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**From Ancient Wisdom to Modern Spirit:
The Roots of Madre Grande Monastery**

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Madre Grande Monastery is the headquarters and holy ground of The Paracelsian Order. This order is a religious, healing, and teaching organization of the Johannine Catholic Church and Temple of the Absolute Light. The origins of these bodies will be traced as their structure, purposes and interrelationships are discussed.

Dr. Gordon Melton (1) differentiates twenty-two families of religions in the United States. Six of them are roots from which our organizations evolved. One other family, the Native American Family, is not included in Melton's work, but it is a part of this story. It interacts with and transforms several of these other families and it is hoped it will be included in forthcoming editions of the encyclopedia. The seven families of interest here are the

- * Western Liturgical
- * Communal
- * Metaphysical
- * New Age
- * Ancient Wisdom
- * Magic and
- * Native American

The Johannine Catholic Church stems from the Old Catholic Church in so far as its tradition of apostolic succession is concerned. (2) Historically, the person called Jesus the Christ is said to have conferred several powers onto his apostles. These gifts include healing, speaking in tongues, (3) and of further passing on these gifts to others. The twelve apostles went out to the nations of the world with their message and passed the gnosis to the community elders. As the number of initiated elders grew, some developed more authority than others, and gradually the categories of Deacons, Priests and Bishops were instituted. More powerful bishops were called Popes, or Patriarchs. The various functions we associate with these Holy Orders began in the time of Constantine and the conversion of the Roman army from Mithraism to Christianity, 312 AD.(4) Two consequences resulted from the growth in the number of initiated Christians and the institution of Christianity as a state religion: the number of variants in belief and the development of monasticism.

Varying opinions held by different groups, often falling into competing or isolated geographical areas, flourished. Several hundred contradictory beliefs can be

distinguished. Because this damaged the power structure and integrity of the hierarchy that had developed among the Bishops, a series of councils were convened from 325 AD through 787 AD. In this conciliar period, dogma was decided. (5) Dogma is a belief defined to be true by a body claiming authority to determine the truth. Dogma is a truth taken to be essential to one's salvation. This process, of course, results in schism. Parties holding to opinions declared heretical naturally excommunicated one another and so established varying traditions and mutually isolated authoritative bodies. The more power the body had, the more successful it became in defining and imposing dogma.

The dogmas that developed around the power of the Roman Pope created the Western Roman Liturgical Family of religions. Dr. Melton lists these characteristics for this family.

- * Strong liturgical life
- * True creeds (dogmas)
- * Allegiance to creeds (belief required for salvation)
- * Holy orders
- * Sacraments
- * Language
- * Culture and
- * Belief in apostolic succession (6)

The Western Liturgical tradition continued to fragment over the nature of these characteristics, Roman-imposed dogmas, as well as from geographical and political pressures. The Old Catholic movement is basically a revolt against the claims of the Roman Pope.(7) While not denying the providential nature of the Papacy, they deny its claim to divine rights. Rome's claim depends on the veracity of three suppositions:

- * Christ gave to Peter all the rights that later Roman popes have claimed by divine right, and that Peter exercised them for the rest of his life.
- * Peter became the territorial Bishop of Rome.
- * Peter passed all these rights to the Bishops of Rome as his sole successors. (8)

Rome holds these claims to be dogmatic. The Old Catholics find none of them able to be substantiated. The beginnings of the final division centered around dogmatic opinions in the nature of grace. (9) The Jesuits held that mere fear of punishment was sufficient for priests to give absolution. (10) Jansen, whose followers were at Port Royal in France, held as St. Augustine had written, that contrition, arising from love of God, was necessary. (11) Subsequently, the Jansenists had to leave France, whereupon they went to Holland at the see of Utrecht. When the Bishop of Utrecht, Theodore de Cock, refused to condemn the Jansenists, the Pope deposed him and sent Bishop Codde to replace him. For nationalistic and political reasons, Codde was banished from Holland, but de Cock discontinued his episcopal functions. This

left the see of Utrecht bishopless until Dominique Marie Varlet, the Pope's uncle and newly consecrated Bishop of Babylon, stopped in Amsterdam en route to Persia in 1719. Not knowing about any papal proscriptions, he confirmed 600 children, for which he was suspended by the Pope. In 1724 he returned to Amsterdam and consecrated a new bishop of Utrecht, Cornelius von Steenoven. This, of course, resulted in the normal mutual excommunication between Rome and Utrecht. The neighboring Dutch dioceses of Haarlem and Deventer also were refilled, which assured the continuance of the Old Catholic Church. (12)

The dogma of papal infallibility developed in the ninth century. (13) It was based on the discovery of a series of letters, later proven to be forgeries, known as the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals. (14) With the support again of the Jesuits, this claim grew stronger from the thirteenth century. At the First Vatican Council of 1870, the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, was declared infallible when speaking on matters of faith and morals. In reaction, the Old Catholic Church was organized along national lines ending all connections with Rome. The Roman Catholic Church has recognized the validity of Old Catholic Orders (apostolic succession), but holds their exercise of episcopal powers to be illegal. (15) The Old Catholic Church holds the same opinion of Rome.

The Old Catholic succession came to America by three men; Arnold Harris Matthew, Joseph Renee Vilatte, and Hugh George de Willmott Newman. (16) The Johannine Catholic Church traces its succession from Matthew. (17) However, there is no other connection with the Old Catholic Churches. The Johannine Church restores the use and meaning of the word *catholic* to its original intent. *Catholic* means universal; universal means that all men who possess the gnosis can reconcile the apparent discrepancies in varying opinions. Dogma as a required belief based on external authority is not taught. All opinions can be looked at without fear, and the truth in all can be determined by the individual. This results in a wide latitude of religious opinion, and a living expression of religious intent.

As stated above, the institution of Christianity as a state religion created monasticism. There were many early attempts at communalism in apostolic Christianity. Initiated Christians banded together and pooled their assets. When everyone was a Christian, however, the idea of initiation ceased as a necessity, and the culture became only nominally religious. (18) Thence, men and women joined orders and formed monasteries to make their lives authentic expressions of religious living. An order has certain rules by which its members are expected to guide their behavior. (19) Three rules are common:

- * Poverty and renunciation of the world;
- * Chastity (originally, Christian communities were family oriented, so chastity was the rule, not celibacy. As family life was the main distraction to community allegiance, chastity was replaced with celibacy.)
- * Obedience to the Abbot.

The Johannine Catholic Church comprises several orders. One is monastic (The Paracelsian Order), one is for priests (the Order of St. John the Evangelist), and one is for magical work by any qualifying church member (the Temple of the Absolute Light). In 1975, the Johannine Catholic Church, in cooperation with organizations from several other religious families mentioned above, instituted The Paracelsian Order as a religious, healing, teaching, and monastic order. Monks of The Paracelsian Order take five vows:

Non-ownership and non-attachment--"I recognize that I own nothing and that non-attachment to things of this material world is important to my spiritual unfoldment. I accept the responsibility of being a caretaker for the bounty of the universe."

Moral chastity--"Recognizing freedom for all beings, I will strive not to impose on anyone to do anything against his or her Highest Consciousness, nor will I allow anyone to impose on my Highest Consciousness."

Obedience--"I will endeavor to be obedient to my Higher Self, my Godself. I seek to recognize the group mind of the monks, the church and the rule as a reflection of the Highest."

Root digger[†]--"I pledge all my energy to the work of the order. I recognize that I am a channel for Infinite Abundance, and accept the responsibility for meeting my material needs."

Openness and honesty--"I strive to be honest with myself and others and to encourage openness through positive and loving communication,"

The communal roots of The Paracelsian Order stem not only from the monastic tradition, they come from secular traditions within the United States as well. These traditions--as well as other modern influences on our organization--will be explored in part two of this article in the Fall, 1991 edition of *The Philosopher's Stone*, which follows:

In 1840 George Ripley wrote to Ralph Waldo Emerson on his utopian plans. (19) He thought a union of intellectual pursuits and labor would be natural on a piece of land that could provide the basis for life, livelihood and education. By allowing some personal property in an open government run by consensus, not only individuality would be encouraged, but industry without drudgery and equality without vulgarity would also be possible.

Income to the community would provide for the needs of all and religious freedom would be allowed. When the experiment was in fact undertaken, it failed because of two factors: There was no well-planned operating procedure and there was no common religious life, the only common activity was dining. By endorsing the ideas of economic equality by Edward Bellamy in his novel *Looking Backward*, written in 1887, H.P. Blavatsky opened the door to theosophical community. (20) One of the more successful of such communities was that of The Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society at Pt. Loma, California, from 1897 through 1942. (21) More

recently, the hippie flower children of 1967 and the back-to-the-land movements of the 1970s spawned a new interest in communalism.

Communally, The Paracelsian Order drew from all of these sources. The organizational and situational ideas of Ripley were instituted at the order's headquarters community at Madre Grande Monastery in Dulzura, California, in 1975. A large piece of land capable of providing sustenance and support for the community was purchased. It is operated as a college for communal living, it has religious freedom along with limited personal property, and is instituted with an open consensus government. A well-developed plan of operation and many varied and shared spiritual experiences guarantee that the failure of Ripley will not be repeated. The eclectic philosophy of the Theosophical Society and their equal acceptance of all sexes, nationalities, races, castes, and religions puts this community squarely in the theosophical camp. (22) Many of their practices stem from the Pt. Loma tradition. The All One Family was one of the New Age (23) organizations of the 1970s. It was involved in back-to-the-land movements and the operation of healing celebrations, aiming at both utopia and ecotopia. Together with the Theosophical Society, the New Age movement rejected the Spiritualist emphasis on spirits and mediums and joined the new wave of Eastern teachers that appeared in the late 1960s. Commonly believing themselves to be harbingers of a new age for humanity, they seek to establish a universal religion in which God will be seen as the unifying principle binding nature and humanity into one whole. A mystical awareness in individuals will arise in this process. Together with the Johannine Catholic Church, the Theosophical Society in San Diego and the All One Family formed the Madre Grande Monastery of The Paracelsian Order, thereby harmonizing the western liturgical, monastic and magical traditions with all of these principles. A theosophical, monastic order in which all people can unite for the common and purposeful good of the world and its being became a reality. Religion without dogma, equality without stagnation, hierarchy without power, and industry without drudgery are combined with an unfettered individual search for truth in a monastic, healing and educational environment.

The Metaphysical Family (24) of religions are an outgrowth of the writings of Swedenborg (1688-1772), Mesmer (1734-1815), Quimby (1802-1866), Emerson (1803-1866), Evans (1817-1887) and Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910). From this a New Thought movement asserted the reality of the spiritual world, the importance of mystical experience and the healing value of invisible forces operating on the mind and body of man. The Christian Science Theological Seminary began ordaining women and disseminated a thoroughly feminist theology. Opening the doors to female ordination, they assigned a key position to women in God's activity in history. The Johannine Catholic Church accepts women into holy orders and has two Archbishops, one man and one woman.

Through the churches of Religious Science, poverty consciousness was transformed into prosperity consciousness, and the role of practitioners in healing prayer was developed. These principles were adopted by The Paracelsian Order as

well. The monks of the order are healing and teaching practitioners, striving to learn and educate in the ways of mystical development.

Madre Grande, or the Great Mother, is the Grand Mother of the Native American and the *Anima Mundi* of occultists. The monastery is situated on ground holy to the American women's mysteries, and its service is dedicated to the Great Mother spirit of Earth. The Temple of the Sun in the Mother's Garden, a Native American sun temple, which also subscribes to all these principles, was instrumental in the founding of Madre Grande. It can be classed as a part of the Ancient Wisdom Family, as can the Theosophical Society and the Temple of the Absolute Light, since all accept a hidden wisdom passed from a line of teachers in the remote past. (25) In equal agreement with these groups, the powers latent in man and the hidden powers of nature are taken as natural parts of the Earth's environment.

These are the roots from which The Paracelsian Order draws its sustenance. From these several sources and their efforts and dreams grow the united body and expression in which is Madre Grande Monastery. Every effort is made to insure that this most noble of human endeavors does not fail. The National Historical Communal Societies Association is an organization established to study communalism in America. It is affiliated with the International Communal Societies Association which networks such studies by other national groups. Why do some groups fail and others succeed? What constitutes failure and success? What are the driving forces that bring such groups into being? These are the questions asked by these organizations. From such research several factors can be discerned. Dr. Melton lists five reasons for failure and four necessary, but not individually sufficient, for success. (26)

Reasons for failure are these:

- * Founded for shallow reasons;
- * Poor planning by those inexperienced in meeting people's total needs;
- * Lack of order or anarchy, jobs are everyone's, but no one's responsibility;
- * Hostility from surrounding community; and
- * Success itself. The communal ideal must always be kept before the group.

Here are some factors contributing to success:

- * Strong leadership;
- * Strong system of social control and behavior;
- * Economic self-sufficiency; and
- * Removal from the outside world.

A period providing for a change in habits must be provided and there must be a continual careful check on new ideas. “Just as eternal vigilance is the price of freedom, eternal confrontation is the price of continued communal life.” (27)

The interactive organizational structure of the Johannine Catholic Church and The Paracelsian Order, its subsidiary, with their alter egos, the Temple of the Absolute Light and Madre Grande Monastery, have been designed with all of these factors in mind, as well as several others not mentioned by Dr. Melton. They will be more fully examined in a subsequent article. The Theosophical intention deriving from the Ancient Wisdom school was fully discussed in a previous article. In that article the philosophical need for a religious system based in a continual search for truth, rather than the dismal self-satisfaction of dogmatic acclamations, was expressed.

It is not sufficient merely to create a “nucleus” for a universal brotherhood. A true, active, and total brotherhood, inciting all mankind to stop spiritual competitiveness is necessary. For the sake of every individual of every cultural expression and for utopian and ecotopian life on Earth, it is a *sine qua non* that all mankind practice a cooperative and positive search for spiritual perfection. Indeed, life on Earth may no longer be possible without such an attitude. Religion must be made practical. It must harmonize with Science and Philosophy. A way must be found to return mankind to non-destructive life as part of the entire living being of our mother Earth.

Spaceship Earth must be given sane guidance in the holistic spirit. The fate and condition of all life is a religious concern. Dissension and strife based on competitive greed for power and control has not only overcome the material world, it has wreaked havoc with the religious institutions as well. (28)

By uniting the roots of these several traditions a veritable tree of life expressing the unity in all things has been envisioned. It is being declared to the world by a group of pioneers willing to put all their being into this religious cause. They feel there is no reasonable alternative and readily dedicate their efforts for the benefit of all beings.

Endnotes

- (1) *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, by J. Gordon Melton (Gale Research, Inc, 3rd edition, 1989) pp v-vi.
- (2) See “Table of Apostolic Succession
- (3) *The Old Catholic Church or The History, Doctrine, Worship and Polity of the Christians*--traced from the Apostolic Age to the Establishment of the Pope as a Temporal Sovereign, A.D.755, by W.D. Killen (T & T Clark Edinburgh, 1871), p.7.
- (4) *Ibid.* pp 42-46.
- (5) Melton, *Op. Cit.*, p.1.
- (6) *Ibid.*
- (7) *The Old Catholic Movement: Its Origins and History*, by C.B. Moss (The Episcopal Book Club, 1977), p.1.
- (8) *Ibid.*, p.5.
- (9) *Ibid.*, p.33.
- (10) *Ibid.*, p.38
- (11) *Ibid.*, p.40.
- (12) Melton, *Op. Cit.*, p.3.
- (13) *Ibid.*, p.12.
- (14) *Ibid.*, p.6.
- (15) *Ibid.*, p.3.
- (16) *Ibid.*
- (17) See “Table of Apostolic Succession”, page 8.
- (18) Melton, *Op. Cit.*, p.99.
- (19) *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, by J. Gordon Melton (Gale Research, Inc., 3rd edition, 1989), pp 101.
- (20) *Ibid.*, p.102.
- (21) *A California Utopia: Point Loma: 1897-1942*, by Emmett A. Greenwalt (Point Loma Publications, 1978).
- (22) Melton, *Op. Cit.*, p.129.
- (23) *Ibid.*, p.123.
- (24) *Ibid.*, p.105.
- (25) *Ibid.*, p.127.
- (26) *Ibid.*, p.102.
- (27) *Ibid.*, p.103.
- (28) “The Paracelsian Order”, by John H. Draais, *Journal of Theosophical History*.
† Now called “Self Sufficiency”

Table of Apostolic Succession of Johannine Catholic Church

(Old Catholic - Utrecht Succession)

- * Dominique Marie Varlet the Roman Catholic Bishop of Babylon did consecrate
- * Petrus Johannes Meindaerts as tenth Archbishop of Utrecht on October 18, 1739, who consecrated
 - * Johannes van Stiphout, who consecrated
 - * Walter van Nieuwehuisen, who consecrated
 - * Adrian Brockman, who consecrated
 - * Johannes Jacovus van Rhijn, who consecrated
 - * Gisbert de Jong, who consecrated
 - * Willibrord van On, who consecrated
 - * Johannes van Santan, who consecrated
 - * Harmannus Heykamp, who consecrated
 - * Gaspardus Johannes Rinkel, who consecrated
 - * Gerardus Gul as seventeenth Archbishop of Utrecht, who consecrated
 - * Arnold Harris Matthew as Old Catholic Bishop of England on April 28, 1908, who consecrated
 - * Prince de Landas Berghes et de Rache on June 29, 1913, who consecrated
 - * Carmel Henry Carfora as Archbishop of Canada on October 4, 1916, who consecrated
 - * Albert D. Bell, who consecrated
 - * Edgar Ramon Verostak as regionary Bishop of the North American Old Roman Catholic Church, who consecrated
 - * H. Ernest Caswell on June 8, 1974, who consecrated
 - * James Julian Gillmon and Rita Anne Gillmon as first Archbishops of the Johannine Catholic Church on May 28, 1977, who consecrated Laurence McCarty on June 25, 1977; who consecrated
 - * John Harlan Drais on April 22, 1990.