love of God*. It is a beautiful picture of fecundity, presenting the image of a bewildering variety of trees and flowers growing and dying, each in its own rhythm, the whole dominated by the great vortical rhythm of death and rebirth. Out of this image there arise, briefly, small forms of great beauty, such as flowers which “were marked with stars or varied with spots, and thus represented heaven itself with its scattered constellations; while some again figured the flaming sun with its rays, and his marriage with the earth.” The formal esthetic here embodied—an unanalysable rapidity of interweaving vital functions, out of which moments of pure beauty and significance emerge, and which we have called the forest or maze esthetic—is essentially that found in African and Amerindian art at their highest. The clearest exposition of this point of view is again found among the Dogon, who think of planting as “weaving the land”⁸—art turning the maze into a network. It is in this manner that ritual arises out of the unsystematised and individual practices of everyday life, and high art out of the generalized flow of ritual activity.

We are thus brought sharply to the question of “tribal,” “totemic,” or “animist” theatre (adjectives we mention only to discard them) on our own continent. For traditional African and Northwest Coast cosmogonies and ritual dance styles have much in common. They are derived indeed from the same world-wide tradition, which seems to have come to the Northwest Coast from Siberia. In this tradition the chief characters of the dance are animals and spirits; in the comic dances, we have mortal and human actors, performing little “scenes of the village.” The actions are short and simple. It is not until one makes an effort to understand the actions depicted that one realises that each gesture is a symbol carrying a great weight of meaning. The point of view embodies a paradox which is bound to affect us as somewhat hor-

⁷ Guerrier, p. 65.

⁸ Griaule, pp. 70–77.

rifying. Human beings are shown as erratic, intellectually limited and in a sense "cute," like domestic pets, which is why they appear mainly in comic dances. Spirits, which embody themselves in animal or uncanny forms, have sure instinct and absolute presence: they are what they are. We may see behind such symbols an ideology of amoral spiritual power, reflected in our culture by poets (such as Marlowe, Yeats and Rimbaud) who have followed a magical tradition.

What this art must have been in its uncorrupted beginnings (how many millenia ago?) is indicated by a passage from *The Worship and Love of God*, which refers to "... an endless meander (whose) orbits wind about in endless turnings and having run through their allotted courses flow back again into their sources" (paragraph 124). An idea of what an "endlessly meandering" form may have been may be had from Dogon cosmology and pre-Columbian Mexican art, with its combination of spiral and angular forms in a potent symbol of the realisation, in the "squared world," of the vortical rhythms of creation.⁹ The superbly European statement of the rationale of meander form in this section of *The Worship and Love of God* must be read in its entirety: I refer to the vision of the fecund universe seen by "the first-born pair," which makes up what we have of the third part of this work: it should be carefully compared with the cosmology of the Dogon.

Amerindian art, however, has always laid great stress upon the "four-cornered earth," that is, the angularity into which vortical energy descends, and becomes fixed in material form. Its most typical visual representation is the stepped fret and its derivatives. On the Northwest Coast, it may be added, the combination of spiral and angular form in the visual arts, in a convention which developed over centuries, ultimately resulted in one of the great art-languages of the world.

If we exclude the drama of civilised Mexico, which approached literary form and was through-composed by poets, most of the aboriginal drama of the Americas could conveniently be divided into two forms.

1) Monodrama or narrative with interspersed songs, told by a professional story-teller. One Northwest Coast version of this

⁹ Westheim, Paul, *The Art of Ancient Mexico*, (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1965), pp. 112-123.