

WESTERN WISDOM BIBLE STUDY

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Fruitage of the Ministry

CORINNE HELINE

THE MARTYRDOM OF STEPHEN

Acts 6:10, 12-15

And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council.

And set up false witnesses, which said, this man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

The persecution of Stephen was but one of countless tragedies resulting from the ageless conflict between the inner and outer, the esoteric and exoteric phases of religion. The masses always cling to the old established order and customs whereas the pioneers demand advancement; they dare to risk a break with the past, to look ahead, and to teach of the things which are to come.

Philip, the second in spiritual attainment, was sent with the gospel of the new religion into Samaria and Ethiopia. His ministry in Caesarea led to the awakening of Cornelius. Philip became a bishop of Lydia and his home was still to be seen in the time of Jerome.

Prochorus was consecrated by Peter as Bishop of Nicodemia. A bishopric was assigned only to one possessing certain spiri-

tual faculties and a special degree of Initiation. The various sacraments were all initiatory ceremonials and could be administered only by those possessing powers that were bestowed in the celebration of these rites.

Nicanor was among the original seventy sent out by Christ Jesus. He died at about the same time that Stephen was martyred. Timon was also one of the original seventy. He was assigned to the bishopric of Bostra, and there suffered martyrdom by fire because of his spiritual gifts and works. Parmenas suffered martyrdom at Phillipi where he was ministering during the reign of Emperor Trojan. Nicolas worked in Antioch. Clement of Alexandria tells us that an immortal sect in that city borrowed his name and its followers called themselves Nicolaitans.

Stephen exemplifies the sacrificial aspect of the love principle in man. The keynote of his life may be found in the words "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." He is the prototype of Galahad, the pure and stainless knight who found the Grail and gladly, triumphantly laid his life upon its altar.

The veiled esotericism of the Bible is shown in Stephen's defense before the council at the time of his arraignment. In his plea Stephen endeavors to prove to them the truths of Initiation by recounting the various steps or grades passed through by Abraham, Moses and Jacob, showing the attainment reached by those of the Old Testament Dispensation.

Acts 7:54-60

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen begins his defense with a description of the Initiations of principal teachers of the Aryan Dispensation. He concludes with an account of his own spiritual development; for he, too, had demonstrated the truth of these inner plane experiences. In the great rhythmic pulsations of the world of divine love, there can be no place for hatred, revenge or unforgiveness, even under circumstances of the bitterest persecution. Animated by an impulse of the same overpowering love which filled the heart of Christ, Stephen prayed ere he fell asleep, "lay not this to their charge."

***THE WORK IN SAMARIA —
SIMON MAGUS REBUKED***

Acts 8:5-8

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed

with them: and many taken with palsies and that were lame, were healed.

And there was great joy in that city.

The fruits of spiritual illumination show forth in various ways in the work of different Disciples. The work of Philip was concerned particularly with healing and curing obsession.

Every important phase of man's development, every major weakness that places an obstacle in his path toward higher progress, finds mention in this wonderful Book of Acts. It may well be named "The diary of man's soul."

Acts 8:9-11

But there was a certain man, called Simon who beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that he himself was some great one:

To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

Simon typifies awakened spiritual powers used for self-glorification. This was one phase of temptation placed before the Master. Philip represents selfless attainment; Simon that of self-seeking attainment.

Acts 8:14-16

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

Baptism signifies a certain initiatory degree wherein the spirit of fellowship is born. Receiving the Holy Ghost represents a higher step. The true meaning of love and faith and their manifestation in the life of the disciple must be under-

stood before the full power and glory of the Holy Ghost can be received. That is why Peter and John, symbols of these powers, were present whenever this occurred. ☆

SINS OF OMISSION

Arthur Alan Leaver

The General Epistle of James contains a forceful message that clearly shows the author's concern for spiritual growth through *action* especially when life's conditions are difficult. In Verse 22 he emphatically declaims that true religion is more than faith — it is a law of action. "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

James, the brother of Jesus, exhorts his readers to look upon trials and persecutions as a privilege rather than to blame God. "... let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect." *James 1:4*

Aspirants to the higher life quite properly seek to avoid errors that will mar their spiritual progress. They diligently try to stay clear of theft, gossip, violence, adultery, cheating, boasting, judging and other "sin" that interferes with spiritual growth.

Responding to the appeal for new self-knowledge, some aspirants busily soak up information during long hours of intensive study. They seek to know about their origin and future development and search for solutions to the World Mystery. This requires a great amount of time. Consequently, time to be "doers of the word" is not so readily available and may deliberately be avoided by some.

In regard to the acquisition of knowledge, Mr. Heindel states, "To selfishly set aside everything else and live solely for one's own spiritual advance, is as repre-

hensible as not to care for the spiritual life at all." (*Cosmo*, p. 469)

James in Chapter 4, Verse 17, is equally strong: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

Failing to do what we should do can result in serious consequences. Sins of omission are just as significant as sins of commission in determining an aspirant's future life and development. Overcoming our sins of omission requires concentration and determination to put into action deeds of service to others. Such deeds are rewarding, for they contribute greatly to the growth of the vital and desire bodies.

Service to mankind is the very core of the Rosicrucian Philosophy, and without practical and positive use of this mystical knowledge, the aspirant denies himself vital progress that cannot be realized merely by thinking or engaging in vigorous studying.

There are so many ways to "do good." James anticipates reluctant "doers" when he states in Chapter 1, Verse 27: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Not everyone can, or has a desire, to "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." However, it is too simple to rationalize and conclude "there are probably plenty of volunteers; I would only be in the way."