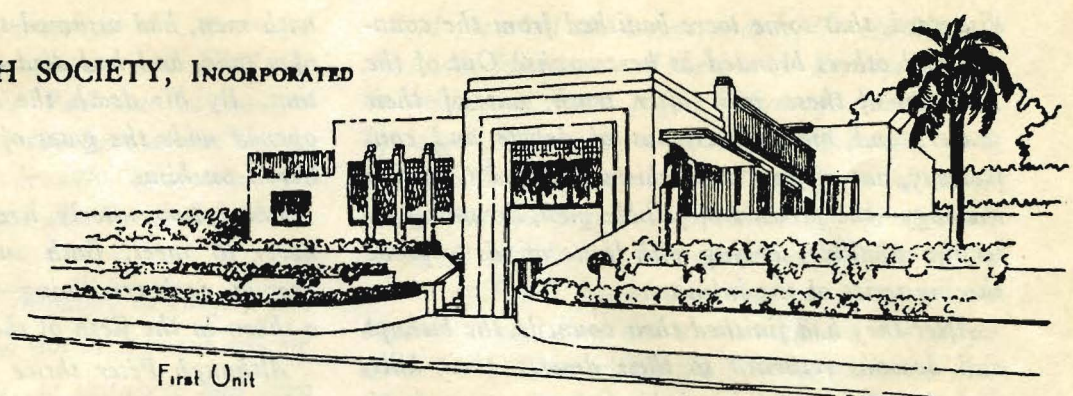


PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY, INCORPORATED
3341 GRIFFITH PARK BOULEVARD
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA



BIBLE COURSE SERIES BY MANLY P. HALL FOURTH YEAR

THE STUDENTS MONTHLY LETTER

Letter No. 11

THE SECRET DOCTRINE IN THE BIBLE

THE JESUS OF PETER AND THE CHRIST OF PAUL

Dear Friend:

Several exceedingly difficult questions confronted the bishops and pastors of the primitive Christian Church. Most of these men were utterly unschooled in that pedantry which was later to bring confusion to Christianity. The faith of these first preachers of Christendom is not to be questioned. They bore ample witness to contrition and devotion. We shall, therefore, assume their absolute sincerity; but there is a vast gulf between sincerity and reason.

The early bishops were not theologians according to our present understanding of the word. They were pastors of small flocks. Some came from the desert, others from the hills, a few from popular centers, but most of them from isolated communities. Courageous and contrite men, they desired to believe in the Christian dispensation, and the very desire gave substance to their beliefs. Such was the caliber of the men to whom the teachings of Christ had been entrusted by the apostles and disciples.

These ragged bishops, with their deacons and a few others, were elected to solve the mighty issues of the Church. Their words were to become dogmas, and even hasty utterances assumed canonical

proportions. It would have been difficult enough if these devout but simple men had been confronted with profane matters. But these same men lay down their opinions on sacred and invisible matters beyond the ken of the most able jurist, though in a court of law their opinions would have had little weight.

Was Christ the Son of God or the son of man? Was he begotten of the Father or born in mortal wedlock? Was he identical with the Father? Did the Father give him dominion over all lands and all peoples? What was the Holy Ghost? Was Christ the same as the Holy Ghost? Were the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost one person, three persons, three in one person, or one in three persons? It was also a mooted question as to whether divine unity was numerically or philosophically three. Was the Virgin Mary human or divine? Was it proper to worship, adore, or beseech the Virgin Mary?

These were weighty problems for illiterate men. Yet upon their decisions hung the future of a great religion and the fate of a thousand generations yet unborn. Is it to be wondered at that the bishops

disagreed, that some were banished from the councils, and others branded as heresiarchs? Out of the struggles of these men after truth, out of their prayers and meditations, out of debate and controversy, out of feud and schism emerged Christian theology—the product of fallible men, dreaming after the infallible, seeking with finite minds to probe the mysteries of the infinite.

After they had finished their councils, the bishops and deacons returned to their deserts, their hills, and their towns, leaving behind them a monument of opinions which were to become the very essence of orthodoxy. From their gropings have emerged the hundreds of sects which together now constitute the Christian faith.

Broadly considered, these first bishops were divided into two camps, each ready to wage war upon the other. Nor did they ever become of one mind. From their synods and councils, held from time to time during nearly a thousand years, have emerged two utterly diverse opinions concerning the substance, nature, and estate of Jesus Christ.

To the first group, Jesus was a holy and good man, filled with the love of God. He had brought a revelation of the divine desire to his people. He was a patriarch like the holy ones of old, a prophet, a king of kings raised up among the Jews, a seer and a sage dignified above other men, because in his soul he had been lifted up into a communion with God. It was this doctrine of the humanity of Jesus that gave rise to Islamism. On one occasion Mohammed is reported to have said: "This Jesus was a good and holy man, a teacher among the Jews, but one day his disciples became mad and made a god of him."

To the second and favored group, whose opinion has long dominated the Christian Church, Christ was no ordinary mortal, but a very god incarnate, nominated and elected to this high estate by his own bishops. In Christ bodily dwelt the three persons of the godhead; in him dwelt the Creator of heaven and earth, wholly and completely. It was, therefore, the Sovereign Spirit of the world who walked beside the Sea of Galilee and preached from a boat beside its shore. God had taken on flesh and dwelt

with men, had assumed the nature and appearance of a man, and had died crucified by his own creation. By his death the ever-merciful Father had opened wide the gates of salvation for all who believed on him.

These two utterly irreconcilable concepts were never to meet. Both survived, enduring to the present, each remaining—as in the third century—a thorn in the flesh of the other.

Although Peter thrice denied his Lord, to him were given the keys of heaven. In the symbolism of Christianity he was the "rock"—PETROS, the stone—on which the church of Christ was to be built. To Peter there were no "mysteries," all was literally and utterly true. Though the flesh sometimes failed him, Peter loved his Lord with a dogged devotion, content to follow after him, satisfied to be near him. To Peter, Christ was God, justified by the doctrine and demonstrated by the miracles. With an almost unlimited capacity to believe, Peter questioned nothing; and from his undoubting acceptance descended the Church of Christ, built upon his name, believing without questioning. To Peter, heaven and hell were places, and the middle distances of the world were filled with spirits, good and bad, herded by angels and demons.

Peter was not different from many of the evangelists of our present time who, in the face of an ever-growing knowledge, preach the "jot and tittle" of the scriptures. They demand that one accept the Bible as literal and unquestionable history. To them, it is an historical document. It never occurs to them that there might be something hidden in the "Book of books," some mystical and symbolical meaning that may only be recognized by an inner enlightenment quickened by the spirit. After nearly two thousand years, hundreds of millions of Christians today neither doubt, question, nor examine, but read, listen, and believe.

A very different kind of man was Saul of Tarsus—the little one—even in his own time a problem to the apostles. After his vision on the road to Damascus, Saul (who later became Paul) discovered the "mystery in the spirit." He possessed a peculiar advantage—he never had met Jesus and

was not under the dominance of his powerful personality that seemed to control and blind the minds of the other disciples. Paul saw "as one afar off." He had a perspective that was absent in the others. Furthermore, he brought education and vision to the "mysteries" and discovered their inner meaning.

It was a task of early orthodoxy to confuse the Pauline epistles. Paul could not be ignored nor entirely destroyed. His sphere of influence had been too wide. The easiest solution was to corrupt his writings, thus destroying his subtler meanings. The result of this questionable strategy is obvious to the impartial reader. Paul is made to contradict himself; statements obviously inconsistent with his vision stand side by side with the most lofty and transcendental thoughts.

Mutilated though they be, the epistles of Paul reveal occasionally his mystical perception. Paul realized that it was not the Jesus who walked the dusty roads of Syria but the "Christ in you" that is the "hope of glory." He realized that Christ is a principle and not a man, that Jesus had come to "bear witness" for that principle. He had come to his own but his own had received him not. Paul sought to honor the teacher, by honoring the teaching. He penetrated the outer veil of the temple before which the apostles knelt, and passed into the adytum where he beheld the "mystery" face to face.

Paul's larger story was the great problem of the early Church, and they sought in vain to confuse him. Paul knew the meaning of the mystical divinity, "the baptism of the Spirit." He realized that man must search vainly in the world for those precious spiritual truths that he can discover only within himself.

To Peter, the Christian "mystery" was that of God made flesh; to Paul it was flesh made God. These two could never mingle their interpretations into a common purpose, and it is recorded in the early writings that Paul visited Peter but Peter refused to see him.

Paul preached the Logos, that is, the teaching of the divine foundation of the world. Perhaps he was an initiate of some pagan "Mystery" resolved to "quicken" Christendom with the old truths. It is possible that he had contacted the germ of Gnosticism that had begun to unfold among the thinkers of Egypt and Israel. We cannot be certain of the source of Paul's knowledge, but one thing is true beyond doubt, Paul did know and his realization created a division within the Christian Church that all the centuries have been unable to overcome.

It is proper to study history but not proper to worship it. The Christian Bible is a semi-historical account of certain possible happenings which, in themselves, are not necessarily the appropriate foundation for a faith. Nor does this history, or neo-history, or in some cases outright fiction, insure salvation by the reading or acceptance of it. This is the error of the ages. In a desperate effort to preserve the "letter" of the law we have committed grievous errors in the name of truth.

By interpretation we discover that Christianity is not the only religion to possess certain mystical traditions. The mystic cannot be creed-bound. If we search far enough into Christian metaphysics we are apt to fall upon Greek and Roman pagan "mysteries," Buddhist philosophy, Pythagorean mathematics, and Gnostic ideology.

The fanatical attitude of the orthodox Christian historian is based upon the fear that a mystical interpretation will detract from the uniqueness of the Christian faith. To the individual who believes that Christianity is different from all other faiths, this would be a harrowing and mortifying discovery. It would breach the walls of Christian isolation, destroy forever the superiority complex of Christendom.

The attitude so far, therefore, has been: "It is better to see nothing rather than that which is not agreeable. Seek not, lest ye find that which will compromise the sovereignty of Christian theology."

PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF THE LOGOS

There is every probability that Paul's conception of the divine "mystery" was profoundly influenced by Greek philosophy. The New Testament was first written in Greek. The oldest existing manuscripts bear witness to Greek scholarship. There is no existing manuscript to indicate that the words of Jesus were first recorded in his own language.

At the beginning of the Christian Era, Greek scholarship dominated the Roman Empire. Roman patricians engaged Greek tutors for their sons. Rome—never a philosophical empire—dabbled superficially in Greek learning and then returned to its more congenial tasks of conquest and control. Many of the first converts to the Christian faith were men of Greek learning. Therefore, in the interpretation of Christian metaphysics, it will be useful to consider the substance of Platonic teaching concerning the nature of the Logos. It will then be obvious that the Christian teaching is but a thinly veiled restatement of the Greek original.

The god of the solar system was termed by the Greeks the LOGOS, or the WORD—the same Word that, according to St. John, was made flesh. The Logos is three natures in one nature, the parts collectively being termed the LOGOI. The divine nature in its own right is the FIRST LOGOS. It is the One within whose nature all the parts of the solar system to the very circumference of the zodiac "live, and move, and have their (our) being."

From the nature of the First Logos is caused to emerge by will the SECOND LOGOS, which is the solar system in its visible parts—not born, but begotten, because it is the progeny of one nature. The First Logos is the invisible solar system, that is, the spiritual nature of the world. The Second Logos is the invisible made visible, the Word in its fleshly part. This Second Logos—generally termed the World—consisting of the planets, moons, and all the elements and creatures distributed throughout them, is truly the only begotten of the Father, consisting of a positive and a negative nature commonly known as spirit and matter.

The blending of spirit and matter produces form, and of all formal bodies the highest manifestation is mind. Therefore, Mind is the third person of the Logos, the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, the Seeker after divine "mysteries." Mind is that power within all objects existing in a temporal state which enables them ultimately to regain their invisible, divine condition through reason.

These three together—God, the Universe, and Mind—are the Three in One and the One in Three. These are the Logoi—the whole of Nature and its parts. The creating power abides in the midst of its world and is not manifested separately from it. Therefore, literally, Christ is the creation, the universe born of the invisible "mystery." It is obvious that the laws, principles, and forms of nature which make up the world could not be enclosed within the frail fabric of one mortal person, even should that person be an initiate of the highest order.

Jesus, then, is the one who bears witness. He must be regarded as a normal human being who, having discovered the "mystery," sought to incline men towards the attainment of the greatest good. He taught the multitude in parables, but to his disciples he told certain things not mentioned in the gospels.

It is quite possible that the great Gnostic book the PISTIS SOPHIA may be an account of the hidden doctrine which Jesus gave to his disciples. Of this we cannot be sure, but such is the claim that was made for the book by its original author in a time now remote.

The PISTIS SOPHIA tells of the aeons and of the one who dwells in the light of the Soter, the son of the aeons—Truth—that shall save all who take shelter in it. Why more has not been heard of this book and the secret instructions which Jesus gave to Mary of Magdala is probably due to the cataclysmic effect its general circulation might have on Christian orthodoxy.

THE MARTYRDOM OF THE DISCIPLES

Nearly all the disciples of Jesus Christ are believed to have suffered martyrdom. The hagiology of the Christian Church describes in detail the

suffering and death of the numerous martyrs of the early Church. In the *GOLDEN LEGEND*, *Jacobus de Voragine* not only publishes exaggerated accounts, but, in his various descriptions of miraculous happenings, approaches the achievements of *Baron Munchausen*. It is natural, of course, that Christendom should revere its martyrs as noble men and women who had undergone the greatest trials and tribulations for their faith. Nor should any man be criticized or condemned for his belief and his willingness to die for it.

From an impersonal standpoint, however, the substantial facts are less colorful than one might imagine. Rome was exceedingly tolerant religiously. The temples of a score of faiths faced upon the Forum. As long as men paid their taxes and admitted their allegiance, Rome cared but little for private belief, provided that belief threatened no treason to the state.

During the imperial period the Roman Caesars were regarded as proper objects of worship. Such worship, however, was not compulsory, and those who preferred to venerate *Serapis*, *Osiris*, or *Zeus* were free to do so. It was, however, a highly treasonable act to conspire against the station, person, or decrees of the Emperor, as these had a sanctity about them wholly inconsistent with the personal lives of the Caesars.

Impersonal consideration would indicate that very few of the first Christian martyrs were actually killed for their beliefs. Most of them were arrested for sedition and executed for crimes against the solidarity of the state.

The apostate Emperor *Julian*—the noblest of all the Romans and a man of the highest personal integrity as well as a student of the deepest classical philosophies—sums up his dislike for the Christians, of which sect at one time he had been a member, simply and directly in better words than most of the other members were able to use.

Julian never was able to understand why the Christians had a special predilection for "sinners." The Church was apparently developing the idea that the worst sinner made the greatest saint. *Julian* regarded this attitude as highly detrimental

to the state, because it encouraged delinquency by rewarding corruption instead of virtue. He also regarded as little less than seditious the Christian doctrine that all men are born sinners due to *Adam's* lamentable weaknesses. He also heartily disliked the political activity of various Christian groups which were attempting to destroy by every possible means, perfidious or otherwise, the pagan Roman Empire.

He resented, furthermore, that a class of people within the boundaries of the empire, for the most part the poorest educated and of least estate, should fanatically expound a belief that they were the sole possessors of truth; that all other gods were demons; all other philosophers, frauds; and all other institutions, heretical. It is barely possible that the Emperor's annoyance was well founded. If the attitude of converts two thousand years ago resembled the attitude of certain modern Christian fanatics, one gains a greater degree of sympathy for the plight of the Romans who were having a faith thrust upon them without the right to say nay.

Once the prejudice against Christians had reached violent proportions, crimes were unquestionably committed against sincere and innocent people. One has only to consider the *Inquisition* to realize how the Christians themselves resented any imaginary or real interference with their own dogma. Christians have tortured more Christians and pagans for their beliefs than ever suffered martyrdom under the Caesars.

A religion to be secure, to be noble, to be truly sufficient must be established upon a great philosophy. It must appeal to both the reason and the heart. It must call to itself only the noblest and the best, and acknowledge as members only those whose virtues merit such inclusion. The Christian Church never did this or held these ideals, thus bringing much persecution upon itself, and also persecuting itself most gravely.

At the time of the introduction of Christianity, the Roman Empire was not in the state of corruption into which it afterwards fell as the result of internecine strife. The Romans celebrated the rites of *Eleusis* and of *Dionysus* derived from the Greeks. They

performed, likewise, the rituals of Isis, Osiris, and Serapis, and they had begun to accept the Mysteries of Mithras, a Persian importation. The magnificent paintings which still survive upon the walls of the Villa of Dionysus at Pompeii prove beyond doubt that some, at least, among the Romans were true to the most enlightened Mysteries that the world has ever known.

Recent research is building up evidence to indicate that it was actually the Christians who burned Rome during the reign of Nero. The increasing body of archeological and historical material available today is reversing some of the opinions of the past. If it be true that Christian fanatics actually burned Rome, then the displeasure of the Romans and the efforts to destroy the cult could hardly be regarded as persecution.

Fanaticism is a by-product of blind faith. When the emotions are stirred to an intensity of feeling and the mind is left unsatisfied or unfed, the result is frequently a form of hysteria or temporary insanity. This is the reason why it is so necessary to discover the true philosophical meaning beneath the Christian faith, so that intelligence may support belief and Christianity become a vital, living force in world affairs instead of a helpless observer of war and crime among men.

There are abundant indications of philosophical footings in the Christian religion. What is necessary is a general reform; new and complete translations of the Bible, with various possible alternative renderings, from the earliest Greek manuscripts; an admission that much is not known and not knowable; and, most of all, an attempt to reconcile Christianity with the great philosophies of the ancient and modern worlds rather than the preservation of an attitude of isolation. As long as there is fanaticism there will be martyrs. But other great philosophies have been promulgated without violence, because honesty of thinking appeals equally to all men.

Astronomy is one of the seven keys to the understanding of the New Testament. Relics of astrology (worship of the heavenly bodies) and cosmogony (consideration of the shape and order of the universe) are to be found in every important

religious system. The twelve apostles of the New Testament are identical in meaning with the twelve jewels upon the breastplate of the high priest of Israel.

At some remote time the zodiacal constellations were delineated among the star groups approximately paralleling the terrestrial equator. As these star groups do not resemble, in most cases, the creature or symbol assigned to them, the origin of the system must have been an arbitrary allocation according to laws of ancient theology. The Ptolemaic belief that the sun annually moved through the twelve signs of the zodiac, which were its many mansions, is frequently reflected in religious symbolism. Many medieval cathedrals throughout Europe are ornamented with zodiacal symbols, and in some cases these signs are actually associated with sacred persons.

It is exceedingly dubious that the original historical Jesus actually had twelve apostles. If he did by chance select this number, it was because he was aware of the astronomical significance. The destruction of numerous gospels after the Nicene Council indicates that many other apostles whose names have not survived may have been closely associated with the master and his work. The Church, however, following Egyptian and Greek precedent, arbitrarily fixed upon twelve, thus indicating that it was aware of the sanctity peculiar to this number.

In the astronomical symbolism, the sun entering into the various signs in sequence takes upon itself the phases, attributes, and aspects of those signs through which the solar force was said to be "mediated" or modified. Therefore, the twelve disciples actually represent the twelve attributes of the Logos, or the sun, both visible and invisible, and should be considered the parts of one being rather than twelve separate beings, each with an arbitrary interpretation of its own.

When St. Augustine was asked why four of the apostles were especially designated from the rest, he replied that it was necessary that there be four principal gospels because there were four corners to the world, thus admitting a relationship between

cosmogony and theology. The association of these four selected evangelists with certain creatures representing the four fixed signs of the zodiac intensifies the realization that we are dealing not with human beings but with the characters of a sublime cosmologic drama, reduced to human estate by the ignorance of clergy and laity alike.

Reference has already been made to the fact that the four gospels were themselves contrived, being merely accounts built up from material derived from the Gospel of Matthew. It seems, therefore, that it was necessary to make the four gospels so that the corners of the world would not be left without appropriate representation.

There is one other point of interest, in this connection. After the perfidy of Judas Iscariot, the number of the apostles was reduced to eleven. For this reason, St. Paul was added to the body of the elect to restore the perfect twelve. In spite of St. Augustine's opinion in allowing St. John to be assigned to the constellation of Scorpio, this arrangement was purely symbolical for astronomical purposes. In the original order Judas Iscariot was Scorpio. After his departure from the twelve, therefore, St. Paul assumes the toga of the Scorpion. The sign of Scorpio coincided with that season of the year during which initiation was usually given in the Greater Mysteries. Judas Iscariot is the negative Scorpio, unredeemed; St. Paul is the virtuous Scorpio, the enlightener, and of all the twelve the most likely to have been an initiate of pagan Mysteries. It is, therefore, appropriate that the most important keys to initiation to be found in the New Testament should occur in the writings of Paul, the small one who had become great.

BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

It is impossible to date with certainty the true time of the beginning of the Christian Church. It is only possible to specify the principal epochs within the structure of the Church itself. Christianity was punctuated by many councils that directed the whole movement of Christian theology.

Presumably, the Church began with Christ. There is no evidence, however, that the chief doctrines of the modern church, especially with regard to the sacraments, the nature of God, and so forth, were a concern of the first apostles. The Christian Church marched slowly over the background of its time, found increasing favor over a period of centuries, and with the death of Constantine became the ruling power in ecclesiastical Europe.

It has been said that Jesus gave the doctrine and Constantine gave the church. This approximately summarizes the matter. The power of the early Church lay in its influence over the masses. It was not the faith of the noble during the first centuries but the faith of the shopkeeper and even the slave. Its power increased through the sheer weight of numbers rather than through special favor by any group. Its early dogmas were uncertain; there was much groping. But after the Council of Nice, a certain integration was obvious, and this was the true foundation of the Church. The ante-Nicene period was the period of apology. The great fathers of this time were engaged upon a defensive program. The heathen and the infidel were appropriately stigmatized; but loudest of all, arose the cry to be heard and to be given an opportunity to prove the magnificence of the new religious ideal. A number of the old pagans were treated not only with tolerance but with generosity. Hermes met with the approval of the fathers, and Plato's teachings were given considerable attention.

After the Nicene Council, apology gave place to diatribe. The early Church was more sure of itself. It no longer asked, it demanded. The post-Nicene fathers proclaimed their opinions, whereas earlier writers had advanced theirs with caution.

The post-Nicene fathers also had a quicker eye for heresy. A mass of belief was gradually being shaped into a creed to which there must be conformity. There was some confusion in the effort to determine fine points of acceptance or rejection, but the faith was strong with youth and began the moral conquest of Europe, a course which remained unchecked until the Reformation.

The Christian Church occupied a unique position in the policies of medieval Europe. It was a sovereignty unto itself, demanding allegiance from all sovereigns. It regarded itself as the ultimate empire, above and beyond all temporal purpose or power. Kings sat upon their thrones because of the favor of the Church, and at the dictates of the Great Mother, king and commoner alike must act.

The Reformation brought to an end the Church's dream of temporal power. One after another the Protestant sects broke away. The Church thundered in vain. Men lost faith with their spiritual leaders because of the numerous occasions on which certain dogmas of theology had been proved fallible. The result is a Christendom divided against itself.

What brought about this great change?

In the first place, after the birth of science, man became more and more conscious of his physical estate. In earlier days, physical security was unknown. Plague, pestilence, and war destroyed him. Life was short and the struggle difficult. Printing brought him books, and books brought with them education. Man became aware of the outer world. He lived no more merely in the anteroom of heaven, but in a spacious physical universe in which there was room and opportunity for physical achievement. The Church had taught that material life was nothing, that man should be constantly

preparing himself for eternity. Exploration enlarged the world. The invention of the telescope and the microscope made man matter-conscious. He saw his physical life as significant and he dreamed of schemes to lengthen it. He sought wealth and position, and refused to continue to regard himself as a sinner merely through the accident of existence. The more he lived in the physical world the more distant the invisible world became, and by the middle of the nineteenth century it focused his attention so completely upon matter that he came even to doubt the existence of those very demons who had plagued his forbears. Thus released and removed from bondage to invisible things that once he had worshipped, theology ceased to fascinate him.

This great swing of the pendulum was the inevitable consequence of fanaticism. From one extreme the mind moves inevitably to the other. The pendulum swings eternally from God to godlessness, and back again. As from some strange, fantastic prison man has emerged from theological domination. Having breathed the atmosphere of freedom of thought, he regards as the most cherished possession of life the right and privilege to order his life by the light of individual reason.

Yours sincerely,

Manly P. Hall