



**One Eternal Round  
(Hermetic Version)**

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ONE ETERNAL ROUND  
THE HERMETIC VERSION\*

Primitive Atonement: our theme the last time was atonement, a bringing together of God and man. Those humans, spirits, or angels who are "at one" with God are naturally at one with each other and with all his creatures. We are speaking of a real event, past and future. This great bringing together or gathering in of all things was rehearsed in the grand manner by the earliest people who have left a record, a subject I have been writing on for fifty years. It begins with a survey of those prehistoric ceremonial centers, found throughout the world. The consistency of the pattern by which they are laid out suggests their use as ceremonial centers, and through the years accumulating data has sharpened the picture. Folklore, myth, legend, and custom, along with the geometrical sophistication of the centers and their astronomical correspondences, confirm the impression of something great going on long before anyone had hitherto suspected it.

There are two dominant theories explaining this strange world-wide phenomenon. One is C. J. Jung's: "With primitives . . . nothing alters, except perhaps the language. . . . Religious rites . . . have grown spontaneously out of the basic conditions of human nature, which are never invented and are everywhere the same."<sup>1</sup> The other, which is now generally accepted, is expressed by Lord Raglan: "There is nothing natural in the performance of rites";<sup>2</sup> "all extant rituals are derived from a single ritual system."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, "in all religions the myths, the doctrines, and the rites form a connected whole," including the death and resurrection of the god, a myth of creation, combat with an adversary, a sacred marriage, a triumphant procession.<sup>4</sup> In terms of language, Raglan asks us to envisage a people of great intelligence and sophistication who

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expressed their ideas in a rich idiom which has left its marks throughout the world among other far simpler languages. "What the evidence suggests is that the originators . . . of all known languages were people of acute and fertile minds who took a pride and a pleasure in working out complex grammatical systems . . . which have been wholly or partly abandoned in all modern language."<sup>5</sup> The labor of the great nineteenth-century philologists was to trace that spread and declension.

I summed up the ritual situation thus in an article 38 years ago:

At hundreds of holy shrines, each believed to mark the exact center of the universe and represented as the point at which the four quarters of the earth converged--"the navel of the earth"--one might have seen assembled at the New Year--the moment of creation, the beginning and ending of time (that's the eternal round)--vast concourses of people, each thought to represent the entire human race in the presence of all its ancestors and gods.<sup>6</sup>

The picture was confirmed some years later by Mircea Eliade, the foremost student of comparative religion of our time: "By virtue of these paradigmatic models revealed to men in mythical [i.e., prehistoric] times, the Cosmos and society are periodically regenerated."<sup>7</sup> Note that the man said "revealed." "It does not seem that any of them (rites) can be explained," Raglan concludes, there is "no accepted theory of its origin, or of the reason why it is believed to be efficacious."<sup>8</sup> So Eliade gives the logical explanation: "For the man of the traditional and archaic societies, the models . . . [were] 'revealed' at the beginning of time, . . . having a superhuman and 'transcendental' origin."<sup>9</sup> The author puts the words "revealed" and "transcendental" in quotes, because he, of course, does not believe in such revelation (at least in his scholarly writings); yet he must use that explanation because that is the only one given by the ancients or available to moderns. Whether the ancient scenario was spontaneous or whether it was carefully worked out in one place before it spread throughout the world, the phenomenon is equally astounding--tribes and nations around

the globe going through the same elaborate rites in the same settings and at the same portentous times--a vast and grandiose spectacle.

The elaborate appointments of the sacred places and the activities they indicate require a rationale, a doctrine. "The temple in particular--preeminently the sacred place--had a celestial prototype."<sup>10</sup> On this I have written a good deal; Eliade goes on to explain that the purpose of the rites, in particular the sacrifice, is "to restore the primordial unity, that which existed before the Creation, . . . to restore the whole that preceded the Creation."<sup>11</sup> That primal unity is the one-ness between heaven and earth which we have called atonement. In a recent study Karl Albert views the great feast or common meal as an example of how "cult grows out of a longing for Daseinsgemeinschaft, a one-ness with the divine existence." He cites Albrecht Dieterich: "These prehistoric 'mysteries' are to achieve a Liebesvereinigung, a return to the primal Father and Mother as a child, a rebirth, a return to celestial company, . . . a yearning for the restoration of a firmly held common existence of man and of the Godhead--Verlangen nach Wiederherstellung der geglaubten Daseinsgemeinschaft zwischen den Menschen und der Gottheit"--a perfect definition of atonement.<sup>12</sup>

The doctrine is inseparable from the rites; wherever we go Eliade reminds us, "there is always a central myth which describes the beginnings of the world." The various versions of the story "taken all together . . . constitute a fairly coherent history" everywhere the same.<sup>13</sup> How far back does it go, and how does it concern us? Intensive studies of the British ruins made since World War II have steadily pushed back the dates until now we find the great "henge" monuments appearing around 3400 B.C.<sup>14</sup> Avebury, where I spent happy days in utter solitude back in 1942 (it has now become an overrun tourist trap), is dated to 2500 B.C.; but Silbury Hill, which is part of the complex and is the greatest artificial mound in Europe, perfectly round in shape, and the work of "a capable and well-organized society

which was highly motivated and disciplined," was begun circa 2750 B.C., exactly the date of the Great Pyramid of Gizah.<sup>15</sup> The renowned Stonehenge, instead of 1500 B.C., is now put at 2500.<sup>16</sup> More surprising is that the land was covered with well-kept farms by the middle of the fifth millennium B.C., with "agriculture . . . established on a more permanent basis around 3800 B.C."<sup>17</sup> To this day many farms in nearby Devon have "hedgerows, boundaries and landmarks described in Saxon charters [that] can still be identified."<sup>18</sup>

Studies in "archaeoastronomy," by such researchers as Alexander Thom and Mrs. E. C. Baitty, have put the ball squarely in the western European court after it was so long in the position of the Orientalists. In particular, findings in the lower Balkans of "enormous quantities of ritual vessels, altars, sacrificial equipment, inscribed objects, clay models of temples, actual temples, and pictorial paintings on vases or on the walls of shrines, already attest a genuine civilization," and that not later than the seventh millennium B.C.--an urban civilization at least 2,000 years earlier than the first appearance of civilization in Egypt.<sup>19</sup>

Along with magnificent jewelry and the astonishingly deep mines from which the precious metals were taken emerged thousands of figurines and paintings showing "a pantheon of gods, . . . costumes and masks, which throw much light on ritual drama and life as it was then lived, . . . ritual drama involving many actors, both gods and worshippers." This was no isolated and vanishing dream world, but a wellspring of later civilization, for "much the same practice seems to have been current in Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia,"<sup>20</sup> while the neighboring "Minoan culture mirrors the same values, . . . [and] aptitude in artistic endeavour[s]."<sup>21</sup> The trappings of true theatre are here common to the "Old European" civilization--Minoan Crete, Ancient Greece, and Rome.<sup>22</sup> The main theme would seem to be "the rite of annual death and resurrection" (we always begin with the terrible questions), while "the central idea of

the ritual drama, the 'Sacred Marriage' . . . of the male god and a female goddess" was introduced not "later than c. 6500 B.C.,"<sup>23</sup> when quite possibly "rites similar to the Eleusinian Mysteries were performed."<sup>24</sup> To complete the picture are the paintings, particularly vase paintings which, as with our own Indians, "[illustrate] the organization of the cosmos."<sup>25</sup>

The wealth of forms and objects which Ms. Gimbutas examines is the special and largely exclusive property of the hermetic people. What is going on here? I refer to that handbook of the archaic world called the book of Moses, and call attention to the great assembly at Adam-ondi-Ahman for a presentation of the original model (D&C 107:53-57). "Adam-in-the-presence-of-God" is the quintessential atonement. Here we must hasten to point out the intellectual achievement of those forgotten ages which has been the special concern of the eminent scientist and historian Giorgio Santillana, who finds in that world "vast protohistoric" schemes of thought<sup>26</sup>--a "great world-wide archaic construction," attested by "thousands of clues to the gigantic puzzle which is waiting to be reassembled."<sup>27</sup> In the prologue which he calls "of High and Far-off Times," he says "the colossal intellectual effort, [the abstract thinking of the masters, is] worthy of the greatest modern theorists. We must assume every age has minds of the order of Archimedes, Kepler, or Newton."<sup>28</sup>

But alas, Ms. Gimbuta's civilization suddenly disappeared under the onslaught of patriarchal invaders out of Asia. The mass destruction of world civilization has happened more than once in the past--the Bible gives us stunning examples: "As it was in the days of Noah" (JS-M 1:4)--and promises more to come. The world collapse produces the typical "Heroic Age" of the Great Migrations, such as we find in Genesis 14 and the book of Ether; those desperate times which are the background of the "epic milieu" of the great bardic poets.<sup>29</sup> But always something lived on, as Aristotle tells us. We see signs of recovery from such a collapse when Mortimer Wheeler, viewing a vast agglomeration of archaeological sites, tells us how "in the third millennium the

idea of civilization was in the air in Western Asia" and things were looking up, "fortified by the consciousness that it had been done before, and in that consciousness they won through."<sup>30</sup> The author is referring to the earlier achievements of Egypt and Mesopotamia; but they in their turn had suddenly appeared on the scene as migrating hosts in times of world upheaval and turmoil, salvaging and replanting the remnants saved from an earlier debacle. As if he were paraphrasing the inspired insight of Joseph F. Smith, Professor Santillana notes that "what we observe as 'primitive' conditions are, with very few exceptions, . . . only what is left of the rise and fall of past higher cultures. . . . We uncover in our search what is not [ancient] virgin soil but areas once cultivated and still full of ancient seeds."<sup>31</sup> He writes as if he had been studying those amazing air photographs of Britain showing well-cultivated farms in the far north from the fifth millennium B.C. In an eloquent passage Santillana reminds us, "The dust of centuries had settled upon the remnants of this great world-wide archaic construction when the Greeks came upon the scene. Yet something of it survived in traditional rites, in myths and fairy tales no longer understood. Taken verbally, it matured [in] the bloody cults."<sup>32</sup> Such is the condition we find at the opening of the book of Abraham when things had degenerated to that stage. More important, the original themes could flash out again, preserved almost intact, in the later thought of the Pythagoreans and Plato.

This takes us into another stretch of road, usually designated as hermetic. How did anything happen to survive? That is the "hermetic" secret. We all know that what is hermetically sealed is tightly preserved from the destructive influence of the atmosphere against a future time when we open and smell the beans or peaches. Let us recall that the book of Moses, which tells us about far-off times, was written by command and sealed up to be "had again among the children of men--among as many as shall believe. . . . Show them not unto any except them that believe" (Moses 1:41-42). The book of Ether, another



record of archaic times, was "sealed by the hand of Moroni," who had edited the text hundreds of years later and which by him was "hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile" (Book of Mormon Title Page). And let us also recall that the book of Abraham was actually hidden in a crypt which has been described by eyewitnesses. Hence the word hermetic lays considerable emphasis on sealing the record.

But why all the hiding? Nothing is more understandable, given the conditions. For sadly it describes the enlightened order of things of the great days: "Adam-ondi-Ahman" or Acadia cannot endure the normal rascality of the race. Men had spoiled it already in Adam's time: "And Adam and his wife mourned before the Lord, because of Cain and his brethren" (Moses 5:27). In each dispensation the world went bad while the prophets united in futile protest, as in the days of Samuel, Hezekiah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. In the powerful phrase of Ether, "the prophets mourned and withdrew from among the people" (Ether 11:13). The prophets always tended to form societies of their own for mutual comfort and security, for they usually appear in numbers in time of crisis: "And in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent" (1 Nephi 1:4). They were not well received. When not preaching it was their custom to keep a low profile, or simply to depart from the scene in the time-honored manner of the Rechabites, a pattern we find repeated over and over again in the Book of Mormon and vividly depicted in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The holy outcasts would form with their followers a community of saints, a church, waiting and working for Zion--Zion itself is a model of such a retreat from the world: "And from thence went forth the saying, ZION IS FLED" (Moses 7:69). In their retreat the righteous refugees take particular pains to preserve the sacred records--we think of Moses, of John, of Ether, of Moroni, etc., preserving, studying, and editing the sacred writings by special command. Without that, the malice and envy of the wicked or the carelessness of the stupid would soon distort and mock the holy books. The

righteous recluse--sometimes appointed by God to survival, escaping the persecution, the wars, and natural disasters--is a standard fixture of history: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

This arrangement divides the world into two camps. Origen, the first and foremost of Christian theologians, divided the church itself into two bodies of members, corresponding to two different ways of comprehending the teachings, the "esoteric" and the "exoteric." The words are his, and they speak volumes. Both societies shared the common membership, but while the exoteric side made up the popular congregations, the esoteric community was limited to those who understood and could be trusted with the deeper meaning of the teachings.

This division between the people is not a natural one or an inevitable one, for normal human beings are capable of qualifying for either society. Men were not always "carnal, sensual, and devilish" (Moses 5:13), we are told, but only became so when they yielded to the enticings of Satan and were henceforth "shut out from the presence of God"--denying at-one-ment with him (Moses 6:49). It wasn't until Satan came among Adam's children that the split took place (Moses 5:13). Being carnal, sensual, and devilish is an acquired skill. Nephi gives up on his own people but cannot excuse them: "And now I, Nephi, cannot say more; the Spirit stoppeth mine utterance, and I am left to mourn because of the unbelief, and the wickedness, and the ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men; for they will not search knowledge, nor understand great knowledge, when it is given unto them in plainness, even as plain as word can be" (2 Nephi 32:7). And these were people whom he had earlier led away from the corrupt society of his own brethren as another of those righteous communities fleeing into the wilderness (2 Nephi 5:5-10). So Mormon laments at the end, "and I have but the strength of a man, and I cannot any longer enforce my commands" (Moroni 9:18). At times we even find all mankind subjecting themselves to the devil

(cf. Moses 7:26). It is the same with Israel; when do they ever live up to the law of Moses? Not in his own day, not in the days of the prophets whom they stoned, not in the time of the Lord's mission among them, and not today.

The division between the two societies, cultures, or "worlds" is truly a great and yawning gulf, much greater than we realize. Actually, the meeting between the two worlds produces a severe culture shock if the one of them is really holy. The appearance of an angel causes shock and fright to Zacharias (Luke 1:12), to shepherds who were "sore afraid" (Luke 2:9) when the other world moved too near, as were the Apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:6), and even Joseph Smith in the presence of Moroni (JS-H 1:32).

Throughout the Book of Mormon the church itself regularly splits into a worldly society, notably the religion of the Nehors, and another consisting of "a few . . . humble followers of Christ" (2 Nephi 28:14) to whom special gifts and revelations were given (Alma 12:9). These were Origen's exoteric and esoteric churches respectively. That is why true Israel was called a peculiar people; people often ask today in what sense the Latter-day Saints are still peculiar, and it is not always easy to find an answer.

The gospel that the retreating wise men take with them into hiding is guarded as a secret, and that by express command. Why seek it? The jealousy and envy of the others can be dangerous; they resent being shut out from something great and mysterious, like boys excluded from the club tree house. They usually take out their wrath and frustration by wrecking the place. A classic instance of that is the destruction of Pythagoras's school in Calabria. The books are protected by sealing and hiding, for which they must be written on enduring tablets and buried in the earth or hidden in crypts. But above all they are protected from dangerous exposure by the cryptic and symbolic signs and language in which they are written; and, even if they could be read, the information is disguised as myths and parables. The

Lord said to a small, closed group of disciples,

It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given, . . . because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand, . . . for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears (Matthew 13:11-15).

The Lord is here observing and preserving the ancient order of things. His mission is directed to two separate societies, those who have heard and received the message, and those who could but would not hear it.

Hermetism or hermeticism is the label for a body of knowledge resembling that of the gospel which has been circulated among mankind for a very long time. How does it relate to the gospel? That is the question I shall now attempt to answer. It was always claimed by those who accepted the hermetic message as true that it was knowledge revealed in the beginning to one Hermes Trismegistus. He was a man who became deified only after his death. He was always identified with Thoth, the Egyptian god who presided over all branches of knowledge and the dispensing of such. He was also identified by the learned Egyptians with the famous Imhotep, the great vizier of Zoser, the founder of the Third Dynasty, and one of the great creative geniuses of all time. Imhotep was beyond dispute a real person, and whether he was the thrice-greatest Hermes or not is beside the point, which is that there actually were men living in far distant times of the caliber of the fabulous Trismegistus and the equal of any who have lived since.

Here we are dealing with world-class noodles, who are naturally drawn to each other and excite ever-mounting distrust, suspicion, and envy of those excluded from the magic circle. "I was destined to prove a disturber and an annoyer of his [Satan's] kingdom," said Joseph Smith (JS-H 1:20), whom we can confidently place among the few great ones of hermetic stature. For we are free to use the word in a secular sense, though there is always something transcendental about it. We all know how the public

received the prophet Joseph, who was placed in the greatest danger, not from angry outsiders but from his jealous followers, like the Higbees and the Laws. The ancient Ephesians passed a law banishing great achievers from the city--they were a standing rebuke to the rest: "If they must excel," they said, "let them go and excel over somebody else." No Ephesian (and remember it was they who kicked out Paul) was more illustrious than the great Heracleitus, whom many consider the most enlightening of ancient pundits, whose caustic remarks fully explain the behavior of his fellow citizens: kynes gar katabauzousin hon an me ginokosin, which means "dogs bark at anyone they don't recognize."<sup>33</sup> Anything they don't understand makes dogs and people uncomfortable, distrusting, and dangerous. As the immortal Aristophanes shows us, in the simplistic society of the businessman and the farmer, the egghead is a disquieting intruder--who knows what he might be thinking? Even if he told us we would not understand, and that can be dangerous! The one way of not only equalizing things but of gaining the upper hand over the smart guys has ever been to make mediocrity obligatory by the authority of money--if you are so smart why aren't you rich? Fortune Magazine, Forbes, the Wall Street Journal, Barron's, and even the Reader's Digest are devoted to suffusing wealth and success with an aura of sanctity, presenting its achievers surrounded by the skillfully crafted symbols of ultrarespectability, amounting at times to apotheosis. Even so the great robber barons surrounded themselves with the glories of authentic imported Classical and Renaissance masters. "Business in education" moves in on the scene, patronizingly offering the wisdom and skill of the successful entrepreneur or stockbroker to the learned community which has become their dependent. To retain its right to continue operations, the University of Utah must now justify its existence by advertising how helpful its discoveries and inventions have been to business. Still, universities are hardly in a position to complain of such a comeuppance, since within recent years they have remodeled



themselves into full-time business colleges where the MBA has largely supplanted the seven liberal arts, which had become spurious labels anyway. Incidentally the seven arts were introduced by Proclus, a thoroughgoing hermeticist. The university colleges of the middle ages were direct descendants of the "hermetic colleges," the most famous of which is that of Pythagoras, burned and stoned out by the mob. Lesser men knew how to adapt themselves and claimed to offer that same recondite learning in less offensive forms with all the trappings and mysteries, uncomplicated by any deeper learning. A. E. Housman used to say of classical scholars, "Among the blind a one-eyed man is king." The one-eyed man is safe in his glory because he presents no real threat to his rivals. Everyone wanted to get in on the act and this was possible with the ancient sophists as it is in the modern university by putting the emphasis on forms and appearances, titles and degrees. In that way, anybody can be hermetic.

But there is no reason why the real product shouldn't be made available to one and all. No one has stated the hermetic ideal more clearly than Brigham Young:

We have the privilege of becoming classical scholars, of commencing at the rudiments of all knowledge, we might say, of perfection. We might study and add knowledge to knowledge, from the time we are capable of knowing anything until we go down to the grave. If we enjoy healthy bodies, so as not to wear upon the functions of the mind, there is no end to man's learning . . . we are made expressly to dwell with those who continue to learn. The greatest and most important labor we have to perform is to cultivate ourselves.

Every accomplishment, every polished grace, every useful attainment in mathematics, music, and in all science and art belong to the Saints, and they should avail themselves as expeditiously as possible the wealth of knowledge the sciences offer to every diligent and persevering scholar.<sup>34</sup>

And that's our duty. We should cease to be children, and become philosophers, understanding our own existence, its purpose and ultimate design. Then our days will not become blank through ignorance. Ever since then ignorant has meant naughty in the

rustic Mormon vocabulary.

Brigham also recognizes that the hermetic ideal does not last among men, and predicts that the world will lose the height of knowledge it has attained: "The Lord has bestowed great knowledge and wisdom upon the inhabitants of the earth--much truth and knowledge in the arts and sciences."<sup>35</sup> Note that Brigham Young accepts the hermetic tradition as attendant on the gospel.

Those nations that deny their God and Saviour will have those principles of intelligence taken from them. . . . This wisdom will be taken from the wicked. Who will receive it? My faith and my desire[s] are that there should be a people upon earth prepared to receive this wisdom. It should not be so forfeited as to be taken from the earth, for I question whether it would return again.<sup>36</sup>

Exactly the same hermetic idea is expressed by Santillana, who notes that the most advanced scientific knowledge is grasped only by a handful of figures. As science becomes ever more esoteric and obscure, the chances of that knowledge surviving grow less and less. The only hope, of course, is for it to be passed on to the next generation; and lacking that, to some future generation, by consigning it to varied writings in the earth, trusting its restoration to the same wise providence that gave it to us in the first place--direct revelation.<sup>37</sup>

We may consider the gospel as the most advanced knowledge on earth, known to but a few because it is accepted and believed by but a few and can be understood by no others. After all, it is the simplest ideas that win Nobel prizes. The gospel belongs to that body of knowledge which has been passed down in patriarchal succession, even as the hermetic knowledge supposedly has been. Are they the same? The first step to answering that is to consider the fatal flaw of hermetism, i.e., its irresistible appeal to ambitious and weak-headed persons. Where higher knowledge is concerned, a great and yawning gulf lies between me and it; and in a society, nay, in a world that lives by appearances, where the appearance is the reality, you are whatever people think you are. The hermetic image has never

lost its appeal, the thrill and mystery of the unknown and the secret possession of those powers in which Owen Glendower gloried. Today the infection is rampant. What used to be the stock figure of the great scientist of nineteenth-century science fiction is now no less than the master of the universe; dungeons and dragons, wizards and magicians, Spocks and Merlins are the standard fare from the infant's cartoon TV through the orgiastic mysteries of MTV, to the endless mystery and power of the corporate giants--"secret combinations, to get power and gain" (Ether 8:22), and the unfathomable secrets of the stock market. There is something hermetic about it all. Though the quantum physicist has made awesome nightmares plausible, the same appeal of the marvelous and sinister was exercised by the best-selling novel of the late nineteenth century, Bulwer-Lytton's silly novel Zanoni.

There is a legitimate interest in the lost learning of the past; it is a fascinating subject in itself, and all the more interesting as new prospects promise retrieval of ever more of it. In the early days of the Church the mysteries of the past intrigued and aroused the brethren. They were fascinated by the ancient records to which they were being directed (D&C 7-9), and God encouraged them to use their brains in deciphering them. Joseph regretted that the cares of the world kept him from those exercises for which he had such a lively appetite. Even the pioneers, forced to relinquish the luxury of books, discovered new delights and surprises all along their arduous journey; and upon arriving in the valley they scattered in all directions on new adventures. So I was told by all my grandparents, who declared that the interest and excitement of discovering new things more than compensated for the inconvenience of exhaustion and dysentery. "We were like kids let out of school," my grandfather used to say.

Today we use the cares of the world, the imperatives of business, to neglect and condemn serious study. Recently, when a young man who had made a lot of money in a hurry told his stake

president that he intended to take off some time to study some of the things that had always been his real interest, the president flew into a rage. "Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that you are going to spin your wheels reading books when you could be making big money?" The gulf between Adam's golden age and our own becomes narrow at those times when the gospel is restored, but presently starts to broaden as the Saints begin to drift away toward the normal human condition. Nephi found this to be a law of nature. In ancient times, apostasy never came by renouncing the gospel but always by corrupting it. No one renounces it today and so we have the strange paradox of people stoutly proclaiming beliefs and ideals that they have no intention of putting into practice.

(1) Every Sunday we thank God for our beautiful surroundings, which in my ward are being systematically destroyed by developers all around us.

(2) We seek knowledge as our greatest treasure, while the poverty of our manuals and handbooks defies description.

(3) As a Church authority commented to me after the last Conference, the President's keynote address on the Book of Mormon was hardly mentioned during the rest of the Conference.

(4) For years we hailed the Welfare Plan as a living demonstration of continued revelation--and then phased it out in deference to the private sector.

(5) Since the days of Joseph Smith, presidents of the Church have made resounding pronouncements against the wicked practice of killing animals and birds for pleasure,<sup>38</sup> and have been unheeded; we have just passed a law permitting eight-year-olds the pleasure of killing big game.

(6) A great and inspired bicentennial message by one we called our prophet was instantly swept under the rug.<sup>39</sup>

(7) The oldest and best testimony to Joseph Smith's first vision has received no attention whatever by the Latter-day Saints since its discovery in 1969, and so it goes.<sup>40</sup>

(8) The prophet Joseph studied biblical languages with

dedicated zeal to help him understand the scriptures, but such studies are frowned upon in our religious institutions.

Joseph Smith sums up the general situation even as Nephi and Moroni do: "God has instructed man to form wise and wholesome laws, since he had departed from Him and refused to be governed by those laws which God had given."<sup>41</sup> We must always settle for second best, and as men keep drifting away they must periodically be recalled: "From time to time these glad tidings were sounded in the ears of men in different ages of the world down to the time of the Messiah's coming."<sup>42</sup> But always the prize has escaped them. "For our own part," says the Prophet, "we cannot believe that the ancients in all ages were so ignorant of the system of heaven as many suppose."<sup>43</sup> And the loss of great promise is not slow in coming: "How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations--too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God, according to the purposes of His will, from before the foundation of the world!"<sup>44</sup> They still had failed to get the point: "We are called to hold the keys of the mysteries of those things that have been kept hid from the foundation of the world until now."<sup>45</sup> They had been offered the greatest prize of all, yet it is not strange that they slighted their opportunities, since "it is in the nature and disposition of almost all men" to turn the knowledge and power of God to their own interest and vanity "in unrighteous dominion," whereupon that power automatically shuts off and the light is taken away--"Amen to the priesthood of that man!" (D&C 121:39, 41).

And that has been the way of the world as well as that of the Church. The great apostasy in the time of the apostles was not a renouncing of the faith but its corruption and manipulation. If the gospel light can be redirected for convenience, the hermetic tradition has also ever been an invitation to fraud. We have said that something claiming to be



a hermetic community was allowed to flourish in the world in the guise of the university. Such sufferance was possible, however, only because the university itself was but a charade. Oliver Cromwell's Minister of Education, William Dell, instructed his Roundhead preachers to displace "the religion of the 'dull and drowsie Divinity of Synods and Schools' buttressed by authority, degrees, and ceremonies," whose desire was "especially . . . to Preach to rich men, and great men, and men in place and authority," to get for themselves "favour, preferment, and a quiet life."<sup>46</sup>

But the appeal of hermetism is universal. The classic demonstration is the case of Faust, superscientist and magician, who, in the opening scene of Goethe's great play, laments that he has spent all his days putting on an act; he wants to see what really holds the universe together, as he says, and not have to go on misleading his students with the display of false omniscience. He decides that the only solution is to take a great shortcut and turn to magic, and, in the most drastic step of all, makes a pact with the devil. Thereby he has instant access to the four things which Nephi tells us will destroy us--power, gain, popularity, and the lusts of the flesh (1 Nephi 22:23, 3 Nephi 6:15). Satan promises them all to Faust for a price, and the price is his salvation. What Faust got from him anyway was only bogus, an extravaganza of false hermetism, make-believe, eyewash, and special effects.

Does the hermetic tradition begin as a real thing, or was it always suspect? Its beginnings are out of sight in the prehistoric world. It is convenient but absurd for such historians of science as Mary Hesse to say simply that it all began in the third century A.D. True, that was when most of the very fragmentary corpus of hermetic literature was produced; that was a time of assimilation, not creation, and so the busy clerks and collectors of the time brought together the accumulated materials of the hermetic tradition, but they did not create it. It was always associated with the mysteries and lived in a zone

of uncertainty, a borderline science, a twilight zone. And indeed, how could that be avoided, considering the abiding need for secrecy, which was a standing invitation for quacks and pretenders to lay claim to it without having to make their claims good? That was the nature of gnosticism.

The great line of pretenders emerges with the Sophists, men like Empedocles and Apollonius of Tyana. They claimed the same wisdom as Plato, but Socrates exposed the false nature of their teachings in his conversation with his Sophist friends Gorgias and Protagoras. Were the hermetic books, whose remains I have here, the actual source of hermetic wisdom? For the ancients they contained all essential wisdom and were written by Thoth, the primal custodian and purveyor of all information and at almost all points the equivalent of Hermes--Plato uses both names in speaking of the hero. There is no shortage of evidence that the Egyptians did keep books from the earliest times, and that those books were meant to contain the sum total of wisdom and knowledge. In the temple library were books on all subjects "to describe the universe and its phenomena."<sup>47</sup> The library itself was called the House of Life, and the building represented a model of the universe--a microcosm.<sup>48</sup> The books were thought to be actual "Power of Re," i.e., direct revelations from heaven.<sup>49</sup> The aim of the archaic cultic activities not only in Egypt but also everywhere was, according to Karl Albert, "to restore the primal community of Gods and men," or as we would say, to achieve atonement;<sup>50</sup> and the ordinances were inseparable from the doctrines that went with them. Everywhere we find myths and legends about how the primal bond that existed between heaven and earth in the Golden Age was broken by the wickedness of men; the great common assemblies ceased and the gods departed.<sup>51</sup> But, as Aristotle notes, some bits of the old knowledge always survived to the next age. A study by Fabio Mora on "The Silence of Herodotus" notes that the three things in the mysteries that Herodotus would never talk about were (1) the grand mystery of the true nature and character of God, which could be known only

by revelation; (2) the ordinances by which the mysteries were taught and implemented; and (3) the doctrine or rationale of the whole, including that which explained the rites.<sup>52</sup> Plato makes Thoth the inventor of writing and tells us that all wisdom was contained in thirty-six of the hermetic books,<sup>53</sup> and Plutarch reports that in his day the authentic forty-two books of Hermes were still to be found in temple libraries.<sup>54</sup>

The name Trismegistus means "thrice-greatest" and has naturally led to all sorts of explanations. One of the most learned of ancient astronomers, the renowned Abu Ma ashar al-Bakhri, like al-Tha labi, explored ancient legends and traditions all over the Middle East and found that there were indeed three Hermes, all related and united in glory--Thrice-Great indeed! The Persians believed him to be Gayomart, the grandson of Adam. The Hebrews also made him third in descent from Adam and so confused him with Enoch, the son of Cain. "Adam," they say, "taught him the hours of the day and the night," and he first studied the structure of the cosmos and built the first temple. "He wrote many books . . . on the knowledge of things of heaven and earth." This earliest Hermes lived in Upper Egypt, where he enriched the world with scientific schemes and diagrams of all sorts and invented characters for writing the scriptures for "those who would come after him."<sup>55</sup>

The second Hermes, according to al-Bakhri, lived in the land of the Chaldeans and taught the world medicine, philosophy, and the nature of numbers, reviving those studies after their loss in the Flood. The third, like the first, lived in Egypt. He wrote a great book on alchemy and its related crafts, and was the teacher of Aesculapius.

But three is merely a beginning. Hermes Trismegistus has been identified with almost every superwiseman who ever lived, beginning with Noah and the first pharaoh; the list includes Zoroaster, Mithra, Elijah, Pythagoras, and Aesculapius, Hesiod, Plato, Aristotle, Buddha, Zosimus, etc. Originally, hermetic books copied in the temples were written on tablets, some of

which various wisemen of old claimed to have discovered at various times and places. When we are told that Geb, the founder of patriarchal rule on earth, had the history of the settling of Egypt by Re and Shu read to him from the Annals which were written down at the time of Atum,<sup>56</sup> we can surmise that the tradition of record keeping was as old as the civilization itself. That impression is confirmed when we discover in the Pyramid Texts extensive reuse and reapplication of much earlier texts. Many have shown that the Pyramid Texts, "the oldest book in the world," the Coffin Texts, and the Book of the Dead, each succeeding the other, have, as Lacau puts it, "absolutely the same object, and that the fundamental teachings, the language, and the script remain virtually unchanged from beginning to end, one simply continuing the tradition of the others."<sup>57</sup>

What was that tradition? Hornung has recently shown that it is always the same: what the Book of the Dead, faithfully carrying on the tradition, contains is nothing less than the complete manual or handbook of all knowledge--the epitome of the hermetic library.<sup>58</sup>

Alexander Moret, who made a special study of the Egyptian mysteries, concluded that all arts and sciences are mysteries and secrets, which men could learn only by revelation. The secret books of rituals were miraculous things written by the very hand of Thoth.

Eduard Naville, who first edited the complete Book of the Dead, stated frankly that the Book of the Dead must belong to the books which Clement of Alexandria called hermetic, being written by Thoth. To indicate how old the records are, we have Otto's recent discovery that the implements of the funerary cults have no recognizably Egyptian names--all are prehistoric, mystic code-names, Decknamen. Moreover, he notes that the rituals are almost never depicted, though they were the main activity, and that no ritual is ever presented in its completeness; also, that from what we know we can find no significant variation between the

rites of the very earliest and the very latest times. Hornung shows us how in Egypt alone we can see a central perennial tradition handed down for thousands of years, preserving its contents through changing forms.<sup>59</sup> As Iamblichus puts it, the Egyptians ask all the basic questions about God and creation, and never cease insisting upon the one universal God and king upon whom all things depend.<sup>60</sup> He assures us that their approach to the interface (Nahtstelle or "seam") between the worlds is the one we must follow if we would ever hope to get "a peek through a chink in the wall."<sup>61</sup>

The Egyptians were not the only ones; other mysteries and cults claimed to be every bit as old. The resemblance of these early cults to each other produced a rich mix down through the centuries, and Herodotes reports that the Orphics, Bacchics, Egyptians, and Pythagoreans were all one with the Delphian Apollo.<sup>62</sup> The Hermeticism of Hermes Trismegistus was confused with Egyptomania, Orphism, and Pythagoreanism," according to Derchain.<sup>63</sup> The claims of Orpheus are as venerable as Trismegistus himself. The ancients believed according to Jacob Burckhardt that "Orpheus 'was the father of all rites and of all mysticism in general.'"<sup>64</sup> He left the world a body of hymns and rites going back to the prehistoric mysteries of Eleusis, the "very ancient Demeter cult . . . [in which the basic ideas were] purification, fertility, rebirth; [and] . . . striv[ing] toward[s] a luminous 'other world.'"<sup>65</sup> The "Orphic Phanes . . . combined in himself all the gods and cosmic forces."<sup>66</sup> Orpheus, like Trismegistus, began as a mortal, the prototype of "a long series of 'divine men'" such as Epimenides of Crete, Abaris the Hyperborean, and Zalmoxis of Thrace, who can be "placed at the side of the sages or shamans such as the Seven Sages, who met at Delphi" in periodic sacred conferences.<sup>67</sup>

At this point of my labors I thought it would be well to bring myself up-to-date on the position of the philosophy faculty on these matters, and so I read the recent volume of Frederick Copleston, S. J., on The Philosophy of Greece and Rome,<sup>68</sup> and



discovered that there really is no such thing as being significantly up-to-date on subjects in which we are dealing with opinions.

First and foremost the author finds that Greek philosophy, which after all is ancient philosophy, deals primarily with "the theme of the relation between the One and the Many, . . . [which] runs indeed through the whole of philosophy," the perennial problem being "to reduce the Many to the One," or as we would say, to achieve at-one-ment.<sup>69</sup> It is gratifying to find that we are on the track. The next greatest problem, he says, is "to discover the ultimate cause or causes of the world," another gospel theme.<sup>70</sup> Then there is that great problem, the nature of the soul. "The Pythagorean conception of the soul," our author notes, "exercised a very considerable influence on the thought of Plato,"<sup>71</sup> while "the most important contribution of post-Aristotelian philosophy to psychology . . . was . . . the religious aspect of the human soul."<sup>72</sup>

You will note that these are all terrible questions. In trying to answer them by speculation, we find only a few solutions, and these are repeated over and over again in Copleston's book. This is why there is endless debate over which ancient philosopher or school is borrowing from which, and why their teachings become so easily mixed up. We end the book feeling let down, for all we have read is opinions. The author must repeatedly insist that this is great stuff; the culmination of philosophy in "the system of Plotinian Neo-Platonism [is] one of the supreme achievements of the human race."<sup>73</sup> Thus the devoutly wished consummation of philosophy is in mysticism, little by little opening the door ever wider to the other world. For after a thousand years of pure reason attempting to solve the great questions of existence, it was clear that they were getting nowhere--"Myself when young did eagerly frequent Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument about it and about: but evermore came out by the same Door as I went."<sup>74</sup> The conclusion is that any confirmation of the final answers to the eternal questions

can only come from revelation. And so philosophy steadily drifted toward mysticism.

The trouble was that no one could offer anything definite, concrete, and specific beyond his own personal, nontransferable dreams and feelings. In the end even Plato must dig up the case of Er the Armenian, which he assures us was a real happening, to answer the number one terrible question: Is there more to come after this life? And Socrates testified in his last hour to vivid personal experiences that firmly convinced him of a judgment in the hereafter. Our judgment teacher never mentions these things but glories in the ultimate achievement of true philosophy, the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, a teaching which he insists is far loftier than anything conceived of by the ancients. He appeals to his readers to recognize in philosophy the equivalent of the great artistic and literary triumphs contemporary with its own development. But philosophy is not art or literature--it is a means to an end, while they are the end. Even mathematics is a "good of first intent."<sup>75</sup> But the student endures tedious expositions and refutations in an awkward and unlovely jargon for the sake of discovering new truth. Philosophy is the road, not the goal, which it never reaches. If you want answers to the questions which it proposes, you can get them in the end only by revelation. That is where the ultimate triumph of Father Copleston's philosophy ends up, with Plotinian Neo-Platonism tottering on the brink of revelation. So the Neo-Platonists come up with the right answers without ever having heard of Christ, and "the Augustinian philosophy was, through Neo-Platonism, strongly impregnated with the thought of Plato,"<sup>76</sup> as corrected by Aristotle.

Hermetism came to its own when the Greek city-state passed away with Alexander; all the local cults, like the local governments, "were merged in a larger whole,"<sup>77</sup> and religion became eclectic or, as the expression goes, syncretistic. Representative of the times is Poseidonius of Apamea (135-51 B.C.). He has been called the most universal mind since

Aristotle.<sup>78</sup> After visiting Egypt, he founded a school in Rhodes. He taught stoic monism, "the 'sympathy' that prevails between all parts of the cosmic system," in a universal hierarchy of beings. He also taught that man is both body and spirit, having both an earthly and heavenly home; operating in the interchange between worlds are angels and devils. "Poseidonius readopted the Platonic theory of the pre-existence of the soul" as well as its immortality.<sup>79</sup> Bear in mind that he taught all these things long before the time of Christ. He taught further that there was once a golden age followed by corruption and a fall, and that laws were given to bring men back again into the fold, and that the duty of philosophers was to teach them the saving morality.<sup>80</sup>

What is called Middle Platonism is represented by Plutarch, who, though strongly opposed to superstition, believed in prophecy and revelation.<sup>81</sup> He saw that some pagan rites had been taken over or instituted by evil spirits, but he supported others as sincere attempts at religious behavior.<sup>82</sup>

The Jews were in on such teachings all along. Josephus shows Orphic-Pythagorean traits in Jewish-Hellenistic philosophy, including the Essenes, both in teaching and in practice.<sup>83</sup> Copleston will not allow Philo, the Jew who reconciled Old Testament history with hermetic philosophy, the decisive influence on Christianity usually attributed to him, for "the Philonic philosophy could never admit the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation," even though "Christianity itself insists on the Divine Transcendence and . . . the Incarnation is a mystery."<sup>84</sup> That seems like some sort of convergence, and the process is all but complete in its triumphant culmination in Plotinus: "In the system . . . then, the Orphic-Platonic-Pythagorean strain of 'otherworldliness,' intellectual ascent, salvation through assimilation to and knowledge of God, reach their most complete and systematic expression. Philosophy now includes, not only logic, cosmology, psychology, metaphysics and ethics, but also the theory of religion and mysticism."<sup>85</sup> Plotinus' confidence

lay in his own personal experience "as the Supreme attainment of the true philosopher." With him "philosophy tends to pass into religion."<sup>86</sup> What's the difference? They attempt to answer the same questions, the terrible questions, in fact, but in different ways, philosophy by endless arguments and speculation. Joseph Smith points this out: "As Paul said, 'the world by wisdom know[s] not God,' so the world by speculation [are] destitute of revelation."<sup>87</sup> Religion answers by private but nonnegotiable spiritual experiences. With his usual insight, Plotinus sees atonement as the solution: "The Father Land to us is that place from whence we came; and in that place is the Father."<sup>88</sup> The important addition of Neo-Platonism to Christianity was "that of contributing to the intellectual statement of the revealed religion"; to Plotinus, "the greatest of the Latin Fathers [and so the universal church] owed no inconsiderable debt."<sup>89</sup> Had Jesus done such a poor job, then? Unless he fell short, we are plainly dealing here with something quite different from what he had in mind. At the very least, conventional Christianity contains a strong infusion of hermetism to take the place of out-and-out revelation.

This is clear in the case of Proclus, the Athenian Scholarch, with his "enthusiasm for all sorts of religious beliefs, superstitions and practices, even believing that he received revelations"; he has been called "the greatest Scholastic of Antiquity."<sup>90</sup> In his "Athenian School of Neo-Platonism," we find "agreement between Plato, the Pythagoreans, the Orphics, and the 'Chaldaic' literature."<sup>91</sup> Finally, the "Neo-Platonists of the Latin West" become mere schoolmen, clerks and compilers rather than independent thinkers, gathering and classifying and especially translating the works of Plato, Aristotle, Themistius' paraphrase of Aristotle, Poseidonius, etc. But the theme of it all remains as ever the one and the many and how they are brought into union.<sup>92</sup> It is significant that Copleston, in dealing with men who consider themselves in debt to Trismegistus, never mentions hermetism, while for him Egypt does

not even exist. Like all the professors of philosophy I have known, for him philosophy begins with the Greeks, whose own repeated insistence that they are in debt to their Egyptian masters goes unheeded. He recognizes in Alexandria the great philosophical clearinghouse from the fourth century B.C. on, but he ignores the all-important triangle of Egypt, Israel, and Greece, all of which borrow from each other. He also has little to say of the Sophists, who opened the door to pseudo-hermetic influence on a large scale. That spirit animates those philosophers who play philosophy off against religion while skillfully hinting of dark powers which they rarely offered to demonstrate.

The tradition carries on into the Middle Ages with Averroes (for it was the Arabs who really took over the hermetic tradition in his time), Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, Roger Bacon, Lully; and so into the Renaissance with such brilliant figures as Marcilio Ficino (who brought Greek hermetic texts to Europe, fervidly defending their Egyptian origin), Pico della Mirandola, Johann Reuchlin, Philippus Theophrastus Paracelsus, J. V. Andrea, Robert Fludd, Francis Bacon, Giordano Bruno, John Dee, Athanasius Kircher, Cagliostro (Balsamo), Emanuel Swedenborg; and into the nineteenth century when science broke the spell and a line of quacks and occultists took over: Anton Mesmer, A. L. Constant (Elephas Levi), Madame Blavatsky, Bulwer-Lytton, Alistair Crowley, etc. (one can look them up in an encyclopedia or in Peter Tompkins). Copleston never once mentions the newly emerging Coptic literature, so full of hermetism--after all, Plotinus, Ammonius Saccus, and Iamblichus were true native Egyptians, who along with Hermes Trismegistus and Horapollo and the Jewish psuedepigrapha compose, as Derchain puts it, a "bricolage, a new universe of representations containing all the debris of the ancients." Over a vast sweep of time, "the cosmogony of prehistoric Heliopolis has passed into that of the author of the Book of the Secrets of Enoch . . . as part of a vast syncretistic movement at the end of the ancient world with



Alexandria as one of the most active centers." Such basic teachings as the journey of the soul through the heavenly spheres was taken over by the Roman Imperial Cult in Roman Egypt, by the Gnostics, Jews, and early Christian Apocalyptic, according to Eberhard Otto. Heaven and hell are described in the old Egyptian fashion in the Coptic writers, Bartholomeu, Paul, Elijah, Sophonia, the Greek Enoch, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the Gospel of Peter (found in an Egyptian tomb). All this means, according to Otto, that a new interpretation of Egyptian religion is necessary, soft-peddalling the overworked "mystic" traits. Reexamination of temple and grave reliefs and inscriptions now shows them in an altered context in which we actually discover quotations from Greek tragedies and epics, showing that the classical writers and the Egyptian scribes were well aware of each other's works.

About 1460 the monk Leonardo da Pistoria brought to Florence fifteen Greek treatises of the Corpus Hermeticum. Cosimo de' Medici bought them and gave them to the famous Marsilio Ficino who translated them. By 1600 the work had run into sixteen editions. Ficino's even more famous pupil, Pico della Mirandola, "was the first to join Hermetism to the Qabbalah." The result was theosophic speculative Pythagoreanism.<sup>93</sup> So the mixing went on. In England, John Colet was the disciple of Ficino; they thought that what they had in the hermetic books was the prisca theologia.<sup>94</sup> "More's Utopia (1516) shows the influence of Hermetism," and Trismegistus is often cited in Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's famous work De occulta philosophia (1533). The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are the golden age of religious hermetism. For the great protestant scholar Duplessis-Mornay Hermes is the source of the Zohar, Orpheus, and Zarathustra, etc. On the other side, the Counter-Reformation used the hermetic writings as a weapon against the Protestants. But when Genevan Isaac Casaubon in 1614 showed the hermetic texts to be no older than the first century, they suddenly lost authority and their devotees went underground as Rosicrucians.<sup>95</sup>

The old excitement of hermetic writings was continued at a lower level by occultism, spiritualism, theosophy, astrology, etc., with such gifted but imaginative champions as Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, who stirred up that Egyptomania which swept Europe and is still alive.<sup>96</sup>

A key figure in sixteenth-century hermetism is the renowned Paracelsus, who strove to replace the Aristotelian-Galenic system of chemistry and medicine "by the Christian Neo-Platonic and Hermetic texts." "He should turn first to the book of divine revelation--The Holy Scriptures--and then to the book of divine Creation--Nature."<sup>97</sup> For, to quote the mathematician Morris Kline, "the work of sixteenth, seventeenth, and most eighteenth-century mathematicians was . . . a religious quest. The search for the mathematical laws of nature was an act of devotion that would reveal the glory and grandeur of His [God's] handiwork."<sup>98</sup> C. H. Dodd sees in the hermetic writers a "reaction against pure rationalism, a philosophy of the gnosis accepting the gift of revelation." It was "Platonism with its mystical and theistic elements emphasized. With it was combined a revived Pythagoreanism, and Stoicism," uniting "the mythology and ritual of various religions of the Near East, believing that all was communicated as divinely revealed gnosis."<sup>99</sup> So it is not surprising that "the priest-physician concept . . . was a fundamental part of Renaissance neo-Platonism, and it is likely that their ultimate source may be found in Ecclesiastes 38:1." As "the Magus transfers the powers of a celestial field into a small stone, . . . the physician extracts the hidden virtues of herbs and prepares powerful remedies."<sup>100</sup>

The early Paracelsians turned from Aristotle and Galen to "the recently translated Hermetic Alchemical and Neo-Platonic texts . . . for a new Christian understanding of nature as a whole."<sup>101</sup> Van Helmont's (1597-1644) sensational discovery of gas, though it was a "rather incidental part of a religious and vitalistic system of natural philosophy," nevertheless provided the nearest thing to spirit so far discovered, standing at a sort

of interface between the worlds.<sup>102</sup> The aim of science was an "UNIO with 'Deus sive Natura'"--more "at-one-ment,"<sup>103</sup> after the brethren ran short on patience with the endless artificiose altercari or word-juggling of the Jesuits.<sup>104</sup> Hermetism reached back "to a secret tradition of knowledge which gave truer insight into the basic forces in the universe than the qualitative physics of Aristotle."<sup>105</sup> But of course the pretenders were eager to climb on the wagon with the great ones, who increasingly resented, as one of them put it, "the windy impostures of magic and astrology, of signatures and physiognomy."<sup>106</sup> P. M. Rattansi informs us that there has been "recent explorations of Renaissance Neo-Platonism, and Hermeticism,"<sup>107</sup> imparting a higher importance and dignity to the subject than modern science has been inclined to accept. For example, "the Neo-Platonic cosmology is indispensable" in understanding Copernicus' system.<sup>108</sup> In his work De Revolutionibus, "Copernicus appealed to . . . Neo-Platonic tenets: the study of astronomy as the vehicle for drawing the mind to the contemplation of the highest good."<sup>109</sup> Kepler accepted Copernicanism in preference to Aristotelianism, since he viewed God as "an ever-active and an ever-generative God diffusing his power into all things"<sup>110</sup> ("in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things" [D&C 88:41], as the prophet Joseph puts it). Kepler's famous Third Law came from a search "for the 'music of the spheres.'"<sup>111</sup> "Such harmony is in immortal souls," wrote Shakespeare, the hermetist, "but whilst this muddy vesture of decay doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it."<sup>112</sup> His insights into hermetism appear in Love's Labours Lost, lightheartedly presenting the precious devotees, recalling the Elizabethan hermetists that gathered at Sir Walter Raleigh's house.

Rattansi points out that "The Cambridge Platonists . . . restate classical Neo-Platonist philosophy to safeguard a religious vision of the world."<sup>113</sup> Hence Newton's absorption in the "literature of alchemy, . . . biblical chronology, and

prophecy," which, he assures us, "must have had some connection with his scientific work."<sup>114</sup> John Maynard Keynes shows us just how close the connection was. He tells us how Newton wrote on "the measurements of Solomon's Temple, the Book of Daniel, the Book of Revelations, . . . hundreds of pages of Church History and the like, designed to discover the truth of tradition. . . . The scope and character of these papers have been hushed up, or at least minimized, by nearly all those who have inspected them."<sup>115</sup> How was such stuff related to his scientific work? They were part of it--to him by far the more interesting part; and they "are marked by careful learning, accurate method, and extreme sobriety of statement. They are just as sane as the Principia, . . . nearly all composed during the same twenty-five years of his mathematical studies."<sup>116</sup>

In an arresting passage cited by Santillana, Keynes writes: Newton was not the first of the age of reason. He was the last of the magicians, . . . the last great mind which looked out on the visible and intellectual world with the same eyes as those who began to build our intellectual inheritance rather less than 10,000 years ago. . . . His deepest instincts were occult, esoteric, semantic. . . . Why do I call him a magician? Because he looked upon the whole universe and all that is in it as a riddle, . . . a sort of philosopher's treasure hunt to the esoteric brotherhood. He believed that these clues were to be found partly in the evidence of the heavens and in the constitution of the elements, . . . but also partly in certain papers and traditions handed down by the brethren in an unbroken chain back to the original cryptic revelation in Babylonia.<sup>117</sup>

Or in Egypt, rather, for all of the hermetic traditions pointed in that direction. Newton also talked as Joseph Smith did, that "truth had been given by God in the beginning, but had been fragmented and corrupted in the course of time; its traces survived in enigmatic form in these different sorts of literature, but had to be recovered by a sort of dialectic between hard, disciplined inquiry and the ancient sources."<sup>118</sup> How could one whom Rattansi calls "the cold and austere Newton" take such stuff seriously? It was because the idea of a

mechanistic universe gave him "a chilling sense of its inadequacy as a world-view to live by."<sup>119</sup>

Egypt or Babylon? That was the ancient controversy. But in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the argument was between three rivals: Greece, Egypt, and Iran. My friend and teacher Werner Jaeger in the 1920s drew attention to the self-declared indebtedness of Plato and Aristotle to Zoroaster. Richard Reitzenstein, who for years had insisted on the Egyptian origin of hermetism as opposed to the stubborn insistence of the Germans that the Greeks alone invented everything, suddenly shifted his allegiance to Iran and from then on saw an ancient Persian background in everything hermetic. A recent study by Karl-Wolfgang Troeger discusses the three-corner rivalry and in the process takes note of the gnostic problem, which cannot be ignored in any discussion of hermetism. "The relationship between the gnosis and the mystery religions," he writes, "often mentioned together in the same breath has, to the present day, never been properly clarified." That, he says, is because there is no general agreement on just what is meant either by Gnosis or by Mysteries<sup>120</sup>--so how are they related? If we had some ham, we would have some ham and eggs, if we had the eggs.

Along with the gnostic problem goes the Kabbala. "Intimate resemblance" in language and thought between gnostic sects and the Kabbala proves to some that "Gnosticism borrowed a great deal if not precisely from the Zohar, at least from its traditions and sources"; and Professor Franck asked, "Could there have existed an older doctrine, from which, unknown to each other, both the kabbalistic system and [the] so-called Alexandrian Platonism" could both have borrowed.<sup>121</sup>

Alexander Altmann traces the "impulse for cosmological speculation by the Palestinian rabbis of the first three centuries . . . [to] Plato's Timaeus, mediated by Philo of Alexandria, and Gnostic" writers and resulting in a special "rabbinic Gnosis."<sup>122</sup> Yet J. Van der Ploeg finds the cosmological teachings already present in the Psalms.<sup>123</sup> The

"mystique cosmologique" of the Medieval Jewish Berayta is traced by N. Sed to the Apocrypha of the first to fifth centuries, when it was shared by Jews and Christians.<sup>124</sup> It is significant that when Origen moved to Palestine he had to give up his use of the Apocrypha, which he had cited freely to his fellow Christians in his native Egypt.<sup>125</sup> He knew that the elders whom he cites were the original Christians, yet he has doubts about them and even about revelation in general. He always remains on the borderline: "When finally by the grace of God the saints shall reach celestial places, then shall they comprehend all the secrets of the stars; God will reveal to them the nature of the universe, etc."<sup>126</sup> But the hermetism of the schools breaks through at the end of the passage when he commends "perfect knowledge, purged of all that is physical and corporeal," and recommends Philo the Jew to his students, "since the Scriptures are silent on the exact nature of the heavens."<sup>127</sup> Having a foot in both camps "[led] Origen into insuperable difficulties in Christology; . . . his 'aberration,'" writes G. Florovsky, "were in fact the birth pangs of the Christian mind. His own system was an abortive birth."<sup>128</sup> The Third Epistle to the Corinthians in the recently discovered Bodmer Papyrus lists as the first and worst offense of the Gnostics that they would not accept a physical resurrection or even a physical creation, and it is clear from the famous Tractate XIII of the Corpus Hermeticum that the essence of Gnosticism was that very spiritualizing of everything. It was a major shift, and hermeticism is a transition phenomenon. Thus, Augustine in the Hortensius tells us that astronomy was his favorite study, but he gave it up entirely when he realized it would not save a soul.

Concerning Tractate XIII that everyone cites, it is agreed that it contains both gnostic and mystery elements. Some, like Walter Scott, see in it a lesson in Platonic idealism; for H. Doerrie it was "a transposing of Platonic philosophy into religious revelations," just as Karl Albert sees in Plato's idealism a transposition of archaic cult practices into

philosophy, taking hermetism back to the very beginning of things. For Reitzenstein, Tractate XIII was indisputably of Iranian origin; H. Jonas said it was Egyptian, Quispel Alexandrian.<sup>129</sup> Recently discovered Coptic texts are now being read as hermetic.<sup>130</sup>

The Sefer Yetzirah, whose author is unknown, is reputed to be the oldest and most respected book of Jewish Mysticism (commonly attributed to Abraham); apart from the Bible and Talmud, it is probably the most discussed work of the Jewish national literature. To cite Louis Ginzberg, "There is a wide divergence of opinion regarding the age, origin, contents, and value of the book, since it is variously regarded as pre-Christian, Essene, Mishnaic, Talmudic, or geonic."<sup>131</sup>

Of special interest in America is freemasonry. The most consistent thing about histories of freemasonry by its most eminent historians is the noncommittal position in the important matter of origins. Freemasons are sure of where things come from. The surest support for their claims is what they call "the doctrine of chance coincidence," which is indeed the basic rule for all conflicting theories about the authenticity and value of hermetism. In the inaugural address at the opening in 1886 of the famous Quatuor Coronati Lodge in London, dedicated to research in Masonic origins, Reverend Adolphus Woodford expresses it thus:

To accept for one moment the suggestion that so complex and curious a system, embracing so many archaic remains, and such skilfully adjusted ceremonies, so much connected matter, accompanied by so many striking symbols, could have been the creation of a pious fraud or ingenious conviviality, presses heavily on our powers of belief, and over passes even the normal credulity of our species. It is, no doubt, true, that as the years have run on, this old and quaint ceremonial of ours has been modified, rearranged, and, perhaps, modernized, here and there; but the traces of antiquity are too many to be overlooked or ignored.<sup>132</sup>

Woodford claims a hermetic background for his mystery and defines hermetism as "the profession and study of occult lore by

a band of philosophers or adepts, whose last great outcome was the Rosicrucian Brotherhood."<sup>133</sup> He accepts Henry Morley's idea that "Hermetic Societies and notably the Rosicrucians . . . spread over Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries, calling themselves a fraternity, adepts, children of light, brethren."<sup>134</sup> In their secrecy and symbolism we may have a clue to much that seems difficult to account for in the peculiar existence of freemasonry. "It is just possible," he continues in a highly speculative vein, "that Freemasonry may have been consciously or unconsciously . . . affected by various influences and controlled by various exigencies as time ran on. It may not have always borne the same outward form."<sup>135</sup> All in all, the most he can be sure of is that "there seems to have been a great analogy between hermetic and masonic (freemasonic) use and teaching."<sup>136</sup> But then there was, as we have seen, a great analogy between hermetic use and teaching and almost any other ancient or medieval conclave you choose to name. Woodford ends by noting that "Freemasonry, like everything else, is or has been evolutionary,"<sup>137</sup> and he quotes Gibbon, who refused to commit himself on the subject of ancient Masonry "by the apprehension of discovering [that it] had never existed."<sup>138</sup>

Albert Pike, one of the leading historians of the society, traces the rites to the Aryan mystery, and particularly to the Zend Avesta, the Iranian theory of hermetism which had come into vogue at the time.<sup>139</sup> But Robert R. F. Gould, the principal historian of the order, did not believe the hermetics and Rosicrucians were closely related at all.<sup>140</sup> On the other hand, Albert G. Mackey, in the Encyclopedia of Freemasonry ("Hermes"), claims that "in all the old manuscript records which contain the Legend of the Craft, mention is made of Hermes as one of the founders of Masonry."<sup>141</sup> As Woodford explains it, "The Hermetic School which passed from the East to the West . . . seems to have flourished from early times, and was in great vogue in the monasteries of medieval days."<sup>142</sup> To Hermes was attributed "the substratum of all occult speculations. . . . At a very early age



they added the study of alchemy, . . . the search after the Aurum Potabile, Elixir of Life, [and] . . . the Philosophers's Stone. . . . Astrology . . . became so mixed up with the reveries of the Hermetic School, . . . that it was eventually made a subject for ridicule."<sup>143</sup> Hence since the eighteenth century, discredited by a line of notorious characters such as Lilly St. Germaine, Cagliostro, etc., there has been a severance, so to say, between freemasonry and hermeticism.<sup>144</sup>

Freemasonry is defined in the Coronati account as "a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols."<sup>145</sup> According to the Constitution drafted in 1721 by the Reverend James Anderson, "Masonry is non-sectarian and teaches humanistic morals, fraternity, and deistic beliefs," defining itself as "a secret organization for the erection of a spiritual temple of humanity in the heart of man." "It is so far interwoven with religion, as to lay us under the obligation to pay . . . rational homage to the Deity, . . . to view . . . the glorious works of creation, and [it] inspires him [man] with the most exalted ideas of the perfections of his Divine Creator."<sup>146</sup> This is a poetic but not satisfying answer to the terrible questions. "Whence these doctrines were originally derived," writes A. G. Mackey, "it would be impossible to say-- but I am disposed to accept Creuzer's hypothesis of an ancient and highly instructed body of priests, having their origin either in Egypt or in the East, from whom was derived religious, physical, and historical knowledge, under the veil of symbols."<sup>147</sup> All quite romantic and glamorous, but nothing very definite. The Coronati statement sums it up in affirming that though all is unproven, "we believe, that in some form or other, some way or other, perhaps as yet hardly clear to the student, perhaps yet to be traced, . . . the old Craft Masons were our forebears,"<sup>148</sup> and that among their legends, that of the "Quatuor Coronati" itself is quite "confused and hazy, . . . adumbrated by no little uncertainty and considerable confusion of facts and names."<sup>149</sup> "As the tendency of masonry is essentially

subjective," we read in the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, "many internal dissensions arose," as well as "the most varied degrees of fantastic terminology and mysterious ceremonial."<sup>150</sup> Though much is made of Egypt--"much . . . of the present Masonic symbolism can be traced to Egyptian counterparts and Egypt was the home of the 'Mysteries'"--according to Gould, "we doubt whether any connexion between modern Freemasonry and Egypt can be established."<sup>151</sup>

In all of this I cannot help recalling that for Eduard Meyer who made by far the profoundest study of Mormonism of any non-Mormon, the most striking thing about Joseph Smith is the uncompromising, unwavering, explicit certainty of the things he taught and especially of the histories he introduced. Everything is concrete and straightforward, Meyer finds; whereas every other major religious founder went through a mandatory period of uncertainty and self-doubt, there is in Joseph Smith's behavior never a moment of doubt or hesitation as to what is what.

In his founding speech in London on January 12, 1886, Woodford challenged Masonic historians to search the

Aryan sources, . . . the mystic symbolism of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, . . . hieratic papyri, . . . the aporreta of Greece and Rome, . . . Scandinavian sagas, . . . Teutonic mythology, . . . the communities of Greece and the collegia opificum of Rome. [They must explore] medieval tendencies, Hermeticism, . . . the Craft Guilds [of the Middle Ages, etc.]<sup>152</sup>

It is all very stirring, but how do you go about it? The Germans called their method Wissenschaft, of course, but it consisted solely of utterly authoritarian scholarly impressions, limited of course to the scope of one's own reading. Everyone decided for himself, and defended against all others his impression of what texts resemble each other, to what degree, and in what order of priority.

Joseph Smith restored what he called "the Ancient Order," the "Patriarchal Priesthood, . . . this 'holy order' of parents and children back to Adam."<sup>153</sup> It is "one eternal order . . . ever the same. The Saints cannot begin to comprehend it now,

their minds being dark." With the Priesthood was "instituted the ancient order of things for the first time in these last days, . . . setting forth the order [of things] pertaining to the Ancient of Days."<sup>154</sup> It was the "ancient order" in its full pattern introduced for the first time, the Order of Melchizedek, "after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch, it being after the order of the Son of God; which order came not by man" (JST-Genesis 14:27-28). "From time to time," said the prophet, "these glad tidings were sounded in the ears of men in different ages. . . . Certainly God spoke to him [Abel]; . . . and if He did, would He not . . . deliver to him the whole plan of the Gospel? . . . And if Abel was taught of the coming of the Son of God, was he not taught also of His ordinances?"<sup>155</sup> Joseph explained to the brethren the ordinances and covenants "on to the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood, setting forth the order pertaining to the Ancient of Days, and all those plans and principles by which anyone is enabled to secure the fullness of those blessings which have been prepared for the church of the First Born, and come up and abide in the presence of the Eloheim in the eternal worlds. In this council was instituted the ancient Order of things for the first time in these last days." All these teachings are given "knowing assuredly that all these things referred to in this council are always governed by the principle of revelation."<sup>156</sup> The cosmic aspect of these mysteries was not neglected for, as Joseph said, "The ancients . . . were [not] so ignorant of the system of heaven as many suppose."<sup>157</sup>

No one knew better than Joseph Smith that sacred things could be corrupted and changed, surviving in various parts of the worlds in different degrees of purity. Those traditions are to be held in respect; Joseph reprimanded those who mocked the "old Catholic Church, . . . worth more than all" by the richness of the elements of the history of the ancient order it has preserved.<sup>158</sup> "Much instruction has been given to man since the beginning which we do not possess now," he said. "Does it remain

for a people who never had faith enough to call down one scrap of revelation from heaven . . . to say how much God has spoken and how much He has not spoken?"<sup>159</sup>

In support of Rigdon's claims to the presidency, John C. Bennett produced what he said was a revelation on the subject. It is an enlightening document by reason of the striking difference to the manner and language of Joseph Smith, the work of one straining to be awesome and impressive. Bennett hails Joseph Smith as one to be "a great king and imperial primate over all Israel," with Hiram and Sidney as "viceroys in the executive dominion," and "the key of conquest [to] be given to Sidney," in Joseph's "establishment of the Halcyon Order, which excelleth all things heretofore given unto men." Particularly interesting is Emma's role in a new "kingdom holding the new keys . . . and her illuminati, and her princes, and her dukes, and her mighty men . . . shall be decorated with gems and costly array, with diadems and great glory."<sup>160</sup>

Precisely because the earth is filled with apostate or defective versions of the true order, a vital function of the priesthood was the key to distinguishing among them. "Joseph Smith taught that these ordinances would serve as a standard by which the subcelestial impurities of surviving remnants of earlier Gospel dispensations could be judged."<sup>161</sup> The employment of such keys, according to the prophet, was in "certain signs and words by which false spirits and personages may be detected from true."<sup>162</sup>

Mormonism is not a hermetic movement nor a descendant from any older dispensation of the church through horizontal succession. It is interesting that the terms horizontal and vertical succession are now being used by theologians to distinguish between two types of tradition, the one by revelation, the other by inheritance.<sup>163</sup> A Yale professor has recently given expression to the frustration of the Doctors in trying to pin down Mormonism: "The exact significance of this great story persistently escapes definition. . . . One cannot

even be sure if the object of our consideration is a sect, a mystery cult, a new religion, a church, a people, a nation, or an American sub-culture. . . . [The] Mormons . . . remain a people apart. . . . Their inner intellectual and spiritual problems cannot easily be shared with others."<sup>164</sup>

To justify the title of this talk a quotation from the Book of Mormon will make the connection: "For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well as in these times as in times of old, and as well as in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round" (1 Nephi 10:19).

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