

Ordo Antichristianus Illuminati®

Myth, Symbol, & Initiation

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Myth indicates an unremitting thread of how we interpret interaction between the Holy and the human condition. Mythology in religion provides the faithful a sacred story, be it oral or written, engaging the faithful with heroes, heroines, and deities often metaphysically. The faithful in the cultures that disseminate myths often believe some elements of truth exist in myths that narrate metaphysical interplay before or beyond historical time. Myths are narratives that break the boundaries between the human and the holy. The multivalence of myth compounds with syncretism in religion, indicating metaphysical relationships between the human condition and the holy.

Generally more experiential than analytical, myths seek to penetrate the depths of human imagination with revelatory narratives that relay {as in the Old Testament, Hopi Kachina myths, the moral certitude of the Holy Qu'ran} moral convictions in culture. Myth fractures the borders of linear time and coalesce historical conceptions of religion. Nearly the founding of all predominant religious traditions derives from mythological inception regardless of history and language. Myth should not be used in a pejorative or dismissive manner for diverse cultures embed their faith in these sacred stories whether or not history unveils their veracity. The revelatory nature behind all myths insists to the investigator in Religious Studies that the sacred story is neither false nor true.

Myths classify into origin, eschatological, ritual, and prestige. Origin myths {Book of Genesis} are sacred stories of primordial origins of human culture, often supplanted in diverse metaphysical realms in this world by divine characters. Cultural etiology, language dissemination, and human alienation from primal grace, segregation from the Holy are qualities of origin myths. Prestige myths are epic tales {Homer's Iliad} of human and divine characters often containing qualities of tragedy, love and agape, sacrifice, retribution, heroics, and war. Myths that centre upon ritual {Christian "last supper," Buddhist accounts of the Buddha meditating in Benares} explain often with metaphysical themes the performance and transmission of ritual within religious traditions. Jewish religious practices and celebrations often

centre upon ritual steeped in Biblical myth such as Abraham's Covenant with God and Passover.

Eschatological myths concern revelations of human destiny under the lens of meta-history. Eschatological myths often include apocalypticism and messianic expectations and belief in time that transcends linear time. Mircea Eliade states that a common quality of eschatological myths is a quality of eternalism steeped in a return of the Holy to "correct" and/or "judge" the acts of humans individual and collective. Forms of segregation and alienation from the divine are restored and human destiny enters a period of everlasting grace and boon proceeding apocalyptic changes in history with dire consequences for the human condition. Millenarianism, the fascination with millennial fulfillment and change in various eras, and cyclical myths, the fascination with cyclical destructions of human history are two categories of eschatological myth.

Myths contain the use of archetypes, as psychologists tend to posit that myth is more of an expression of the human psyche rather than an explanation of faith. Myths are primarily ontological; they are concerned with an understanding of the human condition and the human place in the cosmos. While it is evident ontology is the central theme behind all myth, the segregation of the human from the Holy and the intimate interplay with the Holy and human destiny overall supersedes the veracity of myth. Myth authenticates cultural, tribal, religious custom by connecting the sacred story to faith in metaphysical truths e.g. concepts of Buddhist nirvana, and Catholic penance. Therefore, myths often generation culture innate desires to perpetuate and authenticate experiential and not dogmatic religion. On the negative side, myths can generate cultural schism over territory {Palestine, and Tibet} connected metaphysical tales to justify a culture's occupation of a certain parcel of sacred land.

Myths often lay at the far end of the spiritual continuum in human destiny transitioning from legendary occurrence in history to mythical tale in and out of time. Myth then breaches the end of the religious spectrum by assuming a supernatural quality that supersedes the importance of the quasi-historical events. Myth unveils history in a metaphysical manner that highlights human destiny rather than history emphasizes the accounts of mythology. The meta-narratives of myth breaches barriers of historical accounts and archetypal legends that are neither true nor false yet hold preeminent affect on human destiny as the centre of its self-conceited universe.

Myth also functions as a religious meme where boundaries of the human and holy are perpetually breached. Such mythic themes about the primordial state of human existence, human alienation from the Holy indicates a 'cognitive validity' that is no more verifiable than fairy tales of youth are. I would argue a demythologizing does not eliminate the innate religiosity of myth but possibly devalues the importance of faith with hermeneutics. Thus, meta-narratives illustrate a religious language best left in the confines of belief within the human psyche. Myth is always invoked by history and the innate human need for religious experience.

Religious symbolism always is multivalent; it is a meaning-giving progression that opens direct modes of experience with the Holy. Symbolism is embedded in Mankind's sacraments, art, sciences, mathematics, sexuality, politics, even currency. The term symbol applies to a variety of context, words and money included, pointing to the sacred and a deeper understanding of Mankind's innate religiosity. Money is considered a symbol for human economic agreement, for trade of goods and services, supply and demand. Thus, the reality behind symbols, behind religious hieroglyphs, the meaning of monetary symbolism is mental and underscores the dynamic interaction between the Holy and language.

Religious symbolism must be defined and integrated properly, understanding of how symbols are structured and their multifaceted ways of functioning. The manipulation of symbols to obscure the Holy from the human condition with spiritual materialism and religious fundamentalism is a bane to the faithful and the investigators of Religious Studies. Symbol is a term weighty in its meaning. Religious sigils and hieroglyphs often break down the limits of language and philosophy. Symbols that highlight the referents are called representational symbols, while symbols that manifest or participate in the referent are called presentational symbols. Religious symbolism denotes meanings above and beyond language, inducing the referent to experience a mysterious reality.

The perceptibility of any religious symbol relies on its intrinsic meaning to the reference and the faithful. The recent satirical use of the Prophet Muhammad in Danish journals indicates a deep sensitivity of Mankind toward sacred symbols. Islam forbids any portrayal of Prophet Muhammad, and this satire in Danish periodicals produced a tide of religious fervor and violence. Thus, we are psychologically attracted to religious icons and revile their misperception and misuse. Desecration of religious symbols induces mass revulsion and

condemnation as if the symbols possessed the praeter-human qualities of the referent. To desecrate the Crucifix, the Star of David, a statue of Buddha or at the least the American flag invokes attitudes of a profanation of the Holy. Religious symbolism and archetypes are interdependent. Multivalent religious symbolism indicates a churning, an activation of archetypal forces immersed deep in the human psyche.

The preeminence of studying religious symbols in context has widened approaches to the investigation of comparative theology. Categorized and studying religious symbolism in their content, context of culture and sociology, intention of presentation underscore the human approach to the Holy. Symbols and religious hieroglyphs function also to systemize and synchronize religious traditions and the breeches of faith and language. Masonic symbolism synchronizes religious symbolism that interlaces with many traditions such as ancient Egyptian religion, Judaism, Christianity, and Greco-Roman pagan religions. The theological curriculum for the study of the initial degrees of Freemasonry derives from Judaic and Biblical mysticism.

Religious symbolism often has analogous references to iconic meanings and metaphoric meanings. Signs and symbols of the Holy are not confined to language; rather they present syncretic undertones of faith, prophecy, and ritual. The letter G, the square and compass are symbolism exclusively associated with Freemasonry, whilst the crucifix and representations of the cross are confined to Christianity, albeit with a more secular fashion. An increasing number of scholars are investigating religious symbolism endeavoring to synchronize religious faith and underpin the innateness of Mankind's religiosity. The extensive search to understand religious symbolism is a quest to unravel the context of faith and personal spirituality be it in the confines of Shi'ite Islam, Rabbinic Judaism, or Roman Catholicism. Religious symbolism permeate our culture to represent an underlying societal and religious 'quest' to uncover the realm of faith and of the Holy. Thus, the gaining of understanding a symbol is synonymous with valence of the symbol.

The accomplishment achieve when one communes with the prevalent meaning that underlies a religious symbol is individually fulfilling. One identifies oneself as a Christian by wearing Christian sigils, hence a personal fulfillment in identifying with the referent of the religious sigil. Emile Durkheim explains that religion invokes a "feeling of mystery" {Durkheim 1995: pg. 22}. Particular feelings that break down barriers of faith, language, and science are influenced thusly by religious iconography. Feelings of the mystery, the Holy in

the individual function to synchronize religious symbolism and at once proselytize the faithful.

Ritual and initiation are the greatest forces in religion, and in the human condition. Initiation, be it into a religious tradition or institution, or into a 'private religious fraternity, breaches the boundaries of religious mystery and faith. Rituals that are obscured in secrecy and mystic epiphany propel one into a new physiological, and psychological dawning. Initiation rites evoke a new panorama of religious faith, approachable in this thesis under the auspices of psychology, sociology, and theology. Through ritual initiation the mystic journey of the soul, a reenactment of the romantic history of the soul, and a recapitulation of a divine heritage of the immortality of the soul are often portrayed in a stage of pageantry and solemnity.

Through initiation into the obscure and secretive mystery schools of religion, aptly hidden in the shadows of history, the seeker arrives at a knowledge and conversation with the Holy, the Other that satiates the intolerable ache of the soul to know itself and its creator. Instinct and a primal condition of religion latent in the human genealogy are awakened in ritual initiation. Initiation is meant to instill an indwelling, an epiphany, which activates in the human brain matrix, an innate sense of religion and the mystery of God. Initiation overcomes a spiritual poverty of the soul, exulting a primal condition that annexes the differences between Mankind and the mystery of God.

The virtue of mysticism and magic to the human condition is prevalent. The motive of world religious traditions is that all men and women perceive to a certain degree, the everlasting wail of the Buddhist 'First Noble Truth,' that everything is sorrow and religion consoles them by either an authoritative denial or perpetuation of this truth. This psychological ply is done via transgression of the situation itself, or by promising amends in other states of existence. A fundamental problem is that religions, without exception, often fail and become decrepit at the first tests of history and culture. The claim of religion is to excel, and incidentally, make obsolete the judgments of reason by reconciling mysticism and science. In this formula, a direct experience and more importantly expression of intelligences superior in kind to any incarnate human occur. Preconceptions of religion and the arts and sciences of the occult by the initiated scholar breed spiritual materialism and secular demonisation.

Esoteric religion presupposes ideals of a discarnate intelligence or experience of ultimate reality, regardless of whatever linguistic

intrusion humanity places upon it. This is exactly what no religion has proven scientifically, trapping the human condition in its finitude and trance of sorrow. This is the great melancholy of Mankind, in which men such as Marcus Aurelius, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche have forfeited my definition of religion. Professor William James cites this melancholy as the abode of the “sick soul”⁹ where flesh and spirit lust contrary to one another in a state of all-encompassing schizophrenia. This spiritual schizophrenia is a healthy one that induces men, and women, to initiate into secret societies, religious fraternities, that since ancient times acted as custodians of highest cultural concepts and a depository of ordained knowledge.

Ceremonial initiations express a latent intolerable ache of the soul in Mankind to ameliorate this unbearable “sickness” by seeking a direct contact with the holy mysteries of God and religion.

The solemn and overwhelming initiation rites of the Masonic lodges are symbolic pageantries suited to induce in the frightened and seduced soul a veneration of the divine mysteries, and admiration for the powers of nature and God. Candidates into Masonic initiations are prepared after thorough character examination and appropriate consecration and purification. Initiates of ancient philosophic societies such as Freemasonry, and the Rosicrucians, were regarded as possessing ordained knowledge, an illuminated intelligence, extraordinary faculties and powers. These adept-philosophers were truly enlightened human beings that have guided the manifest destiny of humanity by overseeing developments in the humanities, arts, advances in medicines and the liberal sciences, and great reformations to religion. The esoteric schools of the mystery traditions remain across history as a powerful force in the regeneration of human dignity, religious, and cultural institutions.

There is an epiphany felt when one initiates into previously hidden or unknown religious formulas or uncovers esoteric meanings of symbols and sacraments. Ritual, ceremony, and initiation is a carnal act not achieved by conventional religious institutions or by the officiator whom performs it, or on behalf of the postulant. The experiences of the postulant in such initiation ceremonies as Roman Catholic ordination, the Native American Ghost Dance, and initiation into the Masonic Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite, the York Rite, and Ancient & Primitive Rite of Memphis-Misraim are fulfilling and described by candidates as “enlightenment” or “illumination.” Theologian Emile Durkheim explains, “religion is a feeling of mystery.”¹⁰ Durkheim states “..all that is religious is the notion of the

supernatural. By that is meant any order of things that goes beyond our understanding; the supernatural is the world of mystery, the unknowable, or the incomprehensible.” Initiation into the Masonic lodges penetrates this veil of antiquity.

Experiences of ritual initiation into the mysteries of Freemasonry are impressed upon the candidate by a pageantry of symbols, idols, and esoteric iconography. Masonic 33^o Grand Master Albert Pike likens Masonic initiation, as “is the aspiration of the soul toward the Absolute and Infinite Intelligence, which is the One Supreme Deity, most feebly characterized as an “Architect.” What do we mean by initiation? The root of the word itself stems the Latin noun *initium*, which literally means ‘beginning,’ ‘a commencement anew’. The Greek word used is *telein*, which means ‘to accomplish’ or ‘to make perfect’. Thus initiation means the beginning of a new perception and attitude toward life, death, and rebirth. Moreover, it is the entry into entirely new archetypes of existence. Initiation means, above all, spiritual maturity and reformation, a definite mark in the epoch of human spiritual history. Initiation is veritable not by claims, but by Works. It is the work of the new initiation to make his, or her, life anew and to at last, “*know thyself*.”

Religious scholars have basically discerned three basic categories of initiation. The first being such social rituals as puberty rites which mark the transition of childhood to adulthood. The second category includes those rites, which admit one into a secret society. The major characteristics of these societies are that they are usually limited to one sex and purport to impart secrets usually of a spiritual nature. The third category of initiatory rites encompasses what we could call mystical vocations such as shamans, medicine men, or witchdoctors. These rites are very common to the second category {very confidential} but are more intensely personal in the sense that they culminate in ecstasies and visions. These experiences seal the vocation of the shaman and provide him with further instructions to help him in his craft. Mircea Eliade notes the shamanism experiences of initiatory rites as “equivalent to a basic change in existential condition.”¹¹

Eliade highlights initiation as a repetitive symbolism, retrogression to the chaotic primordial events that shaped the proto-history of the species, thus a common theme in initiation is a reenactment of the interaction betwixt the divine hierarchy and the ancient world. All initiatory rites induce a physiologic and psychological rebirth, a resurrection by iconographic symbols

embedded into the psyche of the postulant. Eliade classifies initiations into two categories: puberty rites and specialized initiations. Puberty rites are ceremonies by virtue of which adolescent members of the community gain access to sexuality and knowledge, often accompanied by dramatic pageants, not excluding corporal and genital mutilations. Specialized initiations are secret ceremonies where individuals undergo psychological transformation and become emissaries or protégés of the divine hierarchy invoked during initiations.

Ritual initiation in Freemasonry and the mystery schools of Christianity, such as Gnostic traditions, Rosicrucian Fraternities, and monastic institutions of Catholicism are commemorative, petitionary and instinctual. Eliade fails to approach ritual initiation from the panorama of a scholar-practitioner. There must be a concern with the insider-outsider approach to Religious studies, for the mantle between scholar and practitioner often is blurred in subjectivity. Various scholars masquerading as practitioners have charged at times Masonic preceptors with misconduct of ethics, sexuality, and unenlightened behavior to say the least. These charges upon the psychology and style of initiation often are due to preexisting aversion to the occult arts and sciences in Freemasonry with its often-erotic mysteries. Arguably, spiritual egotism injects itself here into the vague impression between scholar and practitioner. Eliade often brings a banal, yet informed prospect of rites and symbols of initiation.

In the area between religion and secularism, between scholar and practitioner, a shade emerges as a sort of ‘Trojan Horse,’ pitting the speculative debate of confessional vs. secular-academic against cyclic inconclusiveness. How does an academic insider of a prescribed religion promulgate experience and expression objectively? Is it conceivable for one to be thrust within a certain initiatic religious tradition, in this writer’s case, Freemasonry, while remaining an objective scholar? Alternatively, is it permissible in principle for a practitioner to engage academia? Initiation is the reconciler here. The scholar-practitioner must look impartially upon this issue.

The scholar-practitioner who has failed in initiation, or simply not undertaken the ordeals of initiation, perpetuates a homespun movement whose teachers have not received the teachings and the accompanying spiritual transmission with a recognized lineage. Initiation allows the postulant new archetypes of life and death compounded with dynamic worldviews. To allow initiation unto the unfit is not only severely damaging to all aspects of the aspirants

constitution, it also is disastrous for the teacher and student. Naturally at this point the question arises, what is Freemasonry and “Masonic initiation?” For risk of a sufficient passing grade, and expulsion from the Masonic Lodge and fraternity, I cannot go into detail concerning the secrets of Masonic symbolism and iconography.

In a zeal to appreciate and make the best of my connection with the Masonic Order, scholar-practitioners experience difficulty in defining and placing Freemasonry. Is it religion, philosophy, a system of morals, or what? It may be well at this juncture to clear up the theory that Masonry is not a religion, though it contains marked religious elements and many religious references. A Brother may legitimately say, if he wishes, and many do say, “Masonry is my religion” but he is not justified in classifying and holding it out to other people as a Religion. A Mason is religious, but should not profess Freemasonry as a religion. Reference to the Masonic Grand Lodge Constitutions makes it quite clear that the system is one meant to exist outside and independently of religion; nonetheless, Freemasonry is a religious fraternity. All the Order requires of its members is a belief in Deity and personal conformation to the Moral Law, every Brother being free to follow whatsoever form of religion and mode of worship he pleases.

Importantly neither is Masonry a philosophy; albeit behind it lies a large philosophical background not appearing in its surface-rituals and doctrine, but left for discovery to the research and effort of Masonic Brethren. That philosophical background is a Gnosis or an ordained knowledge, a teaching as old as the world, one which has been shared alike by the Vedics and Tantrics of the Orient, the Egyptian, Chaldean and Orphic Initiation systems, the Pythagorean and Platonist schools, and all the Mystery Temples of both the past and the present, Christian or otherwise. Notice the increasing sensationalism of the mystery schools and secret societies with their inclusions in popular culture and literature, such as: Holy Blood, Holy Grail, The Da Vinci Code {its sequel The Solomon Key no doubt will feature vast misconceptions of Freemasonry}, and popular films like National Treasure. Esotericism is swiftly gaining a resurgence of romanticism and popularity.

Masonic initiations include emic and etic language. Emic language; those terms used by the believers or the observed group, and etic language; distinctions and descriptions made by outside observers, at once break down and erect barriers between the profane and the initiated. Initiation experiences supersede language, often creating a

meta-language of codes, iconology that become embedded in the Initiate's psyche. All initiations, including consecrations in the Masonic Lodge, must have at least three phases, though these phases can be repeated within the same ritual. The first, or pre-liminal phase prepares the candidate for initiation. This is done in many ways but the goal of all of them is to develop in the candidate a sense of separation from his or her former life.

Those first phase preparations that are directed towards the candidate, as opposed to those that are directed towards the ritual conductors or ritual space, generally fall into two groups, physical/psychological and magical, though many groups do not always show a clear delimitation between physical, psychosocial and magical levels of awareness. Almost all groups use forms of sensory deprivation in their initiatory rites. The most common forms of this are the blindfold or hoodwink and the binding of the body in one or more places with cord or rope.

The second phase is that which might be called the 'initiation proper.' In this phase the candidate goes through a process that will eventually bring him or her into the group or tradition. In magical orders or religions this phase is often magical in nature and is said to have specific effects on the candidate that he or she may not be aware of but will bring about the necessary connection to that groups magical current. Integration into the Masonic fraternity is the final phase. It can be difficult to pinpoint where this phase starts in the ritual. In some instances it occurs only after the candidate is declared to be a member of the group or tradition in question and the secrets pertaining to the new initiate's grade or rank within the group are given. In some magical groups this phase begins before the magical current of that group is placed within the candidate.

This phase may continue through to the end of the ritual itself or may end earlier. Integration techniques are often quite simple. For instance almost all initiating groups within the Western Mysteries read to the new initiate a series of instructions pertaining to the teachings of their new grade. In indoor lodge or temple settings the new initiate is often seated in a particular quarter of the ritual space reserved for members of the same grade. This is seen in the initiations of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn as well as in the second and third Masonic degrees of the Blue Lodge.

The three phases of initiation are markedly similar to the phases of a rite de passage, consisting of preliminal, liminal, and post-liminal phases, so much so that we may, as an etic delineation, identify

initiations as a form of rites de passage, as numerous others have already done. As rites de passage, initiations are a subclass of ritual. Therefore we can say that initiations are ritual processes directed towards a subject, being one or more candidates, and having some effect on those men and women. At the end of a successful initiation ritual, the new initiate has a new status within the group. This change of status is expressed within the ritual and is produced by the ritual. Exactly how this occurs will vary. The effect may simply be declarative in nature; the ritual Preceptor, using his {or her} authority as such, declares the candidate a member and therefore he or she is. It may also include psychological factors, based on the identification of the candidate with all others who have undergone the ritual before. It may include mystic factors.

Etically, we can say that initiations, as rites of passage, must have as their object a transforming effect upon their subjects. This transformation can be observed as a change of status for the subject. This change of status may be understood by the practitioners in a number of different ways; mundane, magical, or spiritual. From both and emic and etic perspective, initiations are always first-time rituals that cannot be repeated for the same candidate. This is especially true for non-magical rituals. The author is aware of people who have been given an initiation twice, after an extended period of time, before being given the next initiation in the initiatory process. It is arguable that because this repeated initiation does not change the status of the candidate within the group, it is not actually an initiation but simply an act of ritual with a magical and not an initiatory purpose. This is fully in line with the literal definition of initiation as well as agreeing with the common usage of the term. It is for this reason that second marriages or the birth of a second child are excluded from a general definition of initiation even though they are considered rites de passage.

Rituals of initiation are limited in scope of time from both an emic and etic standpoint. The rituals themselves are not ongoing and must end distinctly before the death of the candidate. In addition rituals are marked by distinct beginnings and endings. All initiation rituals within the Western Mysteries, and Masonic Lodges of the York, Scottish, and Memphis-Misraim rites, from both the emic and etic views, are seen as having a mythological element to them. Generally they are said to take place in a magical space outside of time and space, in the center of time and space or at some mythological location, such as the halls of Osiris from the Egyptian Book of Going

Forth by Day, the construction site of King Solomon's Temple or at the Rosicrucian's mountain Abiegnus.

Ritual initiation is a carnal act. The *sanctum sanctorum* of Freemasonry of ornamented with the shining jewels of forgotten ages; its rituals, consecrations, and initiations, ring with the divinely inspired words of sages and seers. Albert Pike writes “..and so I came at last to see that the true greatness and majesty of Freemasonry consist in its proprietorship of these and it's other symbols; and that its symbolism is its soul.”¹² Initiation invokes a sacred timeless theatre where the human drama of the romantic history of the soul is imitated, be it in the Cathedral, Temple, Synagogue, or Masonic Lodge, a pageant of initiation that is complete with tragedy, secret teachings, ordained knowledge, entry into Light, and the Mystery.