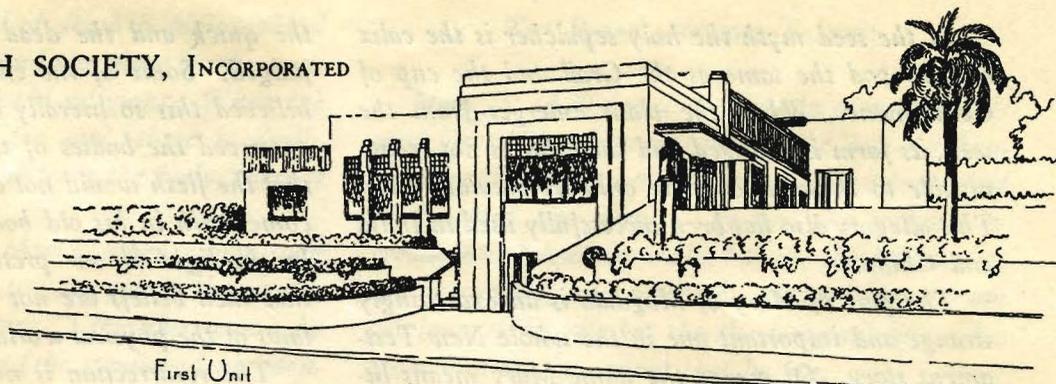


PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY, INCORPORATED

3341 GRIFFITH PARK BOULEVARD

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA



First Unit

BIBLE COURSE SERIES

BY MANLY P. HALL

FOURTH YEAR

THE STUDENTS MONTHLY LETTER

Letter No. 10

THE SECRET DOCTRINE IN THE BIBLE

Dear Friend:

The resurrection myth is common to most of the great world religions. It seems to have originated among the agricultural folklore of primitive human society. The seed planted in the earth brought forth life. The processes of germination and growth were far beyond the understanding of our agrarian ancestors. The result is a complicated mythology in which hero-gods descend into the earth and finally rise again.

A simple form of the seed myth is to be found in the Babylonian story of Tammuz and Ishtar. Tammuz is the seed that descends into the underworld where it remains as a thing dead until Ishtar, goddess of fertility and the humid vapors of the earth, rescues the seed from its dark grave and brings it forth into light.

The resurrection of the seed was not only a mystery in itself, but was intimately associated with human survival. If the seed failed to grow, there was famine and death. Therefore it was appropriate to offer prayers and sacrifices to propitiate the harvest. A tenth part was put away for the new planting. This is the origin of tithing which has survived as an integral part of many theological systems. There is abundant evidence that the authors of the gospels were aware of the mystery of the seed.

Matt. 13 contains several references to the seed myth. In Luke 8: 10-11 is the following highly significant statement: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God."

We must remember that it is explicitly stated in the gospel according to John that Jesus Christ is the Word, the only begotten of the Father. According to St. Paul, unless the seed die it cannot live again. Therefore, it becomes obvious to the studiously minded that the writers of the New Testament intended the agricultural myth to be recognized as one of the keys to the resurrection story.

In the gospel according to Luke, chapter 24, is described the empty sepulcher of Jesus. It is further described that Jesus himself came unto the disciples and conversed with them, but they knew him not.

According to the account given in John 20: 16-17, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene who immediately recognized him. When Mary turned to him, Jesus said: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my father." It would be inferred, therefore, that Jesus appeared not in the flesh, but in the spirit by a mystery.

In the seed myth the holy sepulcher is the calix or seed pod the same as the Grail and the cup of Gethsemane. When the plant emerges from the seed, its form is changed and therefore is not recognizable to those who knew only its previous state. This allegory also has been successfully used in India and China.

The part of Mary of Magdala is an exceedingly strange and important one in the whole New Testament story. Of course the name Mary means literally water and is an adaptation of the Hebrew name Miriam. The word Magdala means from the Greek, a tower, a fortress, a place of strength, a defense or security. Like many Bible names it is a carefully conceived key to the Bible mysteries. Like the Helen of the Greeks, Mary Magdalene symbolizes the moon, the consort of the sun; the principle of humidity, water, MARE and a high fortress or place of protection, Mary of Magdala is like the Ishtar of the Babylonians and the Mylitta of the Phrygians. She is the mistress of growing things, the very symbol of the humid principle that brings forth life.

Magdalene's place in the New Testament story has been subject to mutilation and change, but still the original principles are faintly evident. Mary recognizes her Lord, but the others gather with him and perceive him not because of the metamorphosis that has taken place. The story has been philosophized and theologized, but still it is the agricultural myth.

In the last verses of Luke 24: 51 the ascension is described. "And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." To most Bible students Jesus was physically and literally raised from the dead, appearing physically and literally to his disciples. A study of the gospel account by no means substantiates this attitude, but implies that both the resurrection and ascension were spiritual mysteries. The Christian awaits his day of liberation when he shall be reborn in Christ, but it seems that he is not informed as to the true nature of this spiritual experience.

During centuries of literalism, it was actually believed that a judgment day would come, and in this last day the tombs of the dead would open, and

the quick and the dead would come forth to be judged. Some of the early Christian communities believed this so literally and so intensely that they preserved the bodies of their dead in vats of oil so that the flesh would not corrupt and the man could come forth in his old body for the final judgment. In the light of our present knowledge we realize that such beliefs are not only inconsistent with the laws of the physical world, but of religion likewise.

The resurrection is not the raising of the dead from their graveclothes and their tombs, but rather the lifting up into life and light of the spiritual nature which is within man. Truly, it is the Christ in you, the hope of glory, that must be raised up. The resurrection is an internal and eternal mystery. It is regeneration, the release of the spiritual entity from its material sepulcher of body, instinct, and appetite.

The mystic resurrection is accomplished in two ways: spiritually through illumination, the sublimation of appetites, and the purification of desires; physically, the spiritual nature is released through the phenomenon of death. According to the terminology of the classical philosophers, death is the ACCIDENTAL separation of the superior and inferior parts of man. The word ACCIDENTAL is used here in its philosophical sense as the antonym of INTENTIONAL. Resurrection or release through death is a separation rather than a transmutation, therefore it is not regarded as a spiritual victory. Illumination is the conscious separation during life of the divine from the animal man. It is a conscious resurrection. It is a lifting up through effort and integrity. Therefore it properly may be termed INTENTIONAL.

Plato describes the spiritual part of man as imprisoned within the sepulcher of the flesh as the oyster is imprisoned within its shell. This shell is the holy sepulcher, the tomb of a god. The true resurrection is the lifting of the mind from matter and the life from bondage to physical propensities.

There are two forms of death: the first is the separation of the animal nature from its spiritual part through material accident or disease; the other is the dying out of desires, appetites, and other attributes of the animal nature through discipline and regeneration without the dissolution of bodily har-

mony. This second kind of death is philosophical and truly religious, and finds its place in the symbolism of all the great world religions. When the body is separated from the soul, there is death. When the soul is separated from the body, there is illumination.

In the early Christian church, when a man took holy orders, he was said to "die out of the world, to enter a new life in spirit." For this reason he usually changed his name (the symbol of his identity), taking some mystical or religious name to represent this transition from one state to another. He renounced worldliness, took obligations of detachment from material things, and was as a man apart, sanctified unto God. This is a form of the resurrection, and the physical shadow of the greater mysteries which take place in the consciousness itself. Unfortunately, most men can perceive only the body of the law and attempt to obey its letter. The few who are illuminated, however, perceive the soul of the law and become participants in the spiritual mysteries.

THE PARABLES

The parable is a favorite method of religious instruction and is to be found in most of the sacred writings of the world's great religious systems. A parable is a statement of simple truth which by analogy or symbolical extension reveals a greater and more universal truth. Most parables have moral interpretations, inviting the mind to a consideration of virtue, responsibility, duty, and service. Some parables are descriptive of the condition of man, and like the emblem book of the Middle Ages, reveal the imperfection of man until human nature is united with divine nature.

In certain parts of the New Testament Jesus is made to teach through parables, through homely sayings about familiar things. But the reader must not be deceived into overlooking the fact that a large part of the New Testament itself is a parable, a human statement of divine matters, and that Christ stands in the midst of the great Christian parable as the personification of the righteous man passing through the vicissitudes of life.

Matt. 25: 14-30 describes a certain man who calls unto himself his three servants, to the first of whom he gives five talents, to the second, two talents, and to the third, one talent. The first two servants increase their talents by trade, but the third buries his in the ground, and when the master returns from his journey he rebukes the third servant and takes from him the one talent that he has.

There are many interpretations of this parable, the most obvious of which is a statement of use. USE OR LOSE is a natural law. We are responsible for the abilities that we possess and are judged according to the application we have made of the knowledge that we possess. A man who possesses power and fails to use that power for the greatest good of all shall inevitably lose his power. A man of wealth who does not conscientiously administer the responsibility of wealth shall lose that which he has. It is the duty of all, that, possessing they share, knowing they teach, and commanding they serve.

A less obvious but more profound interpretation is suggested. The talents become like the mustard seed, a symbol of divine energies, or the doctrine, the teaching, the message Jesus Christ had to bring. Those who received to themselves this doctrine were expected to go forth and increase the doctrine, thus fulfilling the responsibility of the learned. The man who hid his doctrine in the earth, that is attempted to hold truth and prevent others from receiving it, was rebuked by his master and lost the very wisdom he had attempted to keep for himself.

It is a common experience in religion to find a certain selfish desire to be superior. For example, I know of a certain case in which a student of the advanced philosophies secured a most precious book not generally available. The student desiring to keep the source of his new knowledge to himself, locked his book in the safe and refused to show it to others. Needless to say, he impoverished himself by his attitude and lost the very truth that he was seeking.

A talent is not only a coin, it is a word that signifies an ability, some expertness or exceptional precocity. The parable can well be interpreted by

regarding the talent as an enrichment of the soul, an ability to do something better than other men can do it. By this interpretation to hide one's talent is to lose it. It is expected of all men that they shall make use of the power which they possess, and again we must use or else lose.

In the parable, the servant who buried his talent in the earth, did so because he was afraid. He was a weak, conscientious man who believed that there was virtue in a conservative viewpoint. Here again the story urges man on to individual effort. It is not enough to possess, it is necessary to strive to make effort with possession, constantly to improve that which he has.

According to the Pythagoreans the soul of man is composed of eight parts. These parts are divided into three groups of which the first contains five, the second two, and the last one. These are termed EXTENSIONS of the soul. Here then is the true key to at least one esoteric interpretation of this parable. The first part of the soul is made up of the five senses, the media of cognizance. The second part of the soul is made up of the two principal body functions, nutrition and propagation. And the last or third part consists of one extension which is the physical body itself, the lowest extremity of the soul. The physical body then is the buried talent, buried not in earth but in the material sphere. The three servants, are the three parts of the soul, the divine, human, and animal soul. The master of the three servants is the spirit who truly is the keeper of the house. When man descends into a physical state and becomes conscious only of body and unaware of the spiritual parts of himself, he rightfully earns the displeasure of his master. A little consideration will clarify the entire parable.

THE PARABLE OF THE SEED

Mark 4 contains several parables of which two are important to our present consideration. The first is the PARABLE OF THE SOWER: Some of the seed fell on stony ground, and some fell by the wayside to be devoured by the birds of the air, and some was scorched by the sun, and others fell among thorns,

and a few fell upon good ground and brought forth an hundredfold. Christ explains the parable of the words of Mark 4: 14: "The sower soweth the word."

In this simple but truly inspired story is revealed the whole mystery of teaching. The sower is God, the seeds are truth, and the grounds into which they fall are the hearts of men. Some receive the truth and others reject it; some distort it, and others permit it to be plucked out by impulses and words; by weeds are to be understood the appetites and passions of the lower emotional nature; by the birds of the air, thoughts; by the sun, pride; and by the stony ground, such as are not yet ready to receive the law. But when the words of truth are brought to the one who is ready and in need, then it is said that the seed has fallen in good ground and from that heart grows up the tree of the soul, and truth increases like the mustard seed which being of no size in itself yet grows into a great bush, increasing many thousands of times.

In the heart of every man is the germ or seed of a divine nature. When it reaches the point of understanding, the seed is quickened and grows into a mighty tree, thus symbolizing the development of the whole spiritual nature which increases greatly when man has learned to understand and obey the mysteries of the universe.

This is the key to the second parable, Mark 4: 26: "And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground." In the East it is taught that men are the harvest of the Gods. Man having received unto himself the divine power increases as a plant and brings forth the flower and fruit. The fruit of the tree is wisdom, the perfect harvest of living; and the flower of the tree is virtue which gives way to wisdom. And it is the duty of man to become wise, even as it is the duty of the tree to bring forth fruit. As an old mystic of the Middle Ages once said: "Godliness is the fruit of life." The tree has always been the appropriate symbol of creation. To the Egyptians the universe actually is a tree; to the Norse people the magic ash Yggdrasil bore the world in its branches. The tree on Meru supports the heavens. Creation is a tree and man is the fruit of that tree. The whole visible cosmos conspires to perfect man who is truly the

fruit of the tree of life. This parable is worthy of much meditation.

THE EYE OF A NEEDLE

The parable of the needle's eye occurs several times in the New Testament. Luke 18: 25 contains the following statement: "For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

In the wall of the ancient city of Jerusalem there remains to this day a small door which is called THE NEEDLE'S EYE. This gate is so narrow and low that for a camel to go through it, the animal must be unloaded. Thus we have a key to the moralism of this parable. If the camel is relieved of its burden and lowers its head, it will just go through the Needle gate. In the parable a rich man is one who possesses this world's goods, or more significantly, one who suffers from the illusion of the significance of this world's goods. A man may be poor and still have the rich man's curse, the desire for wealth, a complex of possessions, and impulse towards accumulations. As the camel must leave its burden behind if it would pass through the NEEDLE gate, so all men must leave behind the complex of accumulation if they would enter the kingdom of heaven. The spiritual sphere always is symbolized as having a tiny door that will just permit to enter what man is, but not what man has.

There is much misunderstanding on the subject of wealth and religion. There is no virtue in great wealth, nor again is there great vice if the wealth has been honestly accumulated. It is not what we have, but the consciousness of possession, the illusion that we may possess, that is the cause of difficulty. Man brings into this world nothing but what he is, and he takes from this world at the end, nothing but what he is. In the interlude between the cradle and the grave men strive madly to accumulate the symbols of wealth and superiority. In their struggle to accumulate, these same men forget to become. The responsibility of possessions alone cramps the soul binding it Ixionlike to the wheel of loss and gain. I have talked about philosophy to many peo-

ple who have wealth; they always answer with a sigh: "We should love to learn, but we are so hampered with the problems of the day and the administration of that which we possess."

Wealth, therefore, impoverishes man, deprives him of time, absorbs his interests, depletes his strength, and leaves him incapable of becoming wise. So in the parable of the needle's eye, if we leave the burden behind, we may enter in. A man once asked Aristotle how much he wanted of this world's goods; and Aristotle replied: "Only this much, that if I fell into the sea, I could still swim ashore."

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

In Matt. 18: 12-13, is given the parable of the lost sheep. The shepherd leaving the ninety and nine sheep went forth to seek the one that had wandered away. In this parable Christ is the psychopomp, the shepherd of souls. He is Anubis that guards the flock, the faithful one. He is Hermes, the herdsman, the keeper of the herds of heaven. He is Orpheus, the good shepherd. On the walls of the catacombs in Rome and the ruined villas of Pompei and Herculaneum are paintings of the good shepherd carrying in his one arm the sheep that had strayed and in the other the shepherd's crook, a hooked staff. On numerous occasions Christ himself, identified with the lamb, is not only the shepherd but is also one of the sheep. He is the lamb of God. Those who accept him are purified in the blood of the lamb. He is a form of the scapegoat. To this day his bishops carry the crosier to signify that they are shepherds over men.

The interpretation of the shepherd story is both moral and astronomical. Christ is a form of the sun-god, and like this solar deity sustains all life with his bounty. For the two thousand years prior to the Christian Era, and for several centuries thereafter, the vernal equinox occurred in the sign of the ram, the heavenly sheep. This lamb was the leader of the herd of constellations, the bellwether of the sky. It was for this reason that according to Godfrey Higgins in his ANACALYPSIS the priests of Eleusis came out on the portico of the temple at

the time of the vernal equinox as early as 1400 B. C. and cried out to the assembled multitude as they held aloft a lamb: "All hail, Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

The shepherds so-called were the primitive initiates of those elder mysteries performed in remote ages. The wise man is a guardian of the flock of humanity. He leads his sheep into green pastures; he is the lawgiver, the priest, and the king, the ruler of the three worlds and of the three parts of man. Osiris, the Egyptian god of the underworld (the material sphere) frequently is depicted carrying the shepherd's crook. This same token of the shepherd was among the coronation scepters of the Egyptian pharaohs. When the mummified remains of Egypt's ancient kings are discovered by modern archeologists, the dried hands always hold the crosier, the symbol of temporal authority, and the fulfillment of the admonition: "Protect my sheep."

The sheep is an animal of gentle ways but no great brilliancy of mind. It always follows the leader and wails dismally if left behind. By this symbol is to be understood the great body of mankind which still follows the leader and wishes to be guided into green pastures. It is the duty of wisdom, of strength, and of integrity to guard the sheep. But there are false shepherds who would lead the sheep astray. And there are wild beasts that would carry away the lamb. So the initiate-teacher became the guardian of his disciples, protecting them against evil and leading them in the way of righteousness. The story is very old, part of the pagan symbolism of the ancient world. It has descended for nearly four thousand years, not as a Christian story, but as a story that has been Christianized because no more appropriate symbolism could be devised.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

In Proverbs 2: 2-5, it is written that wisdom is the most desirable of all things. She must be sought for as silver, and searched out as a hidden treasure. In Matt. 13: 45-46, is described the pearl of great price. This pearl is the kingdom of heaven. When a man discovers this pearl, he sells all his worldly

goods that he may secure it, for it is valued above all other things.

The pearl is a most mysterious and sacred symbol for it is produced within the oyster as a protection against some foreign substance that enters the shell. This is the same oyster described by Plato when he explains that man is held within his body as an oyster is held within its shell. Man through experience and suffering (the foreign particles) builds the soul (the pearl) as a protection or as a method of rendering evil harmless. The pearl thus becomes the symbol of the godliness and divinity that is within man, especially in its attribute as soul, the link between spirit and body.

During the medieval times there sprang up in Europe a mysterious sect called the ILLUMINATI. The story of the pearl of great price became the most important part of their ritual and members of the order were dedicated to the search for this pearl in the same way that the Knights of the Round Table sought for the Grail.

To the ILLUMINATI the pearl was virtue, man's protection against evil; it was wisdom, man's protection against ignorance; it was faith, man's protection against death; and most of all it was understanding, man's protection against life.

In the esoteric tradition, the pearl has gained a new, or rather a more perfectly stated meaning. The pearl of great price is hidden in the depths of the sea and those who would secure it must dive down into the waters and search for the pearl in the subaqueous sphere. Thus the pearl becomes the symbol of truth; the ocean, the sea of rebirth; and the diver, the human spirit that must descend into the gloomy and mysterious depths in search of truth.

It is a proper part of symbolism that divine truths should find their analogies in the most precious of physical things. Thus, while base metals and nonprecious stones are the appropriate symbols of the physical world and its comparative unimportance, precious stones and the most valuable of the metals may be likened to spiritual matters. Therefore the shrines of the gods are adorned with the most precious of this world's goods and the robes of the priests of ancient times were encrusted

with jewels, and the ornaments of the temples were of the purest metal without dross. Man gave the best as his offering to the Best. Whatever was dear and valuable to him, was to some degree symbolical of truth, the most precious thing in the world.

In another parable, that of casting pearls before swine, the pearls become symbols of wisdom, and swine by their nature animals of gross and profane habits, that greater part of humanity which is incapable of comprehending wisdom. It is not right to profane wisdom by bestowing it upon that which obviously is unworthy. Wisdom must be superior, protected, and made available only to such as can comprehend it. That is why the esoteric sciences have remained, even to this day, in the possession of a few who bestow them only upon worthy and upright candidates. The Mysteries must not be defiled.

THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15: 11-32. The story of the prodigal son is the greatest of all the parables. It reveals an intimate knowledge of some of the deepest secrets of the pre-Christian mysteries and has become the inspiration of a vast literature. It is the proper account of the fall of man. Goethe's FAUST and Wagner's PARSIFAL are both based upon this fable. A son demanding his inheritance goes forth from his father's house and travelling to a distant land wastes his fortune in riotous living. Having lost all that he had, the prodigal who was reduced to the keeping of swine and to the greatest degradation, realizing at last the error of his ways, returns to his father's house where his father receives him with great love and joy. A feast of welcome is prepared. The other brother who had remained honestly with the father was aggrieved that his prodigal brother should be preferred before him. The father explains that the one who went forth and returned again had been lost but had been found, which was an adequate reason for rejoicing.

The father's house, of course, is the divine world, the same father's house in which there are many mansions. The father himself represents God, and

the two brothers two great waves of life. Of these, the prodigal son is humanity, and the righteous son who does not go forth represents the waves of life that never enter into a physical condition, that is never go down to Egypt, which in the Bible always represents a material and corrupted sphere. The son who went forth, descending into the material state, made numerous errors and misused the spiritual powers (wealth) which his father had given him. All the faculties and propensities of man are essentially divine, but material human beings have prostituted these powers and corrupted the spiritual virtues in the cause of material accumulation and power.

It is only after the unhappy experience of worldliness that man desires to return again to his father's house and begin the long and difficult evolutionary process which leads him back to God. At last, after numerous trials, he comes again to his father who receives him with great joy and gives him preferment above his righteous brother who never having been tempted had never risen above temptation.

In PARSIFAL the drama is divided into three acts, the first of which is played in the castle of Mont Salvat, the temple of the Grail which corresponds to heaven. The second act is played in the enchanted garden of Klingsor, the magician where the young knight Parsifal is tempted with all the illusions of the flesh. This represents the distant country away from the father's house. The third act also is played in the temple of the Grail back on top of the mountain. Here is shown the return of the knight to his father's house.

The story of Faust is a little more complicated but it shows the same grand division. The first part is Faust's rebellion against the tyranny of scholasticism and learning. This corresponds to the young son desiring to go forth into the adventure of material existence. The second part, WALPURGIS-NACHT, corresponds to Klingsor's garden, the inferior world with its temptations and perversions. The third part, called the redemption of Faust, proves "that a good man, even in adversity, shall not forget the God who let him be." Faust redeemed is lifted up amidst a chorus of angels.

The three parts of the story, therefore, are in

terms of material evolution, involution, epigenesis, and evolution. That is the descent of consciousness into form, the tragic drama of consciousness in form; and the triumphant ascent of consciousness out of form. The story is again beautifully set forth in one of the most inspiring of the Gnostic poems, the HYMN OF THE ROBE OF GLORY.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

A world religion always passes through certain mutations or phases before it becomes a widely recognized theological system. The founder of a great faith seldom lives to see his beliefs widely accepted. In the case of Buddha and Mohammed, however, the religion and its sects were well established in the lifetime of the prophets themselves. Religions are given to times and places. Jesus preached along the roads of Galilee. He preached to a people who had awaited for centuries the coming of a Messiah. His voice was raised against the evils of his time and his scourge of small cords was for the corrupt of that day.

There is no reason to believe that Jesus previsioned the ages that were to come, the ages dominated by the letter of the law. He never saw the cathedral builders, the Huguenots, the Templars, or the inquisitors.

The strength of the Christian revelation lay in the parables, the Sermon on the Mount, and the stories of the miracles. There is a body of obvious truths, of simple, direct, human truths, truths unchanged by time or empire. And around these truths was built up the great structure of Christian theology.

Then came interpretation, church councils and synods, the mumbling of profound mysteries, and balloting on the unity of God. Out of the chaos of the early councils emerged the churchianity of to-

day. From this same source came such doctrines as vicarious atonement and infant damnation. From these synods came orthodoxy, the enemy of truth.

The modern agnostic, the modern skeptic, even the modern atheist, has small quarrel with the golden rule or the simple words of Jesus. Their bitterness is directed against the great institution that was built up about the life and words of one just man.

The occultist and the philosopher are entirely willing to accept the mystical truths of Christianity for they are a part of all truth, all revelation, and all mysteries. What the mystic seeks to escape is not true Christianity but the contendings of unnumbered jarring sects that have theologized Jesus out of existence and put in his place a figure of their own conception.

The philosopher is not anti-Christian, he is anti-theological. He realizes that in the war of beliefs truth has been the victim of a conspiracy. The mystic believes with Dionysius the Areopagite that Jesus was a good man and that Christ was a mystery in the spirit. The struggle between these two beliefs, the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of Christ, is to be the subject of our next letter, to be titled THE JESUS OF PETER AND THE CHRIST OF PAUL.

Sincerely yours,

Manly P. Hall

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