

Arturo Reghini

On Initiatory Fasting

From "Ignis," I, No. 11-12, November-December 1925, pp. 379-395 - Electronic text prepared by the website

lamelagrana.net - adapted by **IniziazioneAntica**

In previous issues of this magazine, and especially in the April-May 1925 and June-July 1925 issues, there was a lengthy discussion of Cagliostro's spiritual quarantines, periods of forty days of fasting during which, with the help of hermetic practices and secrets, according to the ritual of Cagliostro's Egyptian Freemasonry, first "moral perfection" and then "physical perfection."

From the passages of this ritual, reported in the previous issue of 'Ignis' (p. 307), it appears that Cagliostro, in determining the duration of the two spiritual quarantines as forty days, was merely inspired by or adhering to the precedent of Moses' fasts, and we have already noted with various examples the continuity and frequency with which this number appears in the Mediterranean esoteric tradition (Jewish, Christian, pagan, and Hermetic) in relation to the great work of initiatory regeneration. But the subject deserves more careful and special examination, and we will deal with it here.

Pietro Bongo, in his voluminous work *Sojtra i misteri dei numeri* (The Mysteries of Numbers), devotes a dozen pages to the number forty; he says that, after seven, 40 is the number that occurs most frequently in sacred scripture. In Talmudic literature, Casanowicz states, "forty appears in many cases to be used in all appearances as a round figure or as a concrete and definite expression instead of the abstract and indefinite 'many' and 'some', and thus becomes a symbolic number." On the other hand, it is well known that Pythagoras had marked four distinct ages, each of twenty years, in human life as a whole; and from this Pythagorean division into four parts, already prepared by popular culture and Italian-Greek social institutions, probably derives the biographical use of setting forty as the peak of human life.

The Jews and other peoples also seem to have shared with the Greeks this notion that the fortieth year was the peak of human life, and Nöldeke argues that forty years came to represent a generation from this fact.

fortieth year was the peak of human life, and Nöldeke argues that forty years came to represent a generation from this fact. Bongo, after reporting that Isaac and Esau were forty years old when they married Rebecca and Judith respectively, clearly follows this concept, calling this age appropriate because, according to Aristotle, the seed completes its first transformation in the woman's womb in forty days.

Forty is a number associated with every kind of generation and regeneration. Forty days was the prescribed period of purification after the birth of a male (*Lev.* XII. 2, 4) and twice that after the birth of a female (*ibid.* 5); the Holy Fathers say that Jesus was carried for forty days in Mary's womb; and the belief that full-term birth occurs after nine months and ten days, i.e. after 270 days plus ten (forty weeks make 280 days) is still widespread. Bongo, quoting a passage from St. Augustine, says that when

the snake, while remaining alive, wants to shed its old skin and return to youth, it fasts for forty days and then comes out through a narrow hole, adding that this is why Jesus advises us to be as cunning as serpents and as innocent as doves.

The first fasts mentioned in the Holy Scriptures are those practiced by Moses and Elijah. Moses fasted on Mount Sinai, and Elijah walked through the desert for forty days and forty nights without eating or drinking until he reached Mount Horeb, which, if not the same as Sinai, is part of it.

However, Elijah's fast was not complete, because God used a raven to feed him. According to the Hebrew text and the Vulgate, the raven brought Elijah bread and meat in the morning and evening, while the Septuagint says that the raven brought bread in the morning and meat in the evening; and “it would be difficult 7 thing,” writes Thomassin authoritatively, ‘to guess where this difference between the Hebrew text and the Septuagint comes from.’ This difference does not greatly disturb our conscience. Instead, we will make some interesting observations in this regard: in Hebrew, ‘horeb’ means to become dark, to grow dark, ‘hereb’ means evening, and also raven, evidently because it is black like... a raven. On the other hand, ha-raba means uncultivated countryside, barren plain, desert, solitude. These four words all begin with the guttural ajin (16th letter of the Hebrew alphabet), while Horeb, Mount Horeb, begins with the guttural heth (8th letter of the Hebrew alphabet). In this passage, there is only a reinforcement of the aspiration, but these various words are so similar phonetically and semantically that Horeb, the very name of the mountain, written with the letter *heth*, means scorching heat, drought, desolation, and the word *haraba*, which we have transcribed above, is also written with the letter *heth* as its initial letter, always retaining the meaning of destruction, deserted places.

Therefore, raven, desert, Mount Horeb, represent and recall the same thing, the same condition of darkness and spiritual crisis, which must be traversed in order to reach the opposite condition. They are the external and profane darkness, opposed to and preceding the inner and initiatory light, the night that precedes the dawn represented by the dove.

On Mount Horeb, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in the midst of a burning bush. Elijah traveled through the desert fasting, going toward Mount Horeb, and was fed by a raven; he too had a manifestation of fire there and attained initiatory immortality, for he did not die but ascended to heaven in a whirlwind. And if the Bible recounts the death of Moses, it adds that he was buried by God, and that no man ever knew his burial place.

In imitation of Moses and Elijah, Jesus, led by the devil into the wilderness, fasted there for forty days and forty nights before being tempted by the devil; and it is clear and well known that the Christian Lenten fast, the *quadregesima* or Lent, which is an apostolic tradition, was instituted in memory and imitation of the fasts of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus; St. Augustine explicitly says that the 40-day fast is authorized by these three fasts.

In the life of Jesus as recounted in the Gospels, the symbolic number forty also occurs in other circumstances. He remained in his mother's womb for forty weeks, preached publicly for forty months, remained in his tomb for forty hours, including the hour of his death and the last hour of the night on Sunday when he rose again; forty days later, he appeared to the Apostles. This insistence on setting the duration of these various periods at forty days, weeks, and hours must certainly have a cause, a reason, a purpose; and since it always concerns generation and regeneration (resurrection), one might think that

this period was set by taking as a reference point the forty weeks of human generation; the fact that, according to ancient observation and tradition, the phenomena of vegetation and generation are connected to the phases of the moon, and therefore to the week and the month as units of measurement, it might at first seem plausible that this period was determined on the basis of the forty weeks of human generation.

But this explanation is contradicted by what we have already seen, namely that the number forty appears in the Bible and outside the Bible as a round figure indicating a period that is not well defined but concludes a cycle.

This number, observes St. Augustine, is very frequent in Scripture “to insinuate the mystery of perfection in the four-part world,” and many examples could be given: the 40 days required for the embalming of Jacob, the 40 years that Israel stayed in the desert, the forty years of Moses when he became the liberator of his people, the 40 days needed to explore the land of Canaan, the 40 days granted to Nineveh to repent, the 40 days during which Ezekiel had to lie on his right side, the forty days during which Goliath challenged the army of Israel, etc. A more or less direct and clear reference to regeneration can be found in the examples of Adam being placed by God in paradise 40 days after his creation, of Seth, who was forty years old when the angels took him away from the eyes of men to instruct him secretly and mysteriously about the crime of the egregores, the future flood, and the future advent of the Savior, of the forty years of construction of the Tower of Babel, and also in a particularly cosmogonic sense from the various ways in which the number forty appears in connection with Noah's flood: God, in fact, gave the world forty years to repent before dispersing mankind through the flood, the rain of the flood lasted for 40 days, and 40 days interceded between the first appearance of the 19 mountains and the opening of the windows of the ark. First the black raven was sent, and then, after forty days, the white dove. And the dove, it is said in Genesis, returned bearing in its beak a sprig of olive tree, with green leaves. St. Chrysostom (*Hom. XX in Geni*) says that, since the olive tree is *semper virens*, it is likely that when the waters receded, this tree still had its foliage. La Peyrière (*Praeadamitae* - 1645 - IV, 225) argues that the dove had to fly to the mountains of Armenia to bring back the “tessera della pace, with which God, in Noah, reconciled himself with the Jewish people”; certain rabbis and certain scholars argue instead that the olive branch was taken from Paradise, or from the Mount of Olives (cf. Olavi Celsi *Hierobotanicum* - 1745 - 47; II, 331). The olive tree, evergreen, is a symbol of immortality. In the Psalms (Psalm 8) it is an emblem of prosperity and peace (Psalm 52, 8; 128, 3). In paganism it was a symbol of wisdom and sacred to Pallas, like myrtle (also evergreen) to Venus, and laurel (the “verdeggiante allor” of Zanella) to Apollo. For both pagans and Jews, it was a symbol of peace, and even today the expression “olive branch” is used with this meaning. We will see later how these concepts and characteristics are found in the supreme initiation; but, ending this digression, let us return to our subject.

In Arab tradition, God forms man from mud and dries him for 40 days; and even in the Isiac mysteries, as we have observed elsewhere, this number appears, specifically in the 40 days of fasting by Lucius before the initiation of Osiris, as narrated in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. This concordance in the purpose and duration of the fasts of Moses, Elijah, Jesus, Lucius in Apuleius, not to mention those of Campanella and Cagliostro, and the reappearance of this number in the Hermetic tradition as the duration of transmutation and in the mystical Hermeticism of 21

Boehme, suggest that Egypt is the common source or the oldest manifestation known to us of the determination of the period of Lent and its possible connection with the duration of the initiatory fast in the great work of regeneration: and they tend to show how, by adhering to this Mediterranean initiatory tradition even in this particular aspect of symbolism, one is simply following a truly universal “religion,” evidently followed also by Jesus, a religion which, for obvious chronological reasons, could not be Christianity, of which it is at most a derivation.

When, in the early centuries of the Christian era, the practice of fasting at Easter spread, there was great uncertainty as to its duration. St. Irenaeus says that some fasted for 40 days, others for 40 nights, others for 40 days and 40 nights, and others for 40 days and 40 nights.

When, in the early centuries of the common era, the practice of Easter fasting spread, there was great uncertainty as to its duration; St. Irenaeus says that some fasted one day, others more, others forty, etc., and Montanus went so far as to propose three Lenten fasts per year. In some countries, people fasted for two weeks at Easter, in others for three, in others for six, and in Constantinople, neighboring provinces, and in Phoenicia, for seven weeks. St. Ambrose was one of the most zealous in opposing these excesses and in defending the forty-day fast (St. Ambrose - *De Virginibus*, Lib. Ili, cap. IV - *Patrol. Migne XVI*, 223); and finally the Council of Laodicea ordered (Canon 50) that Lent should be fasted in its entirety (without skipping certain days of the week as was customary in some regions), and that “*this sacred number and mystery should not be violated by breaking the fast on Holy Thursday.*” St. Augustine seems to have been well aware of the character and meaning of this mysterious number, for in his explanation of Psalm 94 he wrote: “These forty years signify what is always. For the number forty indicates the completeness (*integritas*) of the centuries, as if the centuries were completed (*perficiantur*) by this number.”

In Hebrew, indeed, forty is *arbaim*, while the obviously related word *arbe* means multitude, and also indicates a kind of locust, just as the ancient Egyptians used the hieroglyph of the tadpole or the lizard to represent the same concept.

concept. And, as in Greek, Latin, and related languages, the word for forty is philologically and phonetically related to the word for four, so too the Hebrew *arbaim*, forty, is clearly linked to and derived from *arbh*, which means four. On the other hand, *arbe*, multitude, has the same origin as *rabb*, which means much, and also great, powerful, leader (hence Rabbi, the Lord, the rabbi). From the number forty, we are thus brought back to the number four, which we find associated with the concept of multitude, greatness, and completeness.

What is the reason for this?

Perhaps the following: philology and history agree in showing us that the lunar month was formerly taken as a unit of time, both by peoples speaking Indo-European languages and by peoples speaking Semitic languages. In Latin, the word *mensura*, measure, is connected to the word *mensis*, month, and the same root appears in Greek in *mén* = month and *méne*, moon. In modern English, similar words, moon and month, are used to refer to the moon and the month respectively. Similarly, in Hebrew, the word *iareah* means moon and *ierah* means month, and the same association is found in ancient Egyptian, where *ab* means moon and *ab* or *abt* (in Coptic *abof*) means month. Now, the lunar period has four phases, which lend themselves easily to being taken as units of measurement; and in this case,

taking the week as the unit of measurement of time, after four weeks the cycle of the lunar phases is completed, and therefore the number four that closes the cycle constitutes a new unit of a higher order, the month, and therefore has a character of completeness, of a period in itself. The likelihood of such a connection between the word designating the number four and the four phases of the moon seems to be proven by the fact that in ancient Egyptian, four is written *aft*, a word clearly related to the word *abt* (month), however little we may know about the phonetics of ancient Egyptian. Additional proof is provided by Egyptian measures of capacity: The unit of measurement was called *hen*, whose multiples or higher units were *Vapt* or *ap* (*aipi* in Coptic and *epha* in Hebrew), a kind of bushel containing 40 *hen*, and the *tena* containing four *hen*. As can be seen, here too the higher units are formed on the basis of four and forty, and it should also be noted that the word *apt*, which designates forty *hen*, is phonetically similar and intermediate between *abt*, month, and *aft*, four.

Other interesting data can be found by examining the Egyptian calendar: as is well known, the Egyptian year consisted of exactly 360 days, with the five epagomenal or complementary days being counted separately. The year was divided into three seasons of 120 days each, each in turn subdivided and composed of four months of thirty days each; this division of the year is undoubtedly more rational than that currently in use in civilized countries. Therefore, the Egyptian season was called tetramenia by the Greeks, because it was composed of four months, similar to the lunar month, which in turn is composed of four weeks.

The number that completes a cycle, which constitutes a new unit of measurement, naturally varies depending on whether the week, month, tetramenia, or year is taken as the fundamental unit. If the season is taken as the basis, then the number three will close the cycle, since after three Egyptian seasons have passed, we return to the same point in the terrestrial year, and therefore the number three (*Chemef*) is the sum, the total (*chemef*), of the three seasons; if the week and the month are taken as the basis, the cycle closes after four Egyptian weeks and four Egyptian months, and then it is the number four that corresponds to the end of a period; if the month is taken in relation to the year, the cycle closes with twelve months and it is then the number 12, the dozen, that closes and constitutes the period. Finally, if we take the fingers of the hands as a unit of measurement, which is equivalent to adopting the decimal number system, it is ten that constitutes the higher unit of order. It follows that the numbers used to designate multitude, completeness, and a period can be 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, and the various combinations obtained by multiplying two or more of them together. For example, the product of three and ten gives us the thirty days of the Egyptian month, the product of four and ten gives us our forty, etc.

We may ask ourselves why, among all these possible numbers that complete the cycle, forty has taken on, especially in relation to regeneration, the prevalence and symbolic meaning that we have found. We do not think it is out of place to refer, in this regard, to the Pythagorean tradition, whose concordance and connection with the Egyptian and Kabbalistic traditions are far from being excluded. We need not recall the importance and meaning that the Pythagoreans attached to the quaternary, the sacred *tetractis*, and the decade. What is interesting, however, is to investigate the mysterious link between four and ten, because it justifies and validates in a certain way the mysterious excellence of the number forty, which is their product. In the geometric genesis of Pythagorean arithmetic, in which the point corresponds to unity, the aggregation of several points arranged in the same direction gave rise to segments composed

of two, three... points, that is, it gave rise to the series of integers; the superimposition, on a plane, of the point on segments of two, three... points gave rise to triangles composed of three, six, ten... points, i.e. the series of so-called triangular numbers (the 'triangular number' is therefore equal to the sum of the first n integers); the superimposition, in space, of the point on triangles of three, six, ten... points gave rise to tetrahedrons or pyramids with a triangular base, consisting of four, ten, twenty... points, i.e. the pyramid numbers (the pyramid number being equal to the sum of the first triangular numbers). The analytical process can then be continued in a similar way with the pyramid numbers, but geometrically, i.e. Pythagoreanly, we must stop, because human intuition of space cannot conceive how tetrahedrons can be superimposed in successive spatial layers. Therefore, four points are sufficient to form a polyhedron and to exhaust the dimensions of space conceived by human intuition. With the point (unity), the segment (two), the triangle (three), and the tetrahedron (four), the geometric manifestation of unity is complete.

Now, the sum of these four fundamental numbers is ten; ten is the *fourth* number in the series of triangular numbers: 1, 3, 6, 10..., just as four is the *fourth* number in the series of numbers and ten is the smallest number that belongs both to the series of whole numbers and to those of triangular and pyramidal numbers. To these arithmetic relationships between 4 and 10 must be added, as confirmation and further indication of the importance of ten and its connection with four, various facts that could not fail to be observed and evaluated by the ancients: The fact that there are ten fingers on the hands, that the initial letter of the word 'decade' is the fourth in the Greek alphabet, and that it is written using an equilateral triangle (10 is a triangular number), etc. In conclusion, four and ten have many characteristics in common, and therefore their product, the quaternary of decades or decade of quaternaries, in a certain way sums up and intensifies all these characteristics in a single number. Cabalistically, similar relationships exist between the *iod* (tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet), the *aleph* (first letter of the Hebrew alphabet) formed, as is well known, by four *iods*, and the *tetragrammaton*.

However, the essential fact is that forty expresses the totality of a period, the integrity of the centuries, as St. Augustine says. This period could also have been symbolically expressed by other numbers; and, if in the special case of Lent or initiatory fasting, forty was chosen or affirmed everywhere in the Isiac mysteries and in the Jewish, Arab, Christian, and Hermetic traditions, in addition to the Pythagorean and Kabbalistic reasons for which 40 excels, this is perhaps due to the common Egyptian origin of the wisdom of Moses and the Isiac mysteries reported by Apuleius, and in any case to the deep bond that links (above fanatical misunderstandings and fierce hatreds) the various currents and manifestations of the Mediterranean initiatory tradition, from which the historical religions of the Mediterranean basin, the Egyptian, Orphic, Pythagorean, Eleusinian, Bacchic mysteries, etc., the orders of chivalry, Hermeticism, and Freemasonry derive more or less precisely and consciously.

We can therefore agree with what Lacuria writes about the number forty-seven

: "The only constant is that the number characterizes a complete and sufficient period to accomplish a work. *St. Augustine thinks that the number forty represents the duration of our pilgrimage on earth, which is in fact a complete period that ends the work of our destiny. Forty must emanate from the number four, which is also a complete number; a number that sums up God and his work; a sum that contains the enumeration of all existing and possible species of beings.*"

It seems clear to us that initiatory regeneration constitutes a period, a span of time with a beginning and an end, like any other case of generation, and is therefore expressible and symbolically compatible with a number such as forty. And since the completion of one period necessarily leads to the beginning of another period of time, and every end is at the same time a beginning, every death a birth, it is natural that the concepts of end, perfection (*per-ficere*), completion, death, beginning, and initiation are closely associated with each other, and that initiatory palingenesis consists intrinsically and is ceremonially represented by that death and resurrection which, in the Christian tradition, has Jesus as its protagonist; whose death and resurrection, therefore and above all, is a symbolic expression of the traditional initiatory spiritual transmutation, whether or not it has reference to a particular historical or legendary event.

We will conclude these notes by dwelling somewhat on the thirteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *mem*, which corresponds to and denotes the number forty.

Maim is the Hebrew name for waters, always designated in the plural (or rather in the dual, indicating the upper and lower waters), which corresponds to the Egyptian *mu*, and the Arabic *ma*, water. We have already seen that waters are related to the number forty in the case of the flood, which marks the end of one humanity and the beginning of another. First, as soon as the 40-day flood ended and the waters receded for 40 days so as to dry up, the raven came out of the ark, never to be seen again; and then it was followed by the dove and the appearance of the sun, that is, the colors of the rainbow. In Hermeticism, the great work has phases that are expressed with identical and similar terminology; even Hermetic transmutation is accomplished by dissolving and drying, and passing from black (the raven of the alchemists) to white (the doves of Diana); and also in Hermeticism there appears the *peacock's tail*, and the period necessary for the completion of the work is sometimes calculated in forty years or months.

The letter *mem*, which corresponds to the 13th card in the tarot, depicting death, is preceded by the letter *lamed*, which has a numerical value of thirty and corresponds to the 12th card in the tarot, depicting the “hanged man”; and is followed by *nun*, whose numerical value is fifty, and which corresponds to the 14th card in the tarot depicting *temperance*.

Lamed in Hebrew means to learn, and this concept, associated with that depicted by the corresponding card in the tarot, is found in the dual meaning of the words discipline and docility (from the Latin *docere*), and in the Sanskrit yoga (*ht. Jugum*). The letter *lamed* therefore refers to the apprentice, the disciple, who must submit to the discipline of the initiatory Order, perform the twelve labors of Hercules, and walk the twelve stations of the *via crucis*, of the passion, before being able to attempt the great work, which is accomplished through death and initiatory resurrection. From this point of view, the numbers 12, 30, their common pitmen 3, and the letter *lamed* are the symbol of the preliminary human phase 28 of initiation, they are the symbol of the apprentice.

This letter is followed by *mem*, dissolution, death on the four arms of the cross; and therefore *mem*, 13, 40, and their common pitmen 4, are the symbol of death and initiatory resurrection, of crucifixion, and are the symbol of the initiate or companion.

The fourteenth card of the Tarot, corresponding to *nun* and 50, represents a woman pouring liquid from one vessel into another, and is therefore a sign of transmutation and palingenesis. According to the spiritual law corresponding to the physical law of communicating vessels, palingenesis leads to equilibrium, and therefore to tranquility, deep peace, and stability immune to change. It is the rest of which Cagliostro speaks in his ritual; and the Egyptian Mason, says Cagliostro, after completing the two forties and achieving spiritual and physical immortality, aspires only to this rest and to be able to say of himself: *ego sum qui sum*. It is the eternal rest of the Catholic liturgy, understood in its esoteric meaning. The letter *nun*, therefore, and the numbers 14, 50 and their common pitmen 5, are the symbol of complete palingenesis, the symbol of the Master.

The sum of the three numbers 30, 40 and 50 gives 120, the number of days of the Egyptian tetramenia, and the years lived by Moses. The sum of their pitmen, 3, 4, and 5, gives 12, the cyclical number of the year, the zodiacal number. These three numbers (and their proportionals, 30, 40, and 50) are also the measurements of the cathetus and hypotenuse of the so-called Egyptian triangle, held sacred by the ancients (see Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*), constantly used in ancient religious architecture for its symbolic and mysterious character, and still in use today as a Masonic symbol. Taking twelve consecutive segments of equal length on a string, holding the points corresponding to the end of the third and seventh segments fixed, and joining the two ends, we obtain this Egyptian triangle, which, as is well known, is a right triangle; indeed, of all right triangles, it is the one for which the measurements of the sides offer the simplest numerical ratios. In this way, you can construct a *square*, a right angle, that is, divide the circumference into *four* parts. The famous theorem of Pythagoras, which also applies to this triangle, states that the sum of the squares constructed on the cathetus is equal to the square constructed on the hypotenuse; that is, that by adding together what is contained in *power* (square) in three and four, we obtain what is contained in *power* in five, the Pythagorean pentalpha. This is true both geometrically and esoterically.

Just as *mem* comes immediately after the first twelve letters of the Hebrew alphabet and has a numerical value of 40, so Easter comes after the twelve stations of the *Way of the Cross* and takes place during the forty hours between death and resurrection. Coming after the end of the twelfth cycle, it is natural that its recurrence should take place just after the end of the year, at the beginning of spring. (*first true, spring*). Now, the first equinox corresponds (if we do not take into account the precession of the equinoxes) to the first point of the zodiac sign of Aries, the Paschal Lamb. But Easter is determined not only after and based on the end of the solar year, or twelve-month cycle, but also after the end of the four-year lunar cycle; and its recurrence falls on the first Sunday (i.e., the first solar day) following the first full moon after the spring equinox. It is therefore subordinate to the end of the two solar and lunar cycles, i.e. based on the two periods that have the greatest influence and correspondence in all vegetation and generation.

It should also be noted that the zodiacal symbol of Aries is used by the alchemist Zosimus (3rd century AD) to represent sulfur, a substance which, according to the ancients, was eminently igneous and flammable, and that sulfur in Greek is expressed by the word *theion*, which also means divine.

Thus, the fiery and divine power of sulfur is connected with the zodiacal sign of Aries, and therefore with the Paschal Lamb, the agnus qui tollit peccata, the lamb that takes away the sins of the world. Thus, the fiery and divine power of sulfur is connected with the zodiac sign of Aries, and therefore with

the Paschal lamb, *the agnus qui tollit peccata mundi*. After the twelve letters of the alphabet, we find the *mem*, associated in various ways with the concept of water; after the cycle of twelve months, we now find the sign of Aries, associated in various ways with the concept of fire; and thus we find water and fire, the solution and coagulation of the great work.

Finally, coming to the nun, we observe that, in both the Jewish and Christian calendars, fifty days after Easter comes Pentecost, as the name itself says. According to the Acts of the Apostles, on the fiftieth day after Jesus' death, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles. But this event is also an effect and not the starting point of the sanctification of Pentecost, that is, of the fifty-day period. In fact, the sanctification of the 50th day after Easter is prescribed in Leviticus with the following words: "And thou shalt sanctify the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; for it is a jubilee. *The man shall return to his possession, and everyone shall return to his ancient family.*"

After what we have said, the esoteric meaning of this passage is not difficult to grasp. Moreover, it can be traced back to the writers of the Church. St. Augustine, for example, believes that forty represents this laborious life and that fifty represents rest and delight; and the Venerable Bede bases himself on the passage from Leviticus quoted above and on that from the Acts of the Apostles on Pentecost to affirm that: "*it is clear that this number can rightly represent the grace of the Holy Spirit and the joy of future bliss, which is attained through the gift of this spirit, and in whose perception alone one truly rests and enjoys.*"

According to St. Jerome, forty is always associated with labor (*labore*), while fifty leads us to the interior of the Church (*interiora Ecclesiae*), because after the seven-week Sabbath, it breaks on the day of the resurrection.

interiora Ecclesiae, because after the seven weeks of the Sabbath, it breaks into the day of the resurrection. Thirty-five

St. Jerome cites Abraham's plea in Genesis to save Sodom if fifty righteous people could be found there, and the parable in the Gospel (Luke VII and XVI) about the two debtors, one owing 50 and the other 500 denarii, to prove that 50 is the number of penance and remission. St. Augustine says that 50 is the symbol of the future Church, where God is always praised, because $50 = 40 + 10$, where forty is the number of human life, and 10 (denarius) is the money or reward of the worker. Another even more amazing link between 40 and 50 was found, according to Bongo, by St. Jerome. In fact, says Bongo, the eternal joy of our jubilee is in a certain way latent in the present conflict, and this can be seen from St. Jerome's observation that the sum of all the divisors of 40 is equal to fifty. The divisors of forty are, in fact, 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 20, whose sum is exactly equal to fifty. This shows, according to St. Jerome, that forty potentially contains fifty, in the mystical symbolic sense that we have explained.

At the beginning of Lent there is the preliminary and ritual purification, Ash Wednesday, which corresponds to the catharsis of the pagan mysteries; then comes the forty-day period of work, trial, fasting and discipline, which ends with death and initiatory resurrection; it is Easter, corresponding in meaning and annual recurrence to the great Dionysian festivals (March 28-April 2) and the Roman

Liberalia (March 17); and finally, the fiftieth day of Pentecost, which ends with the descent of the “Holy Spirit.”

In setting the date of Easter based on the end of the solar and lunar cycles, i.e., at the end of the twelve months of the solar year and the four weeks of the month culminating in the first full moon after the end of the solar year, we took the spring equinox as the beginning of the solar year. In ancient times, in fact, this was what happened in Rome before the reform of Numa Pompilius, as evidenced by the names of some months: April (*aperire*), September, October, etc., which were precisely the seventh, eighth, etc. months of the year; but if we place the beginning of the year at the winter solstice, as is customary today and as seems certain to have been the case even more anciently, that is, at the moment when the sun, in the northern hemisphere, is at its lowest point on the horizon, at the moment when the day ends and the increase begins, it is possible to find, with an approximate shift of ninety days, significant analogies in annual festivals and religious traditions... There are exactly ninety days between the winter solstice and the spring equinox, as December and January have 31 days and February has 28 days in the Roman calendar. And just as Easter is subordinate to and follows the spring equinox, so shortly after the winter solstice (December 21) comes Christmas (December 25), St. John the Evangelist (December 27), New Year's Day, and Epiphany. Because the dates of birth and resurrection are subordinate to the solstice and equinox, some have seen in this nothing more than an allegory of the solar myth, whereas for us the astronomical references are only an appropriate symbol and analogical correspondence of inner initiatory regeneration.

For similar reasons, the period between two consecutive deaths and resurrections of the Phoenix in the midst of flames is sometimes calculated as 1,461 years, the Sothic year of the Egyptians, i.e., the period between two consecutive heliacal risings of Sirius, measured by a number of years equal to four times the exact number of days in the year, i.e. 4 times 365+one.

Usually, however, the death and rebirth of the phoenix is traditionally said to occur every 500 years, i.e. every fifty decades. Thus we find the number fifty again, since 50, according to Origen, is related to 500. Indeed, according to Origen, 500 is more impressive and perfect than 50, and this is proven by the passage from the Gospel about the two debtors that we mentioned above.

We do not believe that this study exhausts the investigation into the symbolic meaning of the number forty, its origin, reason, and history, a subject that is apparently modest and limited but which has led us to examine some very hidden aspects of the Mediterranean esoteric tradition and the Jewish-Christian religious tradition. We have seen that the numerical symbolism of 40 and 50 takes on a predominantly mystical aspect in the Christian tradition and of the Jewish-Christian religious tradition. We have seen that the numerical symbolism of 40 and 50 takes on a predominantly mystical and moralistic aspect in the Christian tradition, but that the esoteric meaning sometimes shines through in the writings of the Church in a relatively clear and faithful manner.

In this investigation of such a minute detail of symbolism, the connection between the various religions and initiatory schools of the West, from Egypt to Christianity, from Kabbalah to Hermeticism, has been revealed; and it is also clear from this investigation that only initiatory experience and the consequent possible esoteric understanding and interpretation of traditions are capable of rising intelligently and synthetically above the divisions of Churches and sects and of fully understanding those truths which,

entrusted to traditional allegory and the symbolic veil of texts, appear fragmentary, misunderstood, and distorted in the interpretations that profane writers of various churches and schools are accustomed to give of sacred things.

Notes

1 Petri Bongii Bergomatis *Numerorum Mysteria* - Bergomi 1599, postrema editio, p. 501.

2 See the article by I. M. Casanowicz under the heading *Forty* in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, V, 438.

3 See A. Rostagni - *Il Verbo di Pitagora*, 1924, pp. 83-84.

4 Nöldeke - *Untersuchungen zur kritik des Altea Testaments*, p. 188. For St. Augustine, too, 40 was the number of human life (see Vigouroux's *Diction. de la Bible*, under the entry *Nombres*, for this and for extensive information on mystical numbers), and Leopardi, in his dialogue between the physicist and the metaphysician, also places the peak of human life at the age of 40.

5 Aug. *in Civit. Dei*, Vili, 15.

6 *Kings*, XIX, 8.

7 Lodovico Thomassin - *Treatise on the Fasts of the Church*, trans. from French. Lucca 1742, p. 10.

8 Cf. Scerbo - *Hebrew-Chaldean Dictionary of the Old Testament* - Florence 1912, pp. 269-70.

9 Mail. IV, 1, 2. This connection between Jesus and Moses and Elijah is completed and confirmed by the transfiguration of Jesus, which, according to the sacred texts, took place between Moses and Elijah (cf. Matt. XVII, Marc. IX, and Aug. *Epistol.* LV, chap. XV).

10 Augus. *Epistol.* LV, chap. XV, in *Patrologia* del Migne, XXXIII, p. 217.

11 Aug. *De Trinit.*, IV, 6; *Patrol.* del Migne, LXII, 894-895.

12 Acts of the Apostles 1, 2; cf. also Aug. *loco supra citato*.

15 Aug. *De Trinit.* IV, 6.

16 According to St. Jerome (Comm. in Ezechiel. Lib IX, chap. XXIX, *Patrol.* Migne XXV, 387), because of this stay, 40 is the number of affliction and punishment, and that is why Moses, and then Elijah and Jesus, fasted for 40 days.

17 Cf. Georg. Syncellus - *Chronographia* - Bonnae, 1829 I, pp. 8 and 9, pp. 16-17?

18 *Gen.* VII, 4, 12, 17.

19 *Gen.* Vili, 6.

20 See "Ignis" - April-May issue, 1925, p. 105.

21 See Boehme - *Dell'impronta delle cose* - Milan 1925, p. 147.

22 Jesus compares himself to the true vine, but the farmer, the Georgos, precedes him as his father. Much could be said about the use of pastoral, agricultural, and edification symbolism in the Mediterranean tradition.

23 Aug. *Enarra fio in Psalmum XCIV*, 14, in *Patrologia* del Migne, XXXVII, 1226.

24 F. Rossi - *Grammatica Copto-geroglifica* - 1878; pp. 257, 260.

25 See the dissertation by G. G. Bredovio in the Bonn edition of the *Chronology* of Syncellus, II, p. 35.

26 See the *Vocabolario Geroglifico copto-ebraico* (Coptic-Hebrew Hieroglyphic Dictionary) by Simeone Castelli, Turin 1887; I, 48.

27 P. F. G. Lacuria - *Les Harmonies de l'Etre exprimées par les Nombres*. Edit. Nouv. 1889; t. II, p. 306.

28 The *pitmene* of a number is given by the remainder of its division by 9, or by 9 itself when the remainder is zero. We prefer to use this ancient Pythagorean term rather than the bizarre expression (theosophical reduction) used by L. C. de Saint Martin. The latter, on the subject of forty, says little and nothing conclusive (*Des Nombres* - Paris, 1861, p. 65; and *Tableau Nature!*, 1783; p. 836).

29 See Hoefler - *Histoire de la Chimie*. Paris 1866, I, p. 269.

30 *Levit XXV*, 5.

31 Aug. *Epist.* LV, chap. XV in *Patrol.* Migne, XXXIII, 218.

32 Venerabilis Bedae - *De Tabernaculis et vasis eius*, Lib. II, chap. II.

33 Hieron. *Comm. in Ezechielem*, Lib. XII, XLI; *Patrologia* del Migne, t. XXV, 396.

34 *Ibidem* - Lib. XII, chap. XV. *Patrologia* del Migne XXV, 383.

35 Hieron. - *Comm. in Isaiam proph.* Lib. II, chap. Ili; Migne XXIV, 60.

36 Aug. - *Sermo CCLII*, chap. XI - *Patr.* XXXVIII, 1178.

37 The Phoenix, so called because of its purple color (cf. flamingo), is an important hermetic symbol, also used in the higher degrees of "Scottish" Freemasonry.

38 Origenis *in Numeros Homilia*, V, 2 - *Patrol.* Greek by Migne XII, 604.

39 *Ibidem* - XXV, 4 - *Patrol.* gr. XII, 768.

40 To avoid misunderstandings, it should be added that when we speak of Mediterranean esoteric tradition, Western initiatory schools, etc., we do not mean to refer to any of the many pseudo-Templar, Rosicrucian, etc. organizations that claim to continue or possess this tradition. With a few exceptions, these are, in fact, completely unfounded claims. The matter is simply humorous on the part of certain "Martinist orders" which, in the West, could only have their headquarters on the island of Pantelleria. In this case, it is no longer a question of deviating from tradition, or even of going off the rails, but simply of... braying; and the head of the order, of course, is no longer Hermes Trismegistus, but Asinesio, three times asinesio, asinesio even in plagiarism.