



SACREDNESS VERSUS 'SIN'

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"mythic images implicitly govern a culture..."
(Preface to *The Myth of the Goddess* by Baring & Cashford)

"With the splitting of the atom everything has changed save our mode of thinking, and thus we drift towards unparalleled disaster." (Albert Einstein)

What is wrong with us today? The dislocation of our societies (referring particularly to our 'Western' society) is obvious in every situation and walk of life. "The times are out of joint", and if Hamlet saw "something rotten in the state of Denmark", he would probably have been horrified by the present state of affairs. It seems to me that there is a fundamental error, a basic cause of current chaos in our ways of thinking and acting. I shall try in this article to suggest what has gone wrong.

I think that we started to go off the rails a long time ago. A basic attitude or philosophy appears to have taken over at some point that resulted in a loss of respect for the physical world; the idea of dominance in place of participation; a loss of balance, tolerance and unity; failure to see the immanence of the Divine in the All, and a terrible dichotomy in place of a sense of wholeness. All these can be traced to the gradual replacement of one set of mythic images by another.

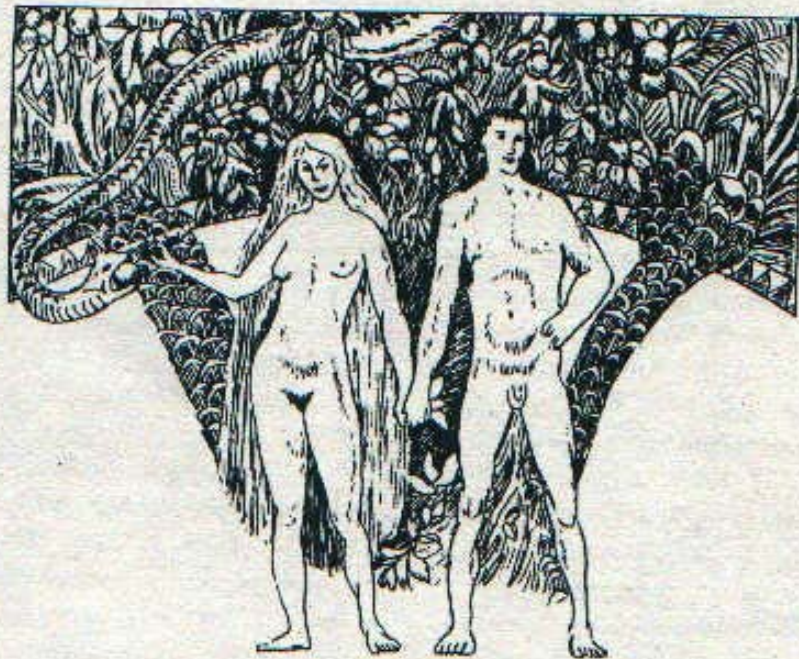
Please do not misunderstand me. I would not wish the following remarks to be interpreted as an attack on anyone's belief. It should surely be possible to retain the best essential tenets of a faith while discarding a few outworn - and dangerous - ideas. It would be counter-productive, to say the least, to throw out the precious baby with the dirty bathwater. The problem of the fundamentalist, however, is insistence on the inviolability of 'Holy Writ', with the retention of every word of sacred writings as now transmitted, translated and re-interpreted to us today, as if they proceeded directly from the Divine without the intervention of a multitude of scribes. I might add that even if the humble scribes were all completely faithful and faultless in their task, we would still have to reckon with the hidden agendas of all the high priests and pontiffs.

One fundamental idea that forms a part of the current set of mythic images relates to the 'Fall' and the concept of

sin. Inherent in this complex is the insistence on belief and obedience as opposed to the very human tendency to experiment, to experience, to be curious and to thirst for knowledge. To become completely human and fulfill our potential, it was necessary to develop self-awareness, thought and reasoning. This inevitably led to an abandonment of the blissful animal existence in the Garden for a life of painful experience and knowledge. Unfortunately, this led to the concept

dominate it. Emphasis is laid on the duty of humanity to 'name' all the rest of creation and govern it, using it as something inferior.

An examination of many so-called 'primitive' cultures shows that such a philosophy is totally opposed to their view of themselves as part of their environment, and to their consequent respect for it and its other inhabitants. This attitude is basic to their systems of belief and the concept of themselves as part of the All. Religion in such a



of Original Sin, which in turn involves, not only the idea of sinfulness being inherent in us, but of unspirituality in the material world. As a result, we are thus infused with a sense of guilt and at the same time told to regard our material world as in some way evil. To become more spiritual, we have thus been taught to shun materiality or to

culture is all-pervasive, and forms a part of every thought and action. Thus some form of prayer or invocation accompanies the killing of an animal for food, the sowing of seed, the gathering of crops or the felling of a tree. In fact, the whole of life, the environment, everything is thus seen as sacred, and the idea of natural

functions as being in any way sinful is totally alien.

Another concept that has led to intolerance and a rending of the fabric of society may be summed up in the word 'exclusiveness'. Starting out with the idea of the Divine as a 'jealous God', the faithful are exhorted to shun other gods. This clearly leads to intolerance of other faiths, ultimately to the self-contradictory 'holy' war against the infidel. Meanwhile the rival faith glories in its crusades against the other set of 'unfaithful'. Nowadays, of course, we are much more mixed up, and rather than embarking for foreign climes to 'spread the faith', we can simply make war on our neighbours. The problem is exacerbated by the schisms that divide one sect of a religion from another, one church from another. Thus, each sect regards itself as a chosen people who will be 'saved' while the rest of humanity is consigned to eternal damnation. If only we could follow our own paths while leaving others to pursue theirs, we could all find ourselves eventually on the same mountaintop. It's a big mountain, so there should be room for all!

It seems to me that it is a basic mistake to cling to the "habit of thinking in oppositions generally". Instead of being regarded as two aspects of the same thing, Night and Day, Male and Female, Yin and Yang are seen as in opposition, as if at war rather than being the two sides of the same coin. Just as Yin and Yang are portrayed as containing the seed of each other, day follows night as night follows day, light and dark exist only

because of each other, and the female includes elements of the male and vice versa. The Universe is part of the Divine, just as the Divine pervades all of it. Instead of seeing the essential relationships, we tend to dwell on differences.

It has been shown that the two hemispheres of each human brain have complementary functions. These reflect corresponding functions of the mind, which should normally be in balance. Our culture tends to encourage logical thought at the expense of intuition and imagination, science and maths at the expense of the arts, and a lack of balance ensues.

This means that two essential aspects of the human mind are out of accord with each other. It may seem a lot to claim that mythic images are so important to all areas of human experience, but the discoveries of Depth Psychology have shown how radically we are influenced and motivated by impulses below the threshold of consciousness, both in our personal and in our collective life as members of the human race. (*The Myth of the Goddess*, by Baring & Cashford). Thus, part of the big mistake of the general world view is in seeing the physical world as the enemy of the spirit and as something to be dominated and exploited rather than embraced, loved and revered. Instead of rebelling against the physical world, the spiritually-minded should see it as an essential part of the Divine Oneness. Once we see its sacredness, wholeness and unity with the Divine, everything should fall into place.