

Selections from the Gnostic Mass:

An Analysis of

I am a man among men
by [Master of Pelican Camp]

[Originally published in *Doomsayer's Digest*, republished in [Words of Power \[2014\]](#)]

Introduction

Aleister Crowley's acclaimed ritual, Liber 15 or the Gnostic Mass, is typical of his overall body of literature. Its narrative alludes to concepts explicit and implicit throughout his own corpus and motifs and allegories from various cultures and times. Analyzing any one segment of the Gnostic Mass can be intimidating, especially if you're trying to avoid sounding like a theologian. However, aspects of the verses can be mentioned and extrapolated upon in their own light.

The subject of this exegesis is the verse “I am a man among men.” There are virtually countless manners by which any verse could be analyzed. I will not here give an exhaustive interpretation of this verse, nor do I necessarily believe myself capable. Instead, I will illustrate its use using three principle methods. First, I introduce literary examples of “I am a man among men” from African folk-lore, English literature, and American phraseology. Next, I give a “play on words” interpretation of the verse. Lastly, taking what we learned, I will survey some modern thinkers and Thelemites' interpretations of this verse and then provide one of my own.

Hermeneutic Analysis

Hermeneutics is an academic approach derived from the critical theory tradition in the social sciences. It takes a survey of literature from contexts both chronological and cultural and, using these instances, charts its development in light of some philosophical relevance.

First, an excerpt from the ritual to understand the passage in question (126, Crowley; 1990):
The PRIEST, issuing from the Tomb, holding the Lance erect with both hands, right over left, against his breast, takes the first three regular steps . He then gives the Lance to the PRIESTESS, and gives the three penal signs .

He then kneels and worships the Lance with both hands.

Penitential music.

The PRIEST: I am a man among men.

He takes again the Lance, and lowers it. He rises.

The PRIEST: How should I be worthy to administer the virtues to the Brethren?

The phrase “I am a man among men” is one of sharp honesty, touching sentimentality, and existential awareness. Perhaps this is the reason it is not unique to Crowley or even European literature. Below is cited seemingly relevant literature that employs this phrase.

The most striking literary appearance of this verse is also one of the earliest. In Milton's “Paradise Lost,” God accepts Christ's offer to incarnate and redeem Adam's transgression through sacrifice. God says (Ch. 3, L. 282-285, Milton),

*Their Nature also to thy Nature join;
And be thy self Man among men on Earth,
Made flesh, when time shall be, of Virgin seed,
By wondrous birth.*

The Messianic motif of the Gnostic Mass resonates strongly with this direct literary reference of which Crowley was undoubtedly aware. The Priest incarnates in order to administer the virtues to the Brethren. These virtues bestow upon the brethren “health and wealth and strength and joy and peace and that fulfillment of will and love under will that is perpetual happiness.” The fortification of man's body and spirit through the host and wine then initiate, propel, or accomplish his salvation or redemption.

In Rudyard Kipling's “Jungle Book,” Mowgli delivers a striking oration to Shere Khan. Akela, the

“lone wolf” who became a mentor of Mowgli, was subdued by he and Mowgli's fellow wolf council and was nearly disposed by Shere Khan. Mowgli brandished fire against Shere Khan and said to his fellow traitorous wolves, “I was all but your brother in blood, I promise that when I am a man among men I will not betray ye to men as ye have betrayed me” (39). This selection is not particularly relevant, but I believe my reader will appreciate any Shere Khan references.

American slave literature uses the “man among men” verse in many places. A potential antecedent to its use among America's slaves is a from Hausa folk-lore. The Hausa are a large tribe of Nigeria, a country near the Ivory Coast, and were therefore among those imported to the United States. “Hausa Folk-Lore” (Shaihua, 1913) tells a story about a man named A-Man-Among-Men whose wife warns him to not boast lest he one day find a man greater than he. He ignores his wife until one day his wife returns from the village well to tell of a man whose infant son was stronger than ten men and that the infant's father was “a man among men.” A-Man-Among-Men demanded to challenge this man, but fled when he found that his greater was none other than a giant! He ran and ran until he came to another giant who swore to protect him. The giant “man among men” met A-Man-Among-Men and his giant protector, and the two giants flew up into the heavens where they battle to this day. This story preaches the moral of humility. In Hausa and Ivory Coast culture, the phrase “a man among men” came to denote a person who found himself equal to his fellow man.

This sense of equality was communicated through slave literature. “The Underground Railroad” (Still, 1872) preserves a letter from a freed man to his family which reads, “I am enjoying good health, and hope when this reaches you, you may be enjoying the same blessing. Give my love to Mr. -- --, and family, and tell them I am in a land of liberty! I am a man among men!”

Johnson (1969) recounts a story of Charlie, a slave who escaped and joined with a company of Union soldiers and earned his freedom by fighting against the Confederacy. His freedom was granted him several years after the Civil War as the Union saw fit to enslave Charlie on one of their little-known post-war plantations. After he served his time with his liberators, Charlie returned to his plantation home in the south and had words with his former master, saying:

“...you whipped me. I used to serve you, work for you, almost nurse you, and if anything bad happened to you I would have fought for you, for I am a man among men. What is in me, though, is not in you. I used to drive you to church and peep through the door to see you all worship, but you ain't right yet, Marster. I love you as though you never hit me a lick, for the God I serve is a God of love, and I can't go to his kingdom with hate in my heart....I done left the past behind me.’ I had felt the power of God and tasted his love, and this had killed the spirit of hate in my heart”
(40)

Mark Twain (1892) in “The American Claimant” announces to himself that, “I have accomplished my dearest wish, I am a man among men, on an equal footing with Tom, Dick and Harry, and yet it isn't just exactly what I thought it was going to be. I miss home.” He says this in regards to his achieving a status quo previously inaccessible via conforming to the petty decadence of the aristocracy.

The above referenced literature uses the phrase “a man among men” in three distinct ways. Milton's use describes a type of superior man who comes among men so as to accomplish some greater goal. It could be rephrased “the man among men.” The story of A-Man-Among-Men and from freed slaves implies a type of achieved equality through humility. Lastly, the story of Charlie, the man who found God by suffering as Christ, and the story of Mowgli use “a man among men” to illustrate a sense of moral superiority through tolerance and hospitality. The virtue of Charlie is embodied by Crowley who once said, “intolerance is evidence of impotence.”

While the egalitarian interpretation is darling, I would personally argue that the Christ allegory is closest to its use in Mass, and that this character implies the virtue of tolerance. Before going on to an intensive qabalistic analysis, there are two important plays-on-words to be discussed. These narratives will provide mythological flesh to the qabalistic interpretation.

I am Amoun among Min

One particular method I have found very useful in understanding Crowley's rituals is unfortunately

underused. Crowley often wrote “plays on words,” phrases that communicate multiple meanings either phonetically, literally, or via some other interpretive method.

Prepare yourself to receive the wisdom of the Egyptians as I recount to you the story of our Saint Amoun and his prophetic message to Min (aka, St. Khem) and you may better understand how “I am a man among men” can be said “I am Amoun among Min.”

More than 3000 years ago there lived a Pharaoh named Ramses the Great whose countenance was known across the world. Being a great warrior, he responded without delay to a request from a neighboring Arabian king for military assistance in Syria. Before he departed, he instructed his chief Theban priest Min to watch over all of Egypt until his return. Ramses II then took all the other men of Egypt with him on his campaign. Not long after Ramses' departure, Min had a dream of Amoun, the Ram headed God of creation whose name means “it is hidden.” Amoun prophesied Ramses' army suffering severe losses and he instructed Min to impregnate every woman in Egypt with his seed which would be infused with the divine virility of Amoun, the principle and primordial God of Thebes. Min did not disobey, and shortly afterwards Ramses returned to find his trust had been betrayed. Min told Ramses of his dream, but the indignant husbands demanded retribution. Ramses then had Min's left arm and left leg removed and he was cast out of his rank as the chief priest of the Temple at Karnak. Not long after, Ramses was again called to battle against the Hittites in Syria, and a long campaign resulted in severe losses but an ultimate victory. Knowing the victory was to be short lived, Ramses returned to Thebes to replenish his army. He had been away at war for many years, and upon his return he found a nation of the healthy and powerful progeny of Min. Ramses' new army's victory against the Hittites convinced the people of Egypt that Min's prophecy had been true and Min was then deified as a great Theban fertility god, depicted as a man with one arm, one leg, and one huge cock.¹

This myth tells us much about the Priest of the Gnostic Mass. The Priest wears the military garb of the priestly-warrior, white and red, and bears the phallic lance. His robes are those of the Adeptus Major and the Emperor. His role is that of sulfur, as the Emperor, and his Ecclesiastic role is that of the masculine virile force. Amoun is the ram-headed initiator God, the Ram being the rising Zodiac two Aeons ago². The ram being sacred to the Emperor, there is a connection between these virile roles. As the Priest is the Yod or Chiah of the Mass, so too is Amoun sacred to Chiah in Liber 777. Amoun is further seen as the silent self or secret seed³ in his appropriation to the Three Veils of Nothingness and Harpocrates. T Apiryon comments upon Amoun as a Saint of EGC saying, “The Hebrew exclamation *Amen*, "verily," probably derives from the Egyptian custom of taking oaths in the name of Amoun. In Isaiah (lxv, 16) the "God of Truth" is in Hebrew *Elohi-Amen*” (Apiryon and Helena, 2004). This introduces a new interesting play-on-words: I am a man = I am Amoun = Ehieh Amen = I am the truth.

Min has his place in *Liber 777* and the EGC, but under the name Khem. This is due to early mis-translations of the God's name by hasty scholars such as Sir Wallace Budge. Khem and Min should be considered consonant. The principle difference is their Qabalistic enumerations: Min=90 (Tzaddi, the Emperor) and Khem=70 (Ayin, the Devil).⁴ For his sexual role and appearance, Khem is appropriated to Atu XV, The Devil. Interestingly, the Priest wears the robes of the Adeptus Major whose grade sign (Puer) is the hieroglyphic depiction of Min/Khem. Min's crown is the same as



1 There are problems with this story that warrant mentioning. 1- Depictions of Min predate the Theban dynasty, 2- Ramses II's campaign against the Hittites is commonly believed to be of territorial motivation, and 3- I could find no records of this myth in the annals of Egyptian mythology or history in my possession. I was told this story by an educated Egyptologist and native of Egypt while visiting the Temple of Karnak at Thebes. However, the military records of Ramses II follow this story closely. Ramses engaged in three Syrian campaigns. The first met a sweeping victory, the second suffered severe losses, and the third suppressed Hittite aggression for a long time.

2 During the Theban dynasty.

3 Depictions survive of a Ram-headed snake, the Spermatozoa of Amoun.

4 The combined presence of Amoun, the Emperor, with Khem, the Devil, gives the spelling of Otz meaning “a tree,” which equates to Qin, or Cain, who irrigated the earth with the blood of his brother. Conversely, Min=90=Tzaddi, the letter of The Emperor (The Ram, as Amoun), equivocating these Gods through this creative and fiery force.

Amoun's, his Phallus is depicted as erect, as often is Amoun's, but his role is as the Lingam while Amoun's is the seed. "I am Amoun among Min" then means, through this analysis, "I am the Chiah about the Linga," "I am the seed within the Linga/Penis," or "I am the libido within the Phallus." The question which the Priest then asks is particularly revealing, "How should I be worthy to administer the Virtues to the Brethren?"⁵

However interpreted, the myth of St. Khem breeding an army through the Virility of St. Amoun provides a powerful magical formula in the Gnostic Mass. The breeding of Theban warriors recalls Crowley's interpretation of Jason's plight in his *Khabs am Pekht*. Jason sowed the teeth within the soil and up sprung Theban warriors who fought randomly and did not distinguish between friend or foe. Crowley posited this was due to Jason having blasphemed Aries, who is Horus in his Warrior-mood. After the Priest is robed (with a Ram's Golden Fleece) he is instructed in how to administer the virtues to the brethren. Perhaps this is that they will not fall upon one another and slay, they are bound to a common formula being "the blood of the grapes,"⁶ which hearkens to the formula of Agape as the wine-press described in "Magick in Theory and Practice". Virtue is the infusion of blood and spirit through the libations of the Holy Graal and reminds men of the Fact of Universal Brotherhood.⁷

I am امام

The second play on words is equally interesting yet, unfortunately for the reader, less qabalistically intensive. Taking the last four words of "I am a man among men" as an acronym, we get I am Amam. Amam, spelt امام, is transliterated as Imam.⁸ Amam comes from the root AM, meaning "to go," which is the 5th power of the Sphinx relegated to Spirit and is the function of a God.⁹

A Sunni Imam is the head of a mosque and a director of the prayers of the faithful. It is the Imam who calls for prayer from the Minaret and is the god-appointed pillar of a religious community. This role compliments the Sheikh who gives sermons.

The Imam as a traditional Shia concept is the rightful ancestor of Mohammad and leader of the Ummah (Muslim people). This role is integral to Shia identity as the Imam are those who carried the teachings and philosophy of Islam into history. Shia Muslims consider the Imams to have been of divine appointment and infallible. Modern Shia await the return of the twelfth Imam who will come



5 Virtue is another title of the Three of Wands, being the Sun in Aries. Three crosses does the Priestess make in awakening the Priest, three to purify the Priest, and three to invigorate the Priest. Then, the Priestess dons the Priest with the "flame of the Sun," bringing the Sun into Aries. Note also, VIRTUE=QVMTz (a handful). Virtue derives from Vir, "a man" or the Viri warrior-priest caste of Vedic civilization. VIR=216=6x6x6=GBVRH (title of the Sephirah of the Adeptus Major). 216 is also "The Blood of Grapes," or wine. The Priest then asks how he may administer the wine.

6 See footnote 5

7 Universal Brotherhood and Virtues to the Brethren share a Qabalistic acronym, VB.

8 The observant reader would be curious as to why "Imam" is considered an acronym for "a man among men." (1)The Farsi pronunciation is "Amam." (2)The Farsi and Arabic spelling of the word is A(lif)-M(eem)-A(lif)-M(eem), but in the Arabic an "i" accent mark over the first Alif gives it an "I" sound, but the original spelling is unchanged. While the sound changes for the language, the spelling does not.

9 Also, AM=41=AIL (A.C.'s comment, "Ram; force; hence = a hero")

shortly before the Apocalypse and will invite war upon the earth. This “twelfth Imam” is also called the “hidden Imam” and their return will give them the Quranic title “Mahdi.” The coming of the Mahdi is a much anticipated event throughout the Shia world and will once again link mankind with the divine. The Shia Ummah are, until his coming, cast into the outer darkness in a blind, impotent, and unjust world. (Aslan, 2006)

One other notable take on the Imam comes from a Shia lineage popularly known as the Hashishin or the Assassins. Their lineage of Imams continues to this day, though their modern agenda and method has changed. The Imams of the Hashishin were more than the heirs of the Ummah, they also extended the doctrines and practices of Islam towards the abolishment of faith and theology (Wasserman, 2001). The too-often quoted “Nothing is real, everything is permitted” applied to the Imam who had transcended the popular reliance upon religion. Their Imam held authority above and authority below and disseminated this wisdom through their hierarchical system of initiation. By exercising discipline through limitation you would learn to overcome the need for both (Evola, 1995).

Taking the Priest as saying “I am Imam,” much can be learned from these three schools of interpretation. In the Sunni sense, the Priest does direct the prayers of the laity, the Ummah. In the traditional Shia sense, the Priest emerging from the Tomb could be seen as the return of the hidden Imam from the “greater occultation” to bring mankind to the next step in the course of history. Lastly, the Hashishin lineage is particularly interesting concerning their rapidly speciating religious philosophy towards individual freedom, irreligious mysticism, and their organization being built upon an initiatory hierarchy that taught yoga, philosophy, and hermetica.

An Aeonic anecdote is here necessary to explain why the Imam would be important to Thelema. Thelema claims a descent from religious founders of the past including Lao-Tze, Siddhartha, Moses, Dionysus, and Mohammad. Aleister Crowley would then succeed Mohammad as prophet. Crowley saw the Apocalypse myth as a grossly misinterpreted foreshadowing of Thelema; therefore, the initiator of the Apocalypse would be the initiator of the Aeon of Horus, that person being the Mahdi or Aleister Crowley respectively. Therefore, that the Priest declares himself the Imam¹⁰ the Priest also repeats the creative act that ushered in Thelema and the New Aeon. This gives the Amam a messianic role and recalls Milton's above analysis of “I am a man among men.” This follows well, as Mahdi is often translated as “Messiah.” The returned Mahdi would certainly be the man among men. Lastly, an important similarity between the Amoun myth and Amam allegory is the raising of an army. This sex-magical process of spiritual subterfuge is thoroughly elucidated in Crowley's *Khabs am Pekht*.

Yama 9²

I was reluctant to include this analysis since it does not share the fascinating military motif with the other analyses here outlined; however, its relevance was too obvious to ignore. It requires a lucid analysis, somewhat play-on-words, somewhat qabalistic.

The first three words, “I am a,” give IAMA, or YAMA. Yama is the Vedic God of the underworld in Hindoo mythology. He presides over judgment and the administration of souls. He is considered to be less than Shiva who, as Lord of the Dead, is closer to the role of Osiris, likening Yama unto Thoth or Ma'at.

More importantly, Yama is often translated as “control,” such as in the limb of yoga “Yama” where the yogi adopts some set ethical code of conduct. Yama is often falsely assumed to be a root word of Pranayama, leaving Pranayama to be translated as “breath control.” The actual root of Pranayama is “Ayama,” which means extension, expansion, or growing. Pranayama is correctly translated as “breath extension.”

In Sanscrit, “a” preceding a word has much the same meaning as in English. To be sexual is to possess an interest in sex and sexuality. To be asexual is to be without any interest in sex. Similarly, as Ayama means “extension,” so can Yama be translated as: contraction, withdrawn, shrunk, withheld, retracted, controlled, etc.. While the Sanscrit spelling of Yama (the God) and Yama (the term) are different,

¹⁰ The Priest also has an ecclesiastic lineage back to Aleister Crowley, as an Imam would, and potentially a royal blood lineage as well, as a Shia Imam would.

their pronunciation is similar enough to assume an etymologically meaningful root.

The idea of death as a contracting, withdrawing, or controlling is common between religions. The soul is contracted into some spirit-essence, like zipping a file, in many faiths. It is withdrawn from the temporal world towards its origin, the higher. Also, it is controlled by whatever judicial forces preside over the dead.

The judicial Yamic forces are typically confined to the afterlife or underworld; however, a common Apocalyptic motif in religions is the judging of the living and the dead, when the gates between the worlds are flung open. If the Priest is here assuming the authority of Yama, and he's just left the Tomb, then the Priest is assuming the role of the judge of the living and the dead, something of a horseman or Usher of the Apocalypse.

Another interpretation only makes sense in light of surrounding phrases. Immediately following "I am a man among men" is the verse "He takes again the Lance, and lowers it." If Ayama is extension, Yama is contraction. The sexual metaphor holds water in Ayama and Yama as gaining and losing an erection respectively. In reference to Crowley's *Eroto Comatose Lucidity* and his sit-stand-sit-stand patterns in the Gnostic Mass, it can be assumed that the losing of an erection is sometimes as necessary as gaining an erection in sex magick. The Priest, in lowering his lance, can be seen as letting his Lingam (or dick) become flacid, his libido become passive, or his phallus turn inward. Therefore, the Priest emerging from the Tomb with Lance erect is the initial excitement which is sacrificed, for the moment, that he might go through the necessary purifications from the Priestess. So too is the adolescent male initiated into the ways of sexuality by the Temple Prostitute, his juvenile boner being elevated to a higher sexual impulse and ability.

The sexuality of this verse does not end with loose interpretations of Yama and the Lance. The remainder of the verse is "man among men." The acronym, "MAM", yields a value of 81. 81 is 9^2 , 9 being the number of Yesod, the Sephirah physiologically related to the Phallus and generative organs.¹¹ 81 itself yields a Hebrew God-name whose formula is critical in the Gnostic Mass, ALIM, "Gods." While ALHIM is a formula of creative sexual magick (given the introduction of H, the breath, into this formula), ALIM lacks the creative influence from on high. In Nietzsche's terms, it is Apollonian rather than Dionysian. In academic terms, it is a reinterpretation rather than novel input. Sophistry to philosophy, Lunar to Solar, rearranging rather than animating. ALIM can be taken as a black magical formula; however, in the Gnostic Mass this is not entirely negative. The Gnostic Mass follows the formula of ALIM closely in various ways that I have yet to come to fully understand, but appeal to *Magick in Theory and Practice* is a good start for the curious pupil.

Various interpretations open themselves from this sections' analyses. The Priest is announcing his contraction of his Lingam or making passive his Libido. Also, the Priest announces himself as the Judge of the living and the dead. Given 81's interpretation of "Gods," the Priest could be saying he's come to judge the Gods, quite a statement of decide. If the "Gods" are the "men", the congregates, this verse could be the Priest declaring he's come to bind them together for the accomplishment of a single feat.

Qabalistic Analyses

Previous published research into this verse has been entirely qabalistic. Qabalistic analyses tend to center on inter-religious motifs, gematria, and numerology, and the meaning we can infer from certain subtle patterns. Aleister Crowley left a rich qabalistic vocabulary that we can use to draw connections between his corpus of literature along with those of his antecedents.

Several others have provided qabalistic discourse on this verse; however, none I found were

¹¹ This introduces an important question unsuited for this volume. What happens to a number when squared? Statisticians have asked this question and have evoked much speculation. The question is intrinsically connected to meaning and the transformation of meaning by some alien method such as mathematics. If 9 is Yesod, is 9×9 YESOD!!! Simple anecdotes often have to suffice; for instance, $4 \times 5 = 20$, 20 expressing the final expression of 4 and 5's relation (the other expressions being multiples of 4 leading to 20 and multiples of 5 leading to 20. Crowley asserts in 777 that the multiples of a number express its sephirotic contexts and this was a key to discovering qualities of primes. Therefore, $9^2 = 9 \times 9 =$ Yesod of Yesod.

particularly revealing or well argued. All other analyses focused on whether “I am a man among men” implied whether the Priest was more humble or exceptional in the presence of his fellow men. One exceptional qabalistic analysis is here referenced.

Frater Dathan Biberstein wrote a brief qabalistic analysis of “I am a man among men” in his yet unpublished “From Gold Forge Steel,” an analysis of the Gnostic Mass from a Qabalistic and Thelemic perspective. His analysis draws principally on gematria, the use of letter-number equivalents to draw connections between important religious concepts. A brief introduction to gematria is inappropriate to this volume; however, a review of *Liber 777* will be suitable for the intelligent student.

The chart below summarizes Fr. Biberstein's notes from his presentation at NOTOCON VI in Salem, MA, 2006:

<u>subject</u>	<u>analysis</u>	<u>source</u>
man	the number of the beast... is the number of a man... [666].”	<i>Apocalypse of John</i> 13:18
I am a man among men.	The initials of this sentence add to 93.	“Thanks to Anubis75 for pointing this out to me.”
AHIH ADM (eng. I am a man) = 66	66 is the number of the Great Work	[777 & <i>Sepher Sephiroth</i>]
AHIH (eng. I am)	God-name of West in LBRP	[<i>Liber O</i>]
93 (acronymic value of verse)	“Aiwass is the <i>logos</i> of the <i>Æon</i> , his number being 93, like that of Thelema the word of the Law.”	Crowley, <i>The Equinox</i> vol. 4, number 1, 167.
666 (Apocryphal value of “man”)	“666 is... employed as an instrument by which the Law might be proclaimed.”	Crowley, <i>The Equinox</i> vol. 4, number 1, 167.
“men”	1 st degrees [of OTO]	[<i>Equinox</i> 3:10]

The entire verse yields the number 93, a critical number in Crowley's system as it yields both Will and Love in the Greek. The verse thus carries the sanctity of Thelema and the formula of the Great Work. This number also yields “Aiwass”, who Crowley references as the Logos of the Aeon. Aiwass was the narrating agent that gave Crowley *The Book of the Law*, the deliverance of a new Law to bring mankind to the next step in its spiritual endeavors.

The “man among men” in question is illustrated by John's 666 value being the Number of Man. Otherwise, 666 is the Beast, which Crowley explains as both himself and also an officer in the New Aeon who is “employed as an instrument by which the Law might be proclaimed.” The Priest announces himself as the Beast who will further “establish the dominion of the Law of Thelema.”

The Priest stands in the west when he speaks this verse, the first two words giving the Hebrew god-name for the west during the Pentagram Ritual. “I am a man” in the Hebrew yields the number 66, the “number of the great work,” but is also Chapter 66 of *The Book of Lies* titled “Praying Mantis,” meaning the “praying prophet.”

Lastly, Fr. Biberstein defines the “men” as the congregates who had just made the old step and sign of the I°'s of OTO. The “men and brothers” of OTO are newly-born in their initiatory journeys and are sucklings of our mysteries.

Fr. Biberstein here illustrates many fundamental associations. “I am a man among men” could be interpreted, “I am the Beast who announces the Law of Thelema,” or “The Great Work is the announcement of Thelema by the coming of the Beast,” or perhaps

“This is the Great Work: that the Beast, who is a Man possessed of the spirit of Aiwass, comes forth to deliver the Law of Thelema to men.”

The qabalistic analyses provide many interesting values of the verse; however, the allusions require a leap of qabalistic faith. Fr. Biberstein ties these analyses together by referencing *Liber 418*, the 25th Aethyr, the vision of the Beast,

On my head is the crown, 419 rays far-darting¹². And my body is the body of the Snake¹³, and my soul is the soul of the Crowned Child. Though an Angel in white robes¹⁴ leadeth me, who

12 419=teth spelt in full, teth being the letter appropriated to the Lust card which depicts Babalon riding the Beast.

13 Teth means “serpent.” The Lust card is sacred to Leo (the Beast). The Lion-Serpent is Abraxas.

14 The Priest emerges from the Tomb wearing nothing but a robe of white, the “inner robe of glory,” sacred to Chokmah.

shall ride upon me but the Woman of Abominations? ... Upon his mouth is set the great and terrible seal¹⁵. And he hath the secret of V. his ten horns spring from five points, and his eight heads are as the charioteer of the West¹⁶. Thus doth the fire of the sun temper the spear of Mars¹⁷, and thus shall he be worshiped as the warrior lord of the sun. Yet in him is the woman that devoureth with her water all the fire of God. (63, Crowley, 1998)

This vision recalls vividly Crowley's association of the Priest and Priestess to the Beast and Babalon. The Priest first emerges wearing the robe of Chokmah and the Lance as the Lingam. He dons his robe, "the flame of the sun," and his crown and assumes the role of Tiphareth and Kether. The path connecting Chokmah and Tiphareth was appropriate to the Emperor (Aries). It is fair to say, from Fr. Crowley and Fr. Biberstein's analyses, that the Priest is the spirit of Aiwass who incarnates as the Beast to propel the Great Work through the propagation of Thelema via the Gnostic Mass.

Conclusions

"I am a man among men" is hardly a cliché in its intensive philosophical implications and magical applications. In the Mass, it identifies a leader, an individual among the populous, who acts and wills with higher authority. This manifests itself in many roles throughout history and cultures, but the Priest's role is closer to that of the Emperor, the Logos (or Christ), the Tzaddik, the Mahdi, the Beast, the Viri/Sindar/Arya, the Thelemite, the *Liber Al's* Hermit, and the traditionalist Priest/King/Warrior.

Several principle interpretations outlined above (Amoun & Min, the Imam & the Mahdi, and Logos & Beast) share common motifs.

- A foreshadowing of a perilous war, if not the actual Apocalypse.
- The initiation of a savior (Min, Mahdi, and the Beast) and the subsequent salvation of the people.
- A hidden thing (Amoun, Imam, and Logos as the secret seed) and a manifest thing (Min, Mahdi, and Beast)
- The announcement of a Law (Amoun's decree, the (Hashishin) Imam's declaration of a new Law, or the Beast's announcement of Thelema)

This hidden-manifest dialectic is found on the Tree of Life as Chokmah-Tipherat. The Priest emerges from the tomb wearing the white robe of Chiah, sacred to Amoun and the Logos, and bearing the Lance as the Linga that establishes the dominion of that word within the Laity, the Eucharist, the Temple, and the World. In order for that lance to work; however, the Priest must be made worthy. He submits himself to elemental initiation as done by the Priestess. He is vested with the flames of the sun and the serpent crown, thus making him both Priest and King and bestowing the aggressive masculine qualities of The Emperor (Mars, Aries, Sulfur, etc) by which he might raise (or erect) his lance.¹⁸

As a method of reincarnation, the deceased Priest's Chiah¹⁹ regains its Ruach²⁰ by appeal to the Neschamah²¹. It must then administer virtues to the brethren, and this is done in a sex-magical method through the formula of the Beast whose spermatozoa contains the force²² of the fire²³ of Horus. This magical method is embodied by the teeth of Jason which bred both Jason and Ramses an army of Theban warriors. The King returns (from the dead), announces his will, reclaims his office, and proceeds to rebuild his kingdom by making warriors out of men. When his army²⁴ is raised, he will judge the living and the dead.

15 Possibly the Mark of the Beast.

16 The Tomb, is situated in the West, where the Priest remains upon emerging.

17 The Priest emerges from the Tomb bearing nothing but a lance, which is a type of spear.

18 Recall that 93 (Aiwass, Thelema, I.A.A.M.A.M.) is the flaming sword or Pentagram unwound and that ABRAHADABRA is the Key of the Pentagram, a key of the Law, and the Word of the Aeon. Abrahadabra's 11 letters then correspond to the 11 strokes the Priestess gives the Lance which rejoins the Pentagram and Hexagram.

19 True Will, spirit, or self.

20 Will, soul, or Apollonian solar self.

21 Binah, Babalon, the Mother of Abominations, the ancestral memory, the Graal containing the Royal Blood

22 AIL means both Ram and Force in the Hebrew.

23 This sulfuric fire is closely aligned with the creative Yod, Xar, and Tzaddi discussed elsewhere in this volume.

24 The Anti-Christ, horsemen, trumpeters, etc..

References

- Apiryon, T. Helena. 2004. *The Gnostic Mass: annotations and commentary*. Retrieved from website: <http://hermetic.com/sabazius/gmnotes.htm> on Nov. 5, 2008.
- Aslan, R. 2006. *No God But God: The origins, evolution, and future of Islam*. Random House Trade Paperbacks.
- Crowley, A. 1974. *The Book of Thoth*. York Beach, Maine: Weiser Books
- Crowley, A. 1990. *The Equinox Volume 3 Number 10*. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser Inc.
- Crowley, A. 1998. *The Vision and the Voice*. York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc.
- Evola, J. 1995. *Revolt Against the Modern World*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International.
- Johnson, C. H. ed. *Religious Conversion Experiences and Autobiographies of Ex-Slaves*. United Church Press: 1969.
- Kipling, R. 1893. *The Jungle Book*. New York: The Century Co.
- Milton, J. 1667. *Paradise Lost*. Bla bla bla
- Shaihua M. 1913. *Hausa Folk-Lore*. Trans. By Rattray, R. S.: Clarendon Press
- Still, W. 1872. *The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &c., Narrating the Hardships, Hair-Breadth Escapes, and Death-Struggles of the Slaves in their Efforts for Freedom*. Philadelphia, PA: Porter & Coates.
- Twain, M. 1892. *The American Claimant*. New York: CL. Webster & Co.
- Wasserman, J. 2001. *The Templars and Assassins: Militia of Heaven*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International



Special thanks to Br. Biberstein for providing me with his unpublished manuscript, "From Gold Forge Steel."

Also, a special thanks to those Brothers who inspired this piece by arguing to me at NOTOCON VI that "there's no reason to overly analyze 'I am a man among men,' it's as simple as it sounds."