The Logos in the Liberal Arts

*Nicola Graves-Gregory, October 2021*

The Logos overlights and lives within, the Liberal Arts. The Logos as the Word, inhabits the Trivium of the verbal arts, Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric. But ‘logos’ also means ‘mathematical ratio’ in ancient Greek. This is the relationship between two numbers.

In ancient Greece, ‘numbers’ means ‘whole numbers’; the mathematical term is ‘integers’. They are intact; they evoke integrity. The Quadrivium of the mathematical arts, Number, Geometry, Music and Astronomy, manifest aspects of the Logos as relationships between wholenesses.

It is time now for a revival of the Liberal Arts. Education ministers reiterate the doctrine of the importance of numeracy and literacy. Indeed, number and word are the basic elements of human communication. But communication relates only to the mechanics of existence. We communicate information. We live in a society which has elevated information to be the new Mammon, a society intent on continual expansion of information and acceleration of communication.

But, as T.S.Eliot said, “What knowledge have we lost through gaining information? What wisdom have we lost through gaining knowledge?” It is time for a revival of the wisdom of the Liberal Arts, an education whose purpose is not only to help us to communicate more clearly but also to orient us to our higher purpose, communion with the Divine.

This 21st century renaissance of the Liberal Arts, needs to take into account the vast change in cultural consciousness now from that of Chartres in the 12th and 13th centuries. At that time, the high point of the Liberal Arts, when people still felt closely connected to spiritual forces, the symbol for zero, which would undermine that connection, was gradually entering into European culture with the Hindu-Arabic numerals. These were introduced through trade with the middle East, which grew, ironically, during the Crusades.

The profound philosophical implications of the expansion of the concept of number and the corresponding loss in importance of the integrity of whole numbers, was scarcely acknowledged. This was understandable as the new numbers made possible the conflation of number and line which gave rise to tremendous new mathematical possibilities, including Cartesian geometry and from that, the differential calculus.

Rudolf Steiner points to this time as the beginning of the age of the consciousness soul and tells us that humankind needed separation in order to develop. Since then we have seen an exponential growth of technology, hand in hand with developments in capitalist economics. The success of materialist science, together with false ideas spread for business interests, has led to our present situation where the general cultural consciousness is clouded by hubristic materialism.

21st century Liberal Arts are sorely needed. It was for this reason that Sylvia Francke and I came together to create Mathematics & Mythos c.i.c. and this year celebrated our third Sacred Mathematics and the Liberal Arts Festival (‘The Rainbow Tree’) together with Peredur Eurythmy Training (directors, Sigune and Gregers Brinch) in East Grinstead. The Rainbow Tree is the human being. We are upright transceivers, like trees. The 7 rainbow colours shine out between light and dark. It is our human calling now to connect to the Logos and shine between opposing forces.