

CATHOLICISM AND ESOTERICISM
IN THE ECCLESIA APOSTOLICA DIVINORUM
MYSTERIORUM
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CATHOLICISM AND ESOTERICISM IN THE ECCLESIA APOSTOLICA DIVINORUM MYSTERIORUM

There is always some element of trepidation on the part of outsiders looking in to a church that acknowledges an esoteric dimension. They fear that what they will encounter will be some form of errant doctrine that denies the Catholic faith as it has always been taught, or that promotes novel or heretical teachings in the place of those of the historic interpretations of the Church. At worst, they fear that esotericism is merely a cover for blasphemous and even Satanic practices.

None of these fears are justified in the case of the Ecclesia Apostolica Divinorum Mysteriorum. Firstly, E.A.D.M. accords primacy to the teaching of the undivided Catholic and Orthodox faith as represented by the Canon of St Vincent of Lérins, *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ad omnibus* – that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all. Our published Statement of Principles and Teachings summarize our witness to this faith.

For the Ecclesia, however, the understanding of the faith is expressed not in dogmatic interpretation, but in the light of a full appreciation of the teachings of Our Lord, including the insights of modern Biblical scholarship. This means that we have about our approach something of the intellectual and questioning tradition that has been claimed for Protestantism and Nonconformism as their own, although we do not accept that such a tradition demands any form of separation from an authentically Catholic expression of the faith or from a Catholic identity. We believe that such an approach is indigenous to the inner church tradition throughout the ages.

CHRISTIAN TEACHINGS ARE PARAMOUNT, AND IDEAS IN CONFLICT WITH THEM ARE REJECTED

The result of our approach is perhaps best expressed in a greater emphasis accorded firstly to the individual's responsibility to know and grow in the faith, and secondly to the duty of private interpretation. This does not negate 2 Peter 1:20; which applies specifically to Scriptural prophesy. Rather, it speaks of an approach to the faith that is intended for those who are intellectually and spiritually capable of advancement in understanding, and who accept that this understanding is contextualized not only by historical and textual study, but more widely through allegory and advanced moral teaching. Such teaching extends to insights and, where desired, practices drawn from other faiths and philosophies, but not to a

position where any member is required to give assent to any belief not in accordance with Christian teaching. We do not require members to become theologians, but it is likely that they will progress further down that path than is the case within a non-exclusive outer church that is dogmatically-based. Certainly, they will encounter complex and difficult ideas and perspectives on faith, and they will need to be able to find their personal path through them. Our role is to provide support in that process where needed, although the crucial work must be done by the individual themselves.

FREEMASONRY AND ITS ALLIED SCHOOLS ARE COMPLIMENTARY TO CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE

The esoteric schools, likewise, are pursued in harmony with a Christian understanding. We believe that much that has been said by Catholic authorities concerning Freemasonry is deeply misguided and based on a profound misunderstanding of the nature of Masonic teaching and its basis. We understand that Freemasonry and the profession of the Catholic faith are not merely compatible but complimentary. The moral school offered by Freemasonry can assist a member to become a better Catholic and to grow in an appreciation of those virtues central to Christian teaching. We further believe that the origins of Freemasonry lie in teachings that were originally pursued as part of an inner allegorical school of Christianity but were later suppressed and forced into a semi-secret context. We apply the same precepts to other esoteric schools such as Rosicrucianism and Martinism, and recall that for the medieval Christian there would have been no perceived incompatibility between the practice of the faith and the practice of esoteric adjuncts such as astronomy and alchemy.

E.A.D.M. DOES NOT PROMOTE BELIEFS CONTRARY TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

No member of E.A.D.M. is required to profess any belief that is contrary to the time-honoured Catholic faith. Indeed, even where beliefs and practices promulgated within the outer church are contrary to that understanding – such as priestly celibacy, the Marian doctrines and Papal infallibility – we ask that members should regard them not as absolute precepts to be rejected, but first and foremost as historically inevitable manifestations of the outer church pure and simple.

We believe that our witness to Catholicism and Orthodoxy is authentic and true, and that we have avoided the Modernist and other errors that have entered the teaching of the Faith in the post-Constantinian era.

OPENNESS TO THE MYSTIC TRADITION IS NOT HERESY; BUT SUCH OPENNESS HAS CLEAR LIMITS

Naturally, the actions of the church in repressing mysticism and the inner church seek to regard dissent or individual interpretation in unambiguous terms, and to proscribe these within the expression of the outer church. However, where, as often, such proscription extends into a narrow, dogmatic and simplistic understanding, the church fails to allow room for that individual relationship with God that is at the heart of genuine faith. Instead, it risks promoting an adherence to a common set of beliefs that is often little more than lip-service, or the result of fear or repression. While all of us should be on our guard against the inappropriate or insincere manifestations of the *charismata* or of false prophesy, that is not to deny that within a Catholic understanding, both the *charismata* and prophesy are widely present within the experience of the Christian faith, just as they were in Biblical times.

In assessing the response of the church to such events through the ages, we should be aware of the political nature of many of these responses; of the nature of the Roman church post-Constantine as a centre of worldly as well as spiritual power, and of the threat to that worldly power that is posed by individuals who assert that the balance between God in the individual and God in the Church is more strongly weighted towards the former than the latter. We believe that this latter conclusion is inevitable given that Christianity is a religion dependent on individual conscience and not upon blind faith or dictatorial obedience. Further, we believe that the process of the training and progression of the conscience is inevitably one of intellectual and spiritual journeying, not containment.

In general, the Orthodox churches have understood these matters much more effectively than has Rome, particularly through the preservation of the hesychastic tradition. However, here again the tendency towards dogmatism asserts itself as an inevitable consequence of the conveyance of complex and subtle spiritual truths to a mass audience. This again belies the essential subjectivity of the lived religious experience.

On the mystic experience, we concur with Schopenhauer when he says,

“... we see all religions at their highest point end in mysticism and mysteries, that is to say, in darkness and veiled obscurity. These really indicate merely a blank spot for knowledge, the point where all knowledge necessarily ceases...In the widest sense, mysticism is every guidance to the immediate awareness of what is not reached by either perception or conception, or generally by any knowledge. The mystic is opposed to the philosopher by the fact that he begins from within, whereas the philosopher begins from

without. The mystic starts from his inner, positive, individual experience, in which he finds himself as the eternal and only being, and so on. But nothing of this is communicable except the assertions that we have to accept on his word; consequently he is unable to convince. [Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. II, Ch. XLVIII]

It is precisely the unverifiable and individual nature of mysticism that leads to this “inability to convince”. The general conclusion of E.A.D.M. is that mystic experiences are exclusively personal to the holder, that their actual or allegoric message that they convey is to be interpreted in the light of moral teaching in accordance with the Christian faith, and that no person should seek to bind others as a consequence of their own mystic revelations. In practice, mystic experience is a normal process for many as their experience of faith and awareness of esoteric vibrations deepens. It is encouraged as an integral part of E.A.D.M. and recognized as a gift of the Holy Spirit at work.

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