

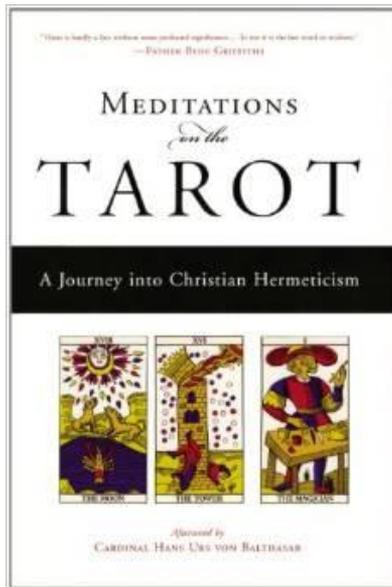
CHRISTIANITY, PLATONISM, AND THE TAROT OF MARSEILLE

A Very Brief



Introduction

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Acknowledgements:

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Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism

By *Anonymous* (Author), *Robert Powell* (Translator), *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Afterword)

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***What is Sufism?*, by Martin Lings**

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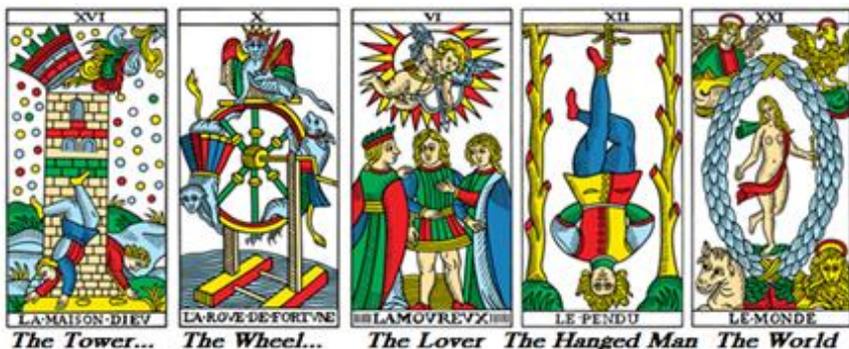


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A student inquires as follows:

“...a couple of questions on the tarot card analogy that was discussed this past class. Do the tarot cards have a specific order in which they can be arranged in order to convey a particular meaning? How do the tarot cards relate to Plotinian thought or other ancient Greek philosophies?”

With regard to the Tarot cards, here is the series of images again—see comments below:

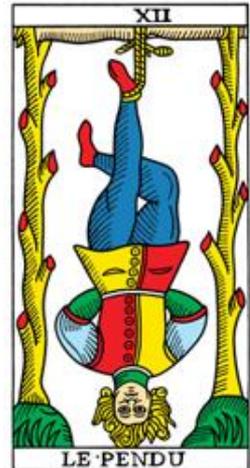


Remember that, for Plotinus, we reside in two worlds. On the one hand, we appear on the horizon of space and time as one entity among a world full of entities competing for finite resources and eventually being overcome by some power greater than our—apparently separate—selves (this is illustrated by the two cards on the left in this series of images--"The Wheel of Fortune" and "The Tower of Destruction"). On the other hand, in our higher aspect, we reside in the *intelligible realm* (aka *Nous* -- more loosely referred to as *Spirit*) where eternity and mutual inclusiveness replace time and space and separation (see Plotinus' *Enneads* V.9.10). The possibility of becoming aware of our higher aspect is illustrated by the two cards on the right (more on this, below).

Perhaps you have heard our conventional existence in time and space referred to as *the horizontal dimension* (or *plane*) — in contrast to *the vertical dimension* which is accessible to us if and only if our hearts are open to it (see, for example, Martin Lings’ *What is Sufism* or his YouTube recording, “Metaphysics & the Perennial Philosophy”). This distinction is key to understanding the universal symbolism of “The Lover” who is pulled in two directions (reminiscent of the myth of the soul in Plato’s *Phaedrus*). Those who choose the route of separation (seeking to secure their personal power, pleasure, and prestige on the horizontal plane) encounter mixed success, at best, and then face death and destruction; while those who “die before they die”— those who become attuned to deeper/higher levels of reality — realize their eternal life NOW (i.e. the vertical dimension). Eternal life does not involve infinite duration in time, but a very different *quality* of



life—a life which is immersed in the pristine presence of *the Intelligible realm* (i.e. “the real present” or “the eternal now”, as some have referred to it). This is portrayed (in the cards on the right) by the very “different center of gravity” of “The Hanged Man” and by the “creative-artistic elan” of “The World” which represents true nature. This aspect of reality escapes the notice of those who are “lost in” (or “in bondage to”) duality. Thus, our anonymous author writes:



"These ‘opposing desires’ are the tendencies through which the two gravitational fields manifest themselves. The man who lives in the grip of gravitation of ‘this world’ at the expense of the gravitation of ‘heaven’ is the ‘carnal man’; he who lives in equilibrium

between the two gravitational fields is the ‘psychic man’: and, lastly, the one who lives under the sway of the gravitation of ‘heaven’ is the ‘spiritual man’.

"It is this latter who constitutes the subject of the twelfth Arcanum of the Tarot, for it is an upside-down man that the twelfth Card represents. The Hanged Man represents the condition of one in the life of whom gravitation from above has replaced that from below.

"Firstly, it should be said that attraction from above is as real as that from below, and that the condition of a human being who has passed, whilst living, from the field of terrestrial gravitation into that of heaven is indeed comparable to that of the Hanged Man of the Card. This is at one and the same time a benefaction and a martyrdom; both are very real" (*Meditations on the Tarot*, Letter XII, "The Hanged Man" 307).

Then, in Letter 22, he writes:

The Arcanum "The World" thus communicates to us a teaching of immense practical significance: "The world is a work of art. It is animated by creative joy. The wisdom that it reveals is joyous wisdom — that of creative-artistic elan, and not that of an engineer-technician or industrial designer. Happy is he who seeks wisdom in the first place, for he will find that wisdom is joyous! Unhappy is the one who seeks the joy of joyous wisdom in the first place, for he will fall prey to illusions! Seek first the creative wisdom of the world — and the joy of creativity will be given to you in addition"



"From this teaching there results an important rule of "spiritual hygiene", namely: that he who aspires to authentic spiritual experiences never confounds the intensity of the experience undergone with the truth that is revealed — or is not revealed — through it, i.e. he does not regard the force of impact of an inner experience as a criterion of its authenticity and truth" (Letter 22, "The World" 643-644).

If this is beginning to make sense, you should now be able to read (or listen to) the Martin Lings material with more understanding. If you find the references to "Adam and Eve" and the garden of Eden off-putting, consider the following excerpt from Letter VI:

"Now, it is in we ourselves that there is to be found the 'Edenic' layer, or that of paradise and the Fall, of which an account is found in the book of Genesis of Moses. Do you doubt the essential truth of this account? Descend into the depths of your own soul, descend as far as the roots, to the sources of feeling, will and intelligence—and you will know. You will know, i.e. you will have certainty that the Biblical narrative is true in the most profound and authentic sense of the word — in the sense that you must deny yourself, deny the witness of the inner structure of your own soul, in order to be able to doubt the intrinsic truth of Moses' account. The descent into the depths of your own soul in meditating upon the account of paradise in Genesis will render you incapable of doubt. Such is the nature of the certainty that one can have here. But, of course, it is not a matter of certainty with regard to the garden, its trees, the serpent, the apple or other forbidden fruit, but rather with regard to the vital psychic and spiritual realities that these images or symbols reveal. It is not the symbolic language of the account which gives certainty of its truth, but rather what it expresses. It expresses in symbolic language the first layer (first in the sense of the root of all

that is human in human nature) of human psychic life, or its 'beginning'.

Now, knowledge of the beginning, 'initium' in Latin, is the essence of initiation" (Letter VI, "The Lover" 129).

"It goes without saying that nobody initiates anyone else . . . this initiation is operative from above and has the value and the duration of eternity" (Letter I, "The Magician" 4).



Indeed, the magic of *the Magician* lives on—eternally—in those who are willing to take upon themselves the *easy yoke* of the Master. This is said to be *the first and fundamental principle of esotericism*:

“Learn at first concentration without effort; transform work into play; make every yoke that you have accepted easy and every burden that you carry light!” (Letter I, “The Magician” 8).

Playing the Fool

One way to help familiarize yourself with the 22 *Major Arcana* of the Tarot is by means of a simple game called **Playing the Fool** (aka *The Pilgrimage of the Fool*). This is a variation on another game called, **Joy to the World** (visit the website—teenytinytarot.com—for those rules). The rules to *Playing the Fool* are as follows:

Gently randomize the order of the cards—taking care not to bend them in the process—and lay them out, face down, in three rows of seven, as follows:

T T T T T T T
T T T T T T T
T T T T T T T

Turn the remaining card face up and play it in its proper position, numerically speaking. Turn the face-down card that *was* in that position face up and play *it* in *its* proper numerical position, and so-on, until all the cards have been played and only the unnumbered *Fool* remains. When the game is over, all the numbered cards should be face up in their proper numerical positions as follows:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8 9 10 11 12 13 14
15 16 17 18 19 20 21



If *The Fool* turns up before the last play of the game (as is usually the case), play it face down in the position of another face-down card of your choosing and continue the game as before, until the last card is played in place of *The Fool* (wherever it happens to have finally ended up). When the last numbered card is played and only the unnumbered *Fool* remains, the game may begin again:

“What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from...” ~ T. S. Eliot

NOTE: It is considered by some to be very auspicious when *The Fool* does not turn up until the very last play of the game. This doesn't happen often, but if you keep playing, chances are it will happen for you. Best wishes, in any event, as you continue on your pilgrimage—**have fun**—but try not to **play the fool** too often! 😊