SYMBOLISM OF THE LABYRINTH

An examination of the various meanings of the Labyrinth ... one of the most challenging phases of the work

The Labyrinth occupies a colorful and interesting position in the literature and culture of the world. An examination of the various meanings associated with the Labyrinth develops one's understanding and appreciation for the symbolic teaching of one of the most challenging phases of the work. This study is suitable as an address by the presiding officer or some other competent individual.

Nowhere is the search for the hidden meanings secreted in our work more challenging than in the quest for the fuller understanding of the Labyrinth. It has been so frequently said that the Labyrinth represents one's journey through life that there is an inclination to accept this statement as comprising the whole truth. However, long association with our endeavors shows us unmistakably that there must be something more to be gleaned from this aspect of our work than a simple definitive statement.

The hand of genius which shaped our ritualistic work into an enduringly beautiful spiritual experience included this phase of our work in order to teach a great truth to those energetic enough to seek, find, and comprehend its meaning. Everyone realizes that the common definition of the word Labyrinth itself is a succession of passages along which it is extremely difficult to find one's way. It is also used to express difficult, aggravating and confounding circumstances or situations. Were we to base our understanding of the Labyrinth on what can usually be found to explain its meaning we might come to some erroneous conclusions. It would seem that, on the basis of what we know so far, the human life is like a Labyrinth, so confusing, meaningless and involved that it defies being coped with by the mortal mind. Nothing could be further from its actual meaning.

LABYRINTH OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY

It is an easy matter to expend a considerable amount of explorative thinking on related matters which lead the seeker farther and farther from the truth being sought. One cannot help remembering the story of Daedalus who constructed the maze, or labyrinth for King Minos for the purpose of confining and trapping the Minotaur. There, King Minos of Crete fed captive Athenian youths to the Minotaur, which according to ancient myths was part man and part bull. In understanding our Labyrinth we have a negative sort of reward for our efforts in examining the legends of ancient Greece. We are certain, beyond any doubt, that what we have to learn is that life is not a relentless maze which is ultimately concluded by a death, horrifying and meaningless. Our efforts have not been all in vain, however, for we have established for ourselves some things which we know the Labyrinth definitely does not represent. We also know that we must search elsewhere for explanatory information.
EGYPT, ANOTHER EARLY SOURCE

Let us turn our thoughts to ancient Egypt for here, also, we shall remember the Pyramids and another famous Labyrinth. Perhaps, here, we may find a clue to the problem of our own Labyrinth.

In ancient Egypt people were very concerned about what ultimately happened to the soul of the individual. They felt that the eternal welfare of the soul was dependent upon the preservation of the mortal body. Therefore, through the centuries, the Egyptians perfected the art of preserving the human body until the preserved body, mummy, could remain intact through centuries to come. Thus, the ancient Egyptian felt that he had preserved his soul by preserving his body.

However, the Egyptian was not content to have merely preserved the body. He wished to protect the body from defamation by the malicious of mind or from ransaction by thieves. Due to the fact that there was a great supply of stone available, it was only natural that the Egyptian used this material to build the edifice which would protect his body and soul. Thus we have the beginnings of pyramid building. Naturally, as time went on, certain rulers, in order to gratify their own vanity and to preserve their names for all posterity, used the pyramid as a pronouncement of their own grandeur and wealth as well as for its original purpose.

One of the great far-sighted Egyptian rulers, Amenemhet III, built his pyramid in the Fayoum area. This pyramid was a little different from others which had been constructed. It had very intricate passages and false doors. The purpose in constructing the pyramid in this fashion was to protect the human soul and body from defamation. It was not constructed to confuse the faithful from bringing tributes to the sanctuary of the deceased but only to prevent molestation of the body.

AMENEMHET III AND HIS LABYRINTH

Amenemhet III also built the miraculous Labyrinth and we have the eye-witness accounts of Strabo and Herodotus from which some idea of the character of this building may be fathomed. The Labyrinth was approximately eight hundred feet wide and about one thousand feet long. There were two levels to the structure and each level contained about fifteen hundred rooms. There were twelve roofed courts which had gates. These courts were placed six on the north side and six on the south side. The whole structure was further protected by a stone wall.

Amenemhet III, presumably, had this building built so that each of the local deities of the numerous nomes (districts) would have a separate chapel. This, the King hoped, would lead to a religious unity. The diversity of religious thought had been a decentralizing and destructive factor in the attempt to make national Egyptian progress. This he hoped would emphasize the subordination of the local deities to the one, great god. Actually, this magnificent Labyrinth was built with the hope of leading the people to the understanding of the greatest religious truths known at that time.
THE PURPOSE OF THE LABYRINTH

It would seem that there could exist little doubt but that the creator of our work viewed life itself not as a trying, inexplicable burden, but rather as a series of experiences designed by the unfathomable hand of God to lead mortal man ultimately to the threshold of eternal life.

When we consider the circuitous path of the winding Labyrinth we cannot help but wonder what thoughts transpired within the perceiving mind of Robert Morris. What actually occurred is, of course, only a matter of conjecture. Each individual must eventually conclude for himself as to the real meaning of the maneuvers within the Labyrinth. However, it may prove helpful to advance certain relationships which do exist.

THE ADAH-MARTHA RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between Adah and Martha is very apparent. Adah was forced to reconcile herself to the abrupt conclusion of mortal life before she had even reached adulthood. However, in the time in which Adah lived, God had not yet sent His Son into the world. Adah did not have the comforting knowledge which Christ gives to the believers. Adah had only her unwavering faith in the Tightness of God's plan to sustain her. However, by traversing the way from Adah to Martha, one symbolically leaves the darkness and misery of the world that knew no Christ and enters into a world made brilliant by the advent heralded by the Star of Bethlehem. For Martha, also forced to reconcile herself to the death of Lazarus whose life was shorn off in its prime, was comforted and sustained by the Word of Christ. Through Him, she received proof positive of God's Power to bestow Life Eternal upon those who would believe in Him through Jesus Christ.

Christianity has no more powerful lesson to teach than this. Through faith in Jesus Christ, even life eternal is possible. This relationship is, to be sure, more than just the gracefully interwoven presentation of a geometric pattern.

THE MARTHA-RUTH RELATIONSHIP

From Martha, one is led from the world that had known the gift of Christ back into the eras which lived in the Hope of the Fulfillment of the Promise. Ruth, humble and unassuming, knew of the anticipated Messiah. Through her great worth in the eyes of God, she became instrumental in establishing the House of David. The ancestral line of Jesus Christ is traceable back to the humble gleaner who married the upright, irreproachable Boaz.

THE RUTH-ELECTA RELATIONSHIP

What could be more pointed than to go from a world that knew Christ only as a Promised Hope to a world in which Electa, knowing Christ and the Light and Understanding He brought, steadfastly refused to renounce Him by word or deed! The reason and purpose behind this phase of the journey cannot be ignored. The challenge is to cling to Christ in spite of any and all adversities, lest we plunge ourselves back into the realms of darkness and misery.
THE ELECTA-ESTHER RELATIONSHIP

From Electa a journey to Esther is at first, perhaps, somewhat baffling. But we must not overlook the fact that the same obligation to live up to the highest standard of obedience to God and God's purposes exists alike for those rich in material wealth and earthly grandeur and those whose earthly possessions are modest and who wear only a crown of personal integrity. God, in his inimitable way, manifests his expectations to each individual. This phase of the journey can surely call to our attention the fact the individual has an obligation to fulfill his part in the Grand Design, regardless of whether the sacrifice be great material possessions or few, regardless of whether the sacrifice entails the loss of power and prestige, and regardless of whether it ultimately is demanding of the sacrifice of life itself.

THE ESTHER-ADAH RELATIONSHIP

With a little consideration the relationship between Esther and Adah becomes apparent. Adah, having become an integral part of the saving of the Hebrews from destruction by the Ammonites through her inclusion in Jephthah's vow to the Lord, is similar in several aspects to Esther. Esther, as was Adah, was called upon to save the chosen people from extermination proposed by the wicked Haman. Who knows when the simplest moral, and forthright actions of the individual may be a determining factor in the fate of a whole nation or people? As one goes mentally along the way, the individual sees the necessity for re-examining his thoughts and deeds that the influence he has on those about him may constantly serve to lead them in paths of right conduct and moral stature.

THE ADAH-MARTHA RELATIONSHIP

Once again we are called upon to re-examine the journey from Adah to Martha. The way is surely fraught with implication. Nothing stands out more surely than the irrevocability of a promise. Did not Adah fulfill her part of the promise which Jephthah had vowed unto the Lord? Did not God fulfill his promise to the ancient patriarchs by sending His Son into the world? This phase of the journey can surely be said to reaffirm the knowledge that God will not forsake His promise to His children. It equally reaffirms our knowledge that our promises and obligations to God are also, unqualifiable, irrevocable, and eternally binding.

THE MARTHA-RUTH RELATIONSHIP

Circling once again from Martha to Ruth, we realize that something further lies beneath the surface of the way. Could it be that one is reminded that no matter how humble or insignificant one's apparent mortal existence seems, we may all unbeknown be serving a vital and consuming position in the grand design of our Creator? Surely the distance we have traveled forcefully illustrates that each of God's children is of a value and worth essential to the fulfillment of Divine Purpose whether this position is revealed to the human mind or not.
THE RUTH-ELECTA RELATIONSHIP

We must traverse the way from Ruth to Electa. One cannot go this way again without realizing that over the centuries, countless great personalities have through industry, sacrifice and even martyrdom, helped to expand and develop the religious heritage that is ours today. Each individual has his own part to play in preserving and augmenting this priceless possession through whatever means the benign Hand of God points out to him.

JOURNEY'S END

From here, we must pass around the signs of earthly reward and honor to the pure radiance of the East. There the individual finds himself, confronted with the brilliance of the Star in the East as he will at the end of mortal life, find himself confronted with all of the radiance of the Son of God.