

Title: Extrinsic and Intrinsic Reflections of the Divine in Nature

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Throughout our Degrees of the Symbolic Lodge, as well as those of the Scottish Rite, we hear frequent choruses recalling allegories to nature. Sometimes these references are vague, veiled in allegory and symbols, and sometimes they are explicit. As Entered Apprentices, we are informed that, “As the Sun rules the day and the Moon governs the night, so should the Worshipful Master, with equal regularity endeavor to rule and govern his Lodge.”¹ As Brothers of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of the Southern Jurisdiction may also recall, one of the lines delivered in the final passages of the 32nd Degree states that “When you can read the Grand Design from the Book of Nature, this world will truly become a most holy place for you.”² In the opening of the 18th Degree of the SMJ, the Junior Warden laments, “Where can we look for the eternal base of the law of mercy and love when the poisonous snake kills the harmless bird that only sings its prayers to the very God who made the serpent?”³ In all of these statements, we see cited a different aspect of how nature is a reflection of the workings of the Divine. We are reminded of the Hermetic axiom that what is above is like that which is below.

Unfortunately, all of mankind’s sacred texts are pregnant with our own prejudices and flavored with our own sorrows, pains, and joys. This is, of course, the product of man trying to transcribe the ineffable glory of the Divine, interpreted through his own imperfect eyes and in our constrained languages. Then in turn, each man interprets these imperfect holy books in their own way and colors them with their own biases. The end result is that religion, *at its best*, constitutes a source of hope filled with confusion; at its worst, it creates contention and conflict among peoples where no such conflict is truly warranted.

It can be inferred by reading Bible verses Psalm 19:1-4, Romans 1:20, and others, that the Universe and nature are God’s Bible, perfectly reflecting His sacred plan in their unerring regularity and balance between the dark and the light, the harsh and the mild, and the good and

the evil. In Nature, these opposing forces are not in contention for dominion over one another but are all working together throughout eternity in perfect balance, harmony, and equilibrium.

Looking into the allegories and rituals of the ancient religions and mysteries, we find indications that answers to the eternal questions of life forever have been sought within the Book of Nature.

Rex Hutchens affirms this point in his book, *A Bridge to Light*, where he writes, “The wondrous profusion of tiny lights which sparkled upon the great slate of the night sky became man’s tracing board. Upon it, he wrote his mythology, divined his future, discerned his fate, planted his crops, named his children. He made it the abode of his gods and his devils.”⁴

In the 32nd Degree of the Southern Masonic Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite, we are told that the ancients adored the stars that rose just before the sun at the vernal equinox⁵. Going back four thousand years in time, we find prominent religious symbolism of the apis, or bull, by the Hindus, Japanese and Egyptians. At that time, Taurus rose equinoctially in the spring when it was time to plant crops with beasts of the field drawing the plows. As such, the bull was revered as a harbinger of more favorable weather and the bringer of life. At about that time, the time of Moses, even the ancient Hebrews

wrestled with heathen worship of a golden calf. To look at an image of a popular depiction of Isis from that time (fig. 1⁶), her headdress may seem peculiar – until one may view it as the sun rising between a bull’s horns.⁷

In a later epoch, Aries, represented as a ram (or lamb), signified the reemergence of life characterized by the birth of lambs and ewes in the springtime. On the other side of the seasons, we observe the Ancient Greeks marking the autumnal equinox’s onset of colder weather and



Figure 1: Isis

diminution of light with the sun rising in Scorpio represented in their infernal god, Typhon. Typhon is generally represented with venomous serpents and scorpions. The Egyptians' corresponding god for Typhon was named Set. In Egyptian mythology, Osiris represented the god of agriculture, life, and light. Set was Osiris' nemesis who slew him, thus thrusting the world into a period of wintery death, darkness, cold and fear. Both Set and Typhon were associated with the sun in Scorpio during the autumnal equinox and identified as markers for the coming winter months.⁸

Continuing with the Roman's and Greek's evolution of the Typhon myth, we observe that they revered their gods Ammon or Jupiter, respectively, who, in the time of spring's reemergence of life and light, took the form of a ram (or Aries), and bore the pantheon of gods down from Olympus in defense from Typhon's wintery attack. A notable figure of that time, Alexander the Great, is often depicted with ram's horns, reminiscent of the predominant depictions of his god, Ammon⁹, thus representative as a savior of sorts.

Early Christians made the association of springtime's rebirth to Easter's reincarnation of the "Lamb" of God, Jesus, drawing from the Aries symbolism¹⁰. This imagery thus reflects the sentiment that He was the Light of Life, warm and cultivating, returning to our world. Couple that with several other symbols of Easter, such as Easter eggs and bunnies, we see reflected the ancients' sentiment of the rebirth of new life associated with Jesus. From these ancient celebrations of the return of spring flow innumerable examples of divine rebirth and the return of light, life, and vigor, with these images carrying clear through into our contemporary beliefs.

Curiously, Jesus's birth was at the end of one epoch, and the rise of Christianity came at the dawn of another. At Christianity's inception, Jesus is considered the "Lamb" of God, consistent with Aries symbolism, but as the Christian Church began to flourish some 700 years later, we

find the sun in Pisces on the vernal equinox – which inspired what is popularly celebrated with the Jesus Fish today.

Reflecting through history, we are reminded that in so many cases, there may be found religious symbolism for a facet of the death or rebirth of a god, or a redeemer associated with the onset of darkness and evil or the return of life and light. The lessons of the divine may be learned from both the extrinsic sense as we observed in the preceding sections, as well as from the intrinsic sense, which we will proceed to focus on presently. With this shift of perspective, let's first look at alchemy and its relationship to Masonry.

There is an ongoing feud among Masonic scholars arguing between the “authentic school” of Masonry versus the “romantic school.” The former asserts that Masonic teachings were *inspired* by ancient mysteries, and the latter asserts that the mysteries *actually are the ancestors* of Masonry. With this in mind, let's consider a gentleman named George Ripley, who was one of England's most famous alchemists. He is credited with authoring twenty-three of the most highly regarded scrolls exhibiting demonstrations of alchemical principles. In addition, Ripley wrote many other works, the most famous being the *Compound of Alchymy, or the Twelve Gates Leading to the Discovery of the Philosopher's Stone*. He was born in 1415, and during his life, he traveled to France, Germany, and Italy in search of alchemical knowledge. Ripley also traveled to the island of Rhodes, where he was a patron of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, who were later known as the Knights of Malta. Are Ripley's Knight of St. John associated with those saints to whom Masonic lodges are dedicated? Is there a relation between these Knight of Malta and the York Rite body of the same name? Is there perhaps credence to the Romantic School's claim that Masonry descended from other parents, including alchemy? Many Masonic symbols are reminiscent of alchemy and vice versa. These correspondences provide at least a glimpse of the

reciprocity and cross-pollination between Masonry and alchemy. Study figure 2¹¹ and consider how many Masonic references may be found in this alchemical illustration. Further highlighting the relationship between Masonry and alchemy we can look to one of the Scottish Rite's foundational tomes: *The 1783 Franken Manuscript*. In this book's catechism of the 23rd Degree, *The Key of Masonry Philosophical Lodge of the Knights of Eagle or Sun* we see recounted the overall philosophy of alchemy connected to Masonic precepts.¹²

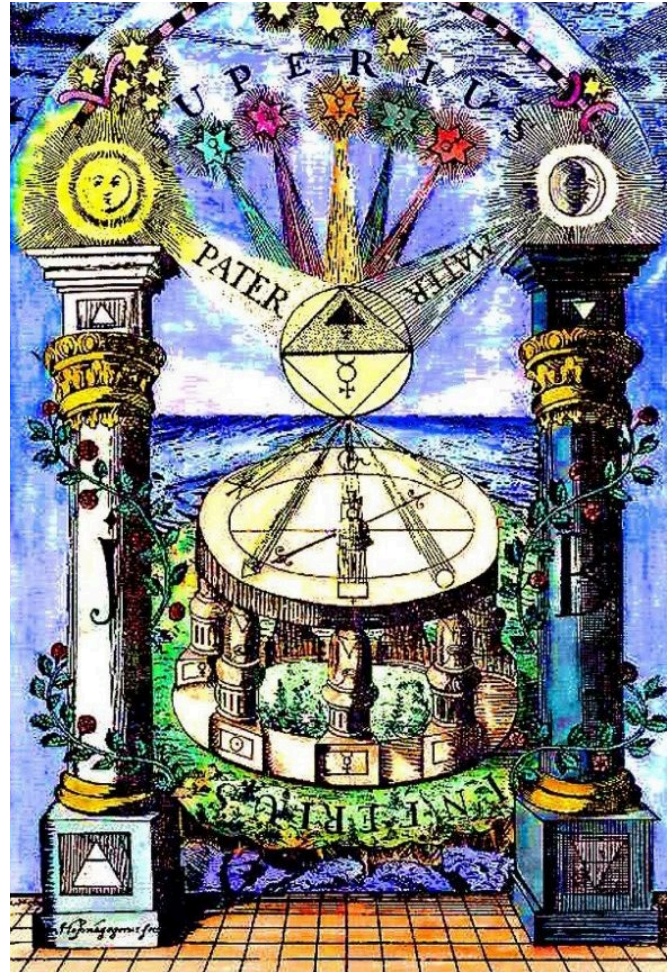


Figure 2: Alchemical Jachin and Boaz pillars

Alchemists used the symbols of nature to veil – and reveal – the secrets of the Great Work, otherwise known as the Philosopher's Stone, or the transmutation of lead to gold. Pike states that the ancient alchemists believed that chaos was the essential universal matter, the *Prima Materia*, or the first matter. The prima materia is considered formless, but susceptible of all forms. They saw form as the light, which is enclosed in the seeds of all species. Form's home is in the universal spirit. So, to extrapolate, the universal spirit's cause was to draw form from the prima materia: Order out of Chaos.¹³ Surely Albert

Pike would argue that as Masons, we continue the Great Work of alchemy. He makes a rather clear testament to this on the cover of *Morals and Dogma*, where appear the words “Ordo ab Chao,” (fig.3).

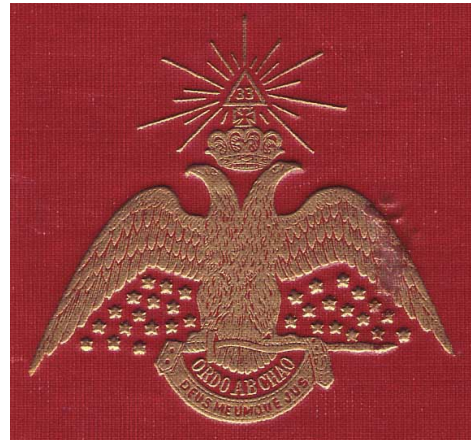


Figure 3: *Morals and Dogma* – Ordo ab Chao

Pike states in *Morals and Dogma* that, “To work on universal matter, use the internal and external fire¹: the four elements result, the *Principia, Principiorum*, and *Immediata*; Fire, Air, Water, Earth.” Alchemy ascribed characteristics to the four ancient elements, for instance, fire was hot and dry, and water was cold and wet¹⁴. From the mixture of these four elements, can be produced the three *principles* of alchemy: mercury, sulfur, and salt. These three principles represent spirit, soul, and earth, respectively¹⁵. The alchemists believed that combinations of all of the four elements mixed together with the three principles resided in all of the compounds of our Universe: animal, vegetable, and mineral. The distinguishing factor between each object of creation being that each was composed of varying proportions of each element and principle. Of course, some elements or principles would be more, or less potent or plentiful in some creations than in others – for instance, the element of fire, which represents passion, action, or change, would be present in large measure in man, but in very small proportion in, say, a rock or a tree. The key point being, that all of the alchemical principles and elements resided within everything.

Albert Pike states in *Morals & Dogma* that, “When the Masters in Alchemy say that it needs but little time and expense to accomplish the works of Science, when they affirm, above all, that but

¹ By “internal fire” is implied living, spiritual fire – the “Universal Seed,” and “external fire” represents the elemental characteristics of passion or active change.

a single vessel is necessary, when they speak of the Great and Single furnace, which all can use... ..we all possess that chemical instrument, the great and single athanor or furnace, which serves to separate the subtle from the gross and the fixed from the volatile.”¹⁶ What Pike is saying, is that through proper understanding and discipline, we are enabled to draw order from chaos, and achieve the Great Work – with nothing more than our own intellect and effort.

Brothers of the 18th Degree bear the moniker of Knights of the Eagle and Pelican, or Rose Croix of Heredom. Two primary symbols of this Degree are the Eagle and the Pelican. To elucidate on these symbols, we look to alchemy, which considered the Eagle to be representative of the Completed Work¹⁷, and that the Pelican, feeding her young with her own blood signifies that within herself is everything that is needed to complete the Great Work¹⁸. As previously established, we too, have that athanor or furnace within us and can find the Philosopher’s Stone - so long as we’re willing to go through the necessary effort and self-sacrifice to achieve it.

Pike then adds to this by saying “This instrument that we possess within ourselves, this athanor or furnace, is as complete as the world, and accurate as the mathematics themselves. It is designated by the sages in the emblem of the pentagram or star with five points, which signifies the absolute sign of human intelligence.”¹⁹ Considering an image of what Pike speaks of here (fig. 4), we can see that

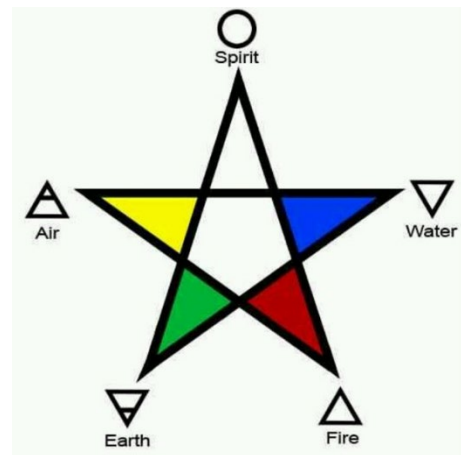


Figure 4: Elemental pentagram

each point of the pentagram represents an ancient element: earth, water, fire, air, and the quintessence, or the spirit of man. From a certain perspective, this depiction may seem reminiscent of a symbol of one of our appendant Masonic bodies.

Continuing in regard to the Great Work, Pike states - To separate the subtle from the gross, in the first operation, which is wholly internal, is to free our soul from all prejudices and vice. This is affected by the use of the principles of alchemy: of the philosophical salt - or wisdom, of mercury - or our personal labor, and of sulphur - or the ardor of our will. Thus, as Pike says, “will we succeed in changing into spiritual gold even such things that are of least value and even the foul things of the earth.”²⁰ Breaking Pike’s comment into less archaic language, alchemists believe that effects achieved and observed in the physical world bear a relationship to the human being, so that transmutations of elements can correspond to transmutations of the spirit – and vice versa. Spirit corresponds to the physical and the physical corresponds to spirit; as above, so below. On Earth as it is in Heaven. These correspondences and processes are at the heart of alchemy.

From the alchemist’s perspective, within ourselves we possess all of the alchemical principles and all of the elements. With the correct knowledge of what these alchemical principles and elements allude to, in combination with the correct discipline and understanding, rearrange the proportions of these adjuncts and achieve the Great Work of transmuting base metal to gold. We can draw order from chaos. The *Emerald Tablet* expressly tells us to “Separate the Earth from Fire, the Subtle from the Gross, gently and with great Ingenuity. It rises from Earth to Heaven and descends again to Earth, thereby combining within Itself the powers of both the Above and the Below. Thus, you will obtain the Glory of the Whole Universe. All Obscurity will be clear to you. This is the greatest Force of all powers, because it overcomes every Subtle thing and penetrates every Solid thing.”²¹

A passage from the Grand Lodge of Florida’s Fellow Craft lecture reads, “Even the Temple of Solomon, so spacious and magnificent, and constructed by so many celebrated artists, escaped

not the unsparing ravages of barbarous force. Freemasonry, notwithstanding, has still survived.” The passage goes on further to state that all Masons are builders of a temple more glorious than that of Solomon²². Together, these points emphasize the truth of the eternal regeneration of life as witnessed in Nature and the immortality of the divine essence that dwells in every single element of creation. Finally, it points out our responsibility to call upon the ray of the divine resident within us to perpetuate those truths and to glorify the divine in all things.

As Masons, we are taught not only to respect sectarian religions, but also to look to the Book of Nature for the source of truth. Within that book are the secrets of building the most magnificent temples, not only within ourselves, but within the world around us. By working with the tools given us and by drawing from the lessons taught us by nature we may transmute spiritual lead into gold. We all believe in the power of prayer and alchemy explains the effect of “prayer” by telling us that spirit corresponds to physical and physical corresponds to spirit. A question may be asked, “how is the process any different for us in our capacity to create a most glorious - and very real temple?”

To connect together the extrinsic and intrinsic viewpoints of the Divine, I summon to mind the Holy Doctrine as described in the 32nd Degree of the AASR SMJ, that the human spirit is a ray of the Divine Light²³. Pike alludes to the doctrine with the symbology of nature in a passage in *Morals and Dogma*’s lecture on the 28th Degree. This passage reads:

In the view of the Kabbalah, God and the Universe were One, and in the One General, as the type or source, were included and involved, and from it have been evolved and issued forth, the manifold and all particulars. Where, indeed, does individuality begin? Is it the Hidden Source and Spring alone that is the individual, the Unit, or is it the flowing fountain that fills the ocean, or the ocean itself, or its waves, or the drops, or the vaporous particles, which are the individuals? The

Sea and the River – these are each One; but the drops of each are many. The tree is one; but its leaves are a multitude: they drop with the frosts and fall upon his roots; but the tree still continues to grow, and new leaves come again in the spring. Is the Human Race not the Tree, and are not individual men the leaves? How else explain the force of will and sympathy, and the dependence of one man at every instant of his life on others, except by the oneness of the race? The links that bind all created things together are the links of a single Unity, and the whole Universe is One, developing itself into the manifold.²⁴

Reflections of the divine in nature can be discerned all throughout the history of mankind, illustrated by the multitudes of gods inspired by the cycles of life as viewed in the night sky and in the pages of the manuscripts of the ancient mysteries. Once we can see the divine within the world around us and the world within us, the macrocosm and microcosm, all creation becomes a place of reverence and beauty. Once we are able to grasp the Grand Design by reading the Book of Nature, we can begin to approach and understand Hermes Trismegistus' axiom: "as above, so below."

Endnote references:

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- ² Arturo DeHoyos, *Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor and Guide*, 3rd edition, (Supreme Council, AASR SMJ, Washington, DC, 2016), 839
- ³ DeHoyos, 455
- ⁴ Rex R. Hutchens, *A Bridge to Light*, (Supreme Council, AASR SMJ, Washington DC, 2010), 281
- ⁵ DeHoyos, 827
- ⁶ (image) Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Isis nursing Horus*, circa 1070–343 B.C, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917, Accession Number: 17.190.1641, link: www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/553034
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- ¹⁰ Manly P. Hall, *Secret Teachings of all Ages*, Dover edition, (Dover Publications, New York, NY 2010), 111
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- ¹³ Pike, 880-883
- ¹⁴ Pike, 890
- ¹⁵ Hall, 443-448
- ¹⁶ Pike, 896
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- ²⁴ Pike, 874