

The Seven Sermons of the Dead

Carl Jung in 1916 as
Basilides of Alexandria

Sermon I

The Dead came back from Jerusalem, where they found not what they sought. They prayed me let them in and besought my word, and thus I began my teaching.

Harken: I begin with nothingness. Nothingness is the same as fullness. In infinity full is no better than empty. Nothingness is both empty and full. As well might ye say anything else of nothingness, as for instance, white is it, or black, or again, it is not, or it is. A thing that is infinite and eternal hath no qualities, since it hath all qualities.

This nothingness or fullness we name the PLEROMA. Therein both thinking and being cease, since the eternal and infinite possess no qualities. In it no being is, for he then would be distinct from the pleroma, and would possess qualities which would distinguish him as something distinct from the pleroma.

In the pleroma there is nothing and everything. It is quite fruitless to think about the pleroma, for this would mean self-dissolution.

CREATURA is not in the pleroma, but in itself. The pleroma is both beginning and end of the created beings. It pervadeth them, as the light of the sun everywhere pervadeth the air. Although the pleroma pervadeth altogether, yet hath created being no share thereof, just as a wholly transparent body becometh neither light nor dark through the light which pervadeth it. We are, however, the pleroma itself, for we are a part of the eternal and the infinite. But we have no share thereof, as we are from the pleroma infinitely removed; not spiritually or temporally, but essentially, since we are distinguished from the pleroma in our essence as creatura, which is confined within time and space.

Yet because we are parts of the pleroma, the pleroma is also in us. Even in the smallest point is the pleroma endless, eternal, and entire, since small and great are qualities which are contained in it. It is that nothingness which is everywhere whole and continuous. Only figuratively, therefore, do I speak of created being as part of the pleroma. Because, actually, the pleroma is nowhere divided, since it is nothingness. We are also the whole pleroma, because, figuratively, the pleroma is the smallest point (assumed only, not existing) in us and the boundless firmament about us. But wherefore, then, do we speak of the pleroma at all, since it is thus everything and nothing?

I speak of it to make a beginning somewhere, and also to free you from the delusion that somewhere, either without or within, there standeth something fixed, or in some way established, from the beginning. Every so-called fixed and certain thing is only relative. That alone is fixed and certain which is subject to change.

What is changeable, however, is creatura. Therefore is it the one thing which is fixed and certain; because it hath qualities: it is even quality itself.

The question ariseth: How did creatura originate? Created beings came to pass, not creatura: since created being is the very quality of the pleroma, as much as non-creation which is the eternal death. In all times and places is creation, in all times and places is death. The pleroma hath all, distinctiveness and non-distinctiveness.

Distinctiveness is creatura. It is distinct. Distinctiveness is its essence, and therefore it distinguisheth. Wherefore also he distinguished qualities of the pleroma which are not. He distinguisheth them out of his own nature. Therefore he must speak of qualities of the pleroma which are not.

What use, say ye, to speak of it? Saidst thou not thyself, there is no profit in thinking upon the pleroma?

That said I unto you, to free you from the delusion that we are able to think about the pleroma. When we distinguish qualities of the pleroma, we are speaking from the ground of our own distinctiveness and concerning our own distinctiveness. But we have said nothing concerning the pleroma. Concerning our own distinctiveness, however, it is needful to speak, whereby we may distinguish ourselves enough. Our very nature is distinctiveness. If we are not true to this nature we do not distinguish ourselves enough. Therefore must we make distinctions of qualities.

What is the harm, ye ask, in not distinguishing oneself? If we do not distinguish, we get beyond our own nature, away from creatura. We fall into indistinctiveness, which is the other quality of the pleroma. We fall into the pleroma itself and cease to be creatures. We are given over to dissolution in nothingness. This is the death of the creature. Therefore we die in such measure as we do not distinguish. Hence the natural striving of the creature goeth towards distinctiveness, fighteth against primeval, perilous sameness. This is called the **PRINCIPIUM INDIVIDUATIONIS**. This principle is the essence of the creature. From this you can see why indistinctiveness and non-distinction are a great danger for the creature.

We must, therefore, distinguish the qualities of the pleroma. The qualities are **PAIRS OF OPPOSITES**, such as —

The Effective and the ineffective.

Fullness and Emptiness.

Living and Dead.

Difference and Sameness.

Light and Darkness.

The Hot and the Cold.

Force and Matter.

Time and Space.

Good and Evil.

Beauty and Ugliness.

The One and the Many.

The pairs of opposites are qualities of the pleroma which are not, because each balanceth each. As we are the pleroma itself, we also have all these qualities in us. Because the very ground of our nature is distinctiveness, which meaneth —

1. These qualities are distinct and separate in us one from the other; therefore they are not balanced and void, but are effective. Thus are we the victims of the pairs of opposites. The pleroma is rent in us.
1. The qualities belong to the pleroma, and only in the name and sign of distinctiveness can and must we possess and live them. We must distinguish ourselves from qualities. In the pleroma they are balanced and void; in us not. Being distinguished from them delivereth us.

When we strive after the good or the beautiful, we thereby forget our own nature, which is distinctiveness, and we are delivered over to the qualities of the pleroma, which are pairs of opposites. We labor to attain the good and the beautiful, yet at the same time we also lay hold of the evil and the ugly, since in the pleroma these are one with the good and the beautiful. When, however, we remain true to our own nature, which is distinctiveness, we distinguish ourselves from the good and the beautiful, therefore, at the same time, from the evil and ugly. And thus we fall not into the pleroma, namely, into nothingness and dissolution.

Thou sayest, ye object, that difference and sameness are also qualities of the pleroma. How would it be, then, if we strive after difference? Are we, in so doing, not true to our own nature? And must we none the less be given over to the sameness when we strive after difference?

Ye must not forget that the pleroma hath no qualities. We create them through thinking. If, therefore, ye strive after difference or sameness, or any qualities whatsoever, ye pursue thoughts which flow to you out of the pleroma: thoughts, namely, concerning non-existing qualities of the pleroma. Inasmuch as ye run after these thoughts, ye fall again into the pleroma, and reach difference and sameness at the same time. Not your thinking, but your being, is distinctiveness. Therefore not after difference, ye think it, must ye strive; but after YOUR OWN BEING. At bottom, therefore, there is only one striving, namely, the striving after your own being. If ye had this striving ye would not need to know anything about the pleroma and its qualities, and yet would ye come to your right goal by virtue of your own being. Since, however, thought estrangeth from being, that knowledge must I teach you wherewith ye may be able to hold your thought in leash.

Sermon II

In the night the dead stood along the wall and cried:

We would have knowledge of god. Where is god? Is god dead?

God is not dead. Now, as ever, he liveth. God is creatura, for he is something definite, and therefore distinct from the pleroma. God is quality of the pleroma, and everything I said of creatura also is true concerning him.

He is distinguished, however, from created beings through this, that he is more indefinite and indeterminable than they. He is less distinct than created beings, since the ground of his being is effective fullness. Only in so far as he is definite and distinct is he creatura, and in like measure is he the manifestation of the effective fullness of the pleroma.

Everthing which we do not distinguish falleth into the pleroma and is made void by its opposite. If, therefore, we do not distinguish god, effective fullness is for us extinguished.

Moreover god is the pleroma itself, as likewise each smallest point in the created and uncreated is pleroma itself.

Effective void is the nature of the devil. God and devil are the first manifestations of nothingness, which we call the pleroma. It is indifferent whether the pleroma is or is not, since in everything it is balanced and void. Not so creatura. In so far as god and devil are creatura they do not extinguish each other, but stand one against the other as effective opposites. We need no proof of their existence. It is enough that we must always be speaking of them. Even if both were not, creatura, of its own essential distinctiveness, would forever distinguish them anew out of the pleroma.

Everything that discrimination taketh out of the pleroma is a pair of opposites. To god, therefore, always belongeth the devil.

This inseparability is as close and, as your own life hath made you see, as indissoluble as the pleroma itself. Thus it is that both stand very close to the pleroma, in which all opposites are extinguished and joined.

God and devil are distinguished by the qualities of fullness and emptiness, generation and destruction. EFFECTIVENESS is common to both. Effectiveness joineth them. Effectiveness, therefore, standeth above both; is a god above god, since in its effect it uniteth fullness and emptiness.

This is a god whom ye knew not, for mankind forgot it. We name it by its name ABRAXAS. It is more indefinite still than god and devil.

That god may be distinguished from it, we name god HELIOS or sun. Abraxas is effect. Nothing standeth opposed to it but the ineffective; hence its effective nature freely unfoldeth itself. The ineffective is not, therefore resisteth not. Abraxas standeth above the sun and above the devil. It is improbable probability, unreal reality. Had the pleroma a being, Abraxas would be its manifestation. It is the effective itself, not any particular effect, but effect in general.

It is unreal reality, because it hath no definite effect.

It is also creatura, because it is distinct from the pleroma.

The sun hath a definite effect, and so hath the devil. Wherefore do they appear to us more effective than indefinite Abraxas.

It is force, duration, change.

The dead now raised a great tumult, for they were Christians.

Sermon III

Like mists arising from a marsh, the dead came near and cried: Speak further unto us concerning the supreme god.

Hard to know is the deity of Abraxas. Its power is the greatest, because man perceiveth it not. From the sun he draweth the summum bonum; from the devil the infimum malum: but from Abraxas LIFE, altogether indefinite, the mother of good and evil.

Smaller and weaker life seemeth to be than the summum bonum; wherefore is it also hard to conceive that Abraxas transcendeth even the sun in power, who is himself the radiant source of all the force of life.

Abraxas is the sun, and at the same time the eternally sucking gorge of the void, the belittling and dismembering devil.

The power of Abraxas is twofold; but ye see it not, because for your eyes the warring opposites of this power are extinguished.

What the god-sun speaketh is life.

What the devil speaketh is death.

But Abraxas speaketh that hallowed and accursed word which is life and death at the same time.

Abraxas begetteth truth and lying, good and evil, light and darkness, in the same word and in the same act. Wherefore is Abraxas terrible.

It is splendid as the lion in the instant he striketh down his victim. It is beautiful as a day in spring. It is the great Pan himself and also the small one. It is Priapos.

It is the monster of the under-world, a thousand-armed polyp, coiled knot of winged serpents, frenzy.

It is the hermaphrodite of the earliest beginning.

It is the lord of the toads and frogs,, which live in the water and gets up on the land, whose chorus ascendeth at noon and at midnight.

It is abundance that seeketh union with emptiness.

It is holy begetting.

It is love and love's murder.

It is the saint and his betrayer.

It is the brightest light of day and the darkest night of madness.

To look upon it, is blindness.
To know it, is sickness.
To worship it, is death.
To fear it, is wisdom.
To resist it not, is redemption.

God dwelleth behind the sun, the devil behind the night. What god bringeth forth out of the light the devil sucketh into the night. But Abraxas is the world, its becoming and its passing. Upon every gift that cometh from the god-sun the devil layeth his curse.

Everything that ye entreat from the god-sun begetteth a deed of the devil.

Everything that ye create with the god-sun giveth effective power to the devil.

That is terrible Abraxas.
It is the mightiest creature, and in it the creature is afraid of itself.
It is the manifest opposition to the pleroma and its nothingness.
It is the son's horror of the mother.
It is the mother's love for the son.
It is the delight of the earth and the cruelty of the heavens.
Before its countenance man becometh like stone.
Before it there is no question and no reply.
It is the life of creatura.
It is the operation of distinctiveness.
It is the love of man.
It is the speech of man.
It is the appearance and the shadow of man.
It is illusory reality.

Now the dead howled and raged, for they were unperfected.

Sermon IV

The dead filled the place murmuring and said:

Tell us of gods and devils, accursed one!

The god-sun is the highest good, the devil its opposite. Thus have ye two gods. But there are many high and good things and many great evils. Among these are two god-devils; the one is the BURNING ONE, the other the GROWING ONE.

The burning one is EROS, who hath the form of flame. Flame giveth light because it consumeth.

The growing one is the TREE OF LIFE. It buddeth, as in growing it heapeth up living stuff.

Eros flameth up and dieth. But the tree of life groweth with slow and constant increase through unmeasured time.

Good and evil are united in the flame.

Good and evil are united in the increase of the tree. In their divinity stand life and love opposed.

Innumerable as the host of the stars is the number of gods and devils.

Each star is a god, and each space that a star filleth is a devil. But the empty-fullness of the whole is the pleroma.

The operation of the whole is Abraxas, to whom only the ineffective standeth opposed.

Four is the number of the principal gods, as four is the number of the world's measurements.

One is the beginning, the god-sun.

Two is Eros; for he bindeth twain together and outspreadeth himself in brightness.

Three is the Tree of Life, for it filleth space with bodily forms.

Four is the devil, for he openeth all that is closed. All that is formed of bodily nature doth he dissolve; he is the destroyer in whom everything is brought to nothing.

For me, to whom knowledge hath been given of the multiplicity and diversity of the gods, it is well. But woe unto you, who replace these incompatible many by a single god. For in so doing ye beget the torment which is bred from not understanding, and ye mutilate the creature whose nature and aim is distinctiveness. How can ye be true to your own nature when ye try to change

the many into one? What ye do unto the gods is done likewise unto you. Ye all become equal and thus is your nature maimed.

Equalities shall prevail not for god, but only for the sake of man. For the gods are many, whilst men are few. The gods are mighty and can endure their manifoldness. For like the stars they abide in solitude, parted one from the other by immense distances. But men are weak and cannot endure their manifold nature. Therefore they dwell together and need communion, that they may bear their separateness. For redemption's sake I teach you the rejected truth, for the sake of which I was rejected.

The multiplicity of the gods correspondeth to the multiplicity of man.

Numberless gods await the human state. Numberless gods have been men. Man shareth in nature of the gods. He cometh from the gods and goeth unto god.

Thus, just as it serveth not to reflect upon the plerome, it availeth not to worship the multiplicity of the gods. Least of all availeth it to worship the first god, the effective abundance and the summum bonum. By our prayer we can add to it nothing, and from it nothing take; because the effective void swalloweth all.

The bright gods form the celestial world. It is manifold and infinitely spreading and increasing. The god-sun is the supreme lord of the world.

The dark gods form the earth-world. They are simple and infinitely diminishing and declining. The devil is the earth-world's lowest lord, the moon-spirit, satellite of the earth, smaller, colder, and more dead than the earth.

There is no difference between the might of the celestial gods and those of the earth. The celestial gods magnify, the earth-gods diminish. Measureless is the movement of both.

Sermon V

The dead mocked and cried: Teach us, fool, of the church and holy communion.

The world of the gods is made manifest in spirituality and in sexuality. The celestial ones appear in spirituality, the earthly in sexuality.

Spirituality conceiveth and embraceth. It is womanlike and therefore we call it MATER COELESTIS, the celestial mother. Sexuality engendereth and createth. It is manlike, and therefore we call it PHALLOS, the earthly father.

The sexuality of man is more of the earth, the sexuality of woman is more of the spirit.

The spirituality of man is more of heaven, it goeth to the greater.

The spirituality of woman is more of the earth, it goeth to the smaller.

Lying and devilish is the spirituality of the man which goeth to the smaller.

Lying and devilish is the spirituality of the woman which goeth to the greater.

Each must go to its own place.

Man and woman become devils one to the other when they divide not their spiritual ways, for the nature of the creatura is distinctiveness.

The sexuality of man hath an earthward course, the sexuality of woman a spiritual. Man and woman become devils one to the other if they distinguish not their sexuality.

Man shall know of the smaller, woman the greater.

Man shall distinguish himself both from spirituality and from sexuality. He shall call spirituality Mother, and set her between heaven and earth. He shall call sexuality Phallos, and set him between himself and earth. For the Mother and the Phallos are super-human daemons which reveal the world of the gods. They are for us more effective than the gods, because they are closely akin to our own nature. Should ye not distinguish yourselves from sexuality and from spirituality, and not regard them as of a nature both above you and beyond, then are ye delivered over to them as qualities of the pleroma. Spirituality and sexuality are not your qualities, not things which ye possess and contain. But they possess and contain you; for they are powerful daemons, manifestations of the gods, and are, therefore, things which reach beyond you, existing in themselves. No man hath a spirituality unto himself, or a sexuality unto himself. But he standeth under the law of Spirituality and of sexuality.

No man, therefore, escapeth these daemons. Ye shall look upn them as daemons, and as a common task and danger, a common burden which life hath laid upon you. Thus is life for you also a common task and danger, as are the gods, and first of all terrible Abraxas.

Man is weak, therefore is communion indispensable. If your communion be not under the sign of the Mother, then is it under the sign of the Phallos. No communion is suffering and sickness. Communion in everything is dismemberment and dissolution.

Distinctiveness leadeth to singleness. Singleness is opposed to communion. But because of man's weakness over against the gods and daemons and their invincible law is communion needful, not for man's sake, but because of the gods. The gods force you to communion. As much as they force you, so much is the communion needed, more is evil.

In communion let every man submit to others, that communion be maintained; for ye need it.

In singleness the one man shall be superior to the others, that every man may come to himself and avoid slavery.

In communion there shall be continence.

In singleness there shall be prodigality.

Communion is depth.

Singleness is height.

Right measure in communion purifieth and preserveth.

Right measure in singleness purifieth and increaseth.

Communion giveth us warmth, singleness giveth us light.

Sermon VI

The daemon of sexuality approacheth our soul as a serpent. It is half human and appeareth as thought-desire.

The daemon of spirituality descendeth into our soul as the white bird. It is half human and appeareth as desire-thought.

The serpent is an earthly soul, half daemonic, a spirit, and akin to the spirits of the dead. Thus too, like these, she swarmeth around in the things of earth, making us either to fear them or pricking us with intemperate desires. The serpent hath a nature like unto woman. She seeketh company of the dead who are held by the spell of the earth, they who found not the way beyond that leadeth to singleness. The serpent is a whore. She wantoneth with the devil and with evil spirits; a mischievous tyrant and tormentor, ever seducing to evilest company. The White Bird is a half-celestial soul of man. He bideth with the Mother, from time to time descending. The bird hath a nature like unto man, and is effective thought. He is chaste and solitary, a messenger of the Mother. He flieth high above earth. He commandeth singleness. He bringeth knowledge from the distant ones who went before and are perfected. He beareth our word above to the Mother. She intercedeth, she warneth, but against the gods she hath no power. She is a vessel of the sun. The serpent goeth below and with her cunning she lameth the phallic daemon, or else goadeth him on. She yieldeth up the too crafty thoughts of the earthy one, those thoughts which creep through every hole and cleave to all things with desirousness. The serpent, doubtless, willeth it not, yet she must be of use to us. She fleeth our grasp, thus showing us the way, which with our human wits we could not find.

With disdainful glance the dead spake: Cease this talk of gods and daemons and souls. At bottom this hath long been known to us.

Sermon VII

Yet when night was come the dead again approached with lamentable mien and said: There is yet one matter we forgot to mention. Teach us about man.

Man is a gateway, through which from the outer world of gods, daemons, and souls ye pass into the inner world; out of the greater into the smaller world. Small and transitory is man. Already is he behind you, and once again ye find yourselves in endless space, in the smaller or innermost infinity. At immeasurable distance standeth one single Star in the zenith.

This is the one god of this one man. This is his world, his pleroma, his divinity.

In this world is man Abraxas, the creator and destroyer of his one world.

This Star is the god and the goal of man.

This is his one guiding god. In him goeth man to his rest. Toward him goeth the long journey of the soul after death. In him shineth forth as light all that man bringeth back from the greater world. To this one god man shall pray.

Prayer increaseth the light of the Star. It casteth a bridge over death. It prepareth life for the smaller world and assuageth the hopeless desires of the greater.

When the greater world waxeth cold, burneth the Star.

Between man and his one god there standeth nothing, so long as man can turn away his eyes from the flaming spectacle of Abraxas.

Man here, god there.

Weakness and nothingness here, there eternally creative power.

Here nothing but darkness and chilling moisture.

There wholly sun.

Whereupon the dead were silent and ascended like the smoke above the herdman's fire, who through the night kept watch over his flock.