

Mysteries of the Substantial Pole

By Anthony Passeggeri

One and one uniting, void shines into void. Where these two abysses hang, equally spirated, de-spirated, there is the supreme being; where God gives up the ghost, darkness reigns in the unknown known unity. This is hidden from us in his motionless deep. Creatures cannot penetrate this aught.

Meister Eckhart

The substance is vile and yet most precious.

Michael Sendivogius

The evil of an evil woman surpasses the evil of a thousand wicked men, and the virtue of a virtuous woman surpasses the worship of seventy *awliyā*.

Mubammad

Bismi'LLāh al-rabmān al-rabīm

Frithjof Schuon has written of the “ontological cataclysm” symbolized by the number two. It is this primordial repetition of Oneness that creates an opening, so to speak, for manifestation; it creates the limits within which the cosmic drama unfolds. It is perhaps also the most “difficult” number, the most abrupt and abstract, since the number three, which

symbolizes the unicity of manifestation,¹ is already² comprehensible by virtue of its reassertion of unity in the domain of multiplicity. The number two is also related to theodicy, or the “problem of evil,” since it gives symbolical expression to the mystery of God’s apparent negation of Himself through the presence of a principle of opposition and hence “phenomenal conveyance”³ in the Infinitude of the Divine Nature. It could therefore be said that the creative application of this principle by the Intellect produces Universal Existence, and this because the relativity prefigured in the Principle entails an inexhaustible elaboration as a consequence of God’s knowledge of Himself, which is Infinite.

According to Sufi doctrine, the creative effusion of the Divine Act can be described as “the imprinting [of] the principal ideas upon the ‘tablet of non-being’.”⁴ This tablet can also be thought of as a mirror, as “the cosmos is essentially a set of mirrors in which the Divine realities are reflected.”⁵ It is the unmanifested Mirror, or immaculate Obscurity,⁶ of which the cosmic mirrors or relative substances (*materiae secundae*) are so many contingent determinations brought about through

¹ This unicity can be considered “from either side of” two. “[I]t is in the nature of Duality to wish to be delivered from its aspect of division, and this transcending—or this solution—occurs either a priori or a posteriori: the division masculinity-femininity has its so to speak causal reason for being in the mystery of love, but from another point of view, the opposition of the sexes finds its solution in that third element which is the child. Duality is as if suspended between two Unities, one initial and principal and the other terminal and manifested.” Frithjof Schuon, *The Eye of the Heart*, Bloomington, 2003, p. 24. Also, under its aspect of “fruit” (terminal unity), the third element in the ternary comprises two dimensions, one intrinsic (realization) and the other extrinsic (procreation). See Schuon, *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, Middlesex, 1981, pp. 66-67.

² The temporal mode of expression here symbolizing relationships of ontological anteriority and posteriority.

³ To convey is to make an idea known, or to communicate a message. In manifesting Himself, God makes known His Ideas and communicates His Message.

⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, Chicago, 2001, p. 185.

⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, Delmar, 1976, pp. 111-12.

⁶ “Symbolically *materia prima* lies ‘below’, because it is completely passive, and it appears as ‘dark’, because, as the absolutely unformed, it eludes every advance of the intelligence.” Titus Burckhardt, *Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul*, Louisville, 1997, p. 98.

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