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# THEOSOPHICAL HISTORY

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followers. In addition, the journal is also receptive to related movements (including pre-Blavatskyite Theosophy, Spiritualism, Rosicrucianism, and the philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg to give but a few examples) that have had an influence on or displayed an affinity to modern Theosophy.

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Brief communications, review articles, and book reviews are welcome. They should be submitted double-spaced.

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# Editor's Comments

## John Cooper

It was with profound sadness that I learned of the death of one of our associate editors, John Cooper. Those within the field of Theosophical history viewed John to be one of its most erudite investigators. Certainly, within the field of Australian Theosophy he was unrivaled. His Master of Arts thesis, *The Theosophical Crisis in Australia: The Story of the Breakup of the Theosophical Society in Sydney from 1913 until 1923*—submitted to the University of Sydney in 1986—is a wonderfully detailed work of some 428 pages resembling more a Ph.D. dissertation rather than an MA thesis. It is a great pity that it still remains unpublished despite the fact of the wealth of material found therein. Nonetheless, together with John's doctoral dissertation—the long-awaited editing of the letters of H.P.B.—there is no doubt that his name and reputation will be firmly established as a groundbreaking scholar of Theosophical history.

Indeed, in a letter dated just two days before his untimely death, John remarked that his doctoral dissertation was already submitted. We now await the verdict of the University of Sydney Ph.D. Committee and the results of his research.

On a more personal note, I met John only once when he visited California in 1990. It proved to be a most fortuitous visit because it

was he who encouraged me to assume the editorship of *Theosophical History* that founder-editor Leslie Price had recently relinquished in 1989. Because of John's support, the journal was resurrected from its brief dormancy by the latter part of 1990. Since then, John had always been unselfish with his time, advice, knowledge, contributions to *Theosophical History*.

As a tribute to John Cooper, a memorial volume is planned for the October 1998 (VII/4) issue. Anyone who wishes to contribute a statement about John should fax, e-mail, or post it by September 5.

\* \* \*

## In This Issue

The main focus of this issue is Michael Gomes' essay on a minor luminary in the Theosophical Society (Adyar), Ferdinand T. Brooks (1873–1916). The essay title, "Nehru's Theosophical Tutor," refers to the young Theosophist who was to serve as a significant educational influence upon the life of the future Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964). This influence lasted from 1901 to 1904, a time when Col. Olcott was still President of the Theosophical Society and when Pandit Nehru was just entering adolescence. Many years later, Nehru acknowledged in his autobiography that "F.T. Brooks left a deep

impress upon me and I feel that I owe a debt to him and to Theosophy.” Yet for all the promise Brooks exhibited as a representative of the Theosophical Society, his association with it began to unravel around 1912, at which time he resigned from the Esoteric Section because of his opposition to the new pledge introduced by Mrs. Besant, the Outer Head of the Section. This pledge required members of the E.S. “to obey, without cavil or delay, the orders of the Head of the Esoteric Section in all that concerns my relation with the theosophical Movement. . . .” Because of subsequent difficulties with fellow Theosophists, Brooks began a new career as antagonist of Mrs. Besant and her policies. He became what some modern scholars of new religious movements term an “apostate”—one who reverses loyalties, thereby becoming a professional enemy of the organization in which he or she once belonged. Pamphlets and two exposés soon followed suit, *The Theosophical Society and Its Esoteric Bogeydom* and *Neo-Theosophy Exposed*. What drove him from the Society was, he claimed, the ascendancy of both J. Krishnamurti and the Liberal Catholic Church, and the controversy over C.W. Leadbeater’s “sexual vices.” Because of Mr. Brooks’ antagonism to the Theosophical leadership, the promise that he exhibited in his earlier years quickly dissipated. What he might have become in ensuing years we shall never know, for he died a few short years after (August 1916). How he died Mr. Gomes does not say. In my reading of some contemporary correspondence, it was hinted that he might have committed suicide, an assertion that I have not been able to verify, however.

The author, Michael Gomes, is a frequent contributor to *Theosophical History*. Mr. Gomes

has edited over the course of several issues the letters of H.P. Blavatsky to W.Q. Judge (TH V/2 - VI/4). He is also the editor of *Theosophical History Occasional Paper*, Volume I: *Witness for the Prosecution: Annie Besant’s Testimony on Behalf of H.P. Blavatsky in the N.Y. Sun/Coues Law Case and W.T. Brown’s “Scenes in My Life”* (vol. IV). As a prolific writer on Theosophical subjects, his two most recent publications are his abridgment of H.P. Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1997) and *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century: An Annotated Bibliography* (NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994).

Two reviews are also included in this issue: *The Only Tradition* by William W. Quinn, Jr. and “*No Religion Higher Than Truth*”: *A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922* by Maria Carlson. The reviewers respectively are John T. Hatfield and Boris Falikov. John Hatfield has taught at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona from 1970 to 1995 and is currently Professor Emeritus. He received his Ph.D. from the Claremont Graduate School in 1965. His dissertation title, *The Structure and Meaning of Religious Objects: A Study in the Methodology of the History of Religions based upon the Thought of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*, is especially significant since it is referred to on more than one occasion by Mr. Quinn in his work. Dr. Hatfield also is co-author of *America’s Religions* (1997), reviewed in the last issue (p. 89).

Dr. Boris Falikov is an associate professor at the Russian State University of the Humanities (Moscow), where he teaches a course on the History of Religions. He received his Ph.D. in 1986

at The Institute of American and Canadian Studies,  
the Russian Academy of Science (Moscow).

\* \* \*

## **CESNUR**

The 12th International Conference of CESNUR (il Centro Studi sulle Nuove Religioni) will be held in Torino from September 9 to 12. Entitled "Religious and Spiritual Minorities: Towards the 21st Century," the conference will include presentations by:

Antoine Faivre, "Western Esoteric Currents at this Turn of the Century: Continuity and New Perspectives"

Massimo Introvigne, "Who is Afraid of Religious Minorities?"

Gordon Melton, "The Future of Religious Pluralism"

Ulf Sjödin, "Contemporary Beliefs in the Paranormal in France, Latvia and Sweden"

Sy Ginsburg, "Gurdjieff, Blavatsky, and the Masters of Wisdom"

Bruce Casino, "Defining Religion in American Law"

Dimitri Peretzi, "Unsolicited Borrowing of Gurdjieff's ideas by Some Spiritual Groups"

Orestis Terzidis, "L'ésotérisme aux temps modernes: mythe, religion ou science?"

Sébastien Grégov, "De l'éveil à l'illumination: un processus. Lecture croisée de Jacob Bohème et Jan van Rijckenborgh"

Enzo Pace, "New Age: Between Crisis and Renewal"

Jean-Pierre Laurant, "L'exégèse de l'oeuvre de Guénon au seuil de l'an 2000"

Céres de Carvalho Medina, "The Kardecist Spiritual Minority in Brazil"

PierLuigi Zoccatelli, "Gli Arcana Arcanorum e la magia trasmutatoria: un'indagine"

A field trip to Damanhur, one of the largest Aquarian/esoteric communities in the world is also planned.

Registration (\$60 or Lire 100,000; \$30 or Lire 50,000 for full-time students under 25) may be facilitated by mail before August 31, 1998. Send registration form and payment to CESNUR, Via Juvarrà 20, 10122 Torino, Italy or fax to (39) (11) 539563 or 541905.

The complete program and registration information is also on the Internet at <http://www.cesnur.org/Torino98.htm>.

\* \* \* \* \*

# Associate Editor's Comment

Gregory Tillett

John Cooper died suddenly in Sydney on the evening of May 12 at the age of 67. He had driven to Sydney from his home at Bega in south-east New South Wales the previous afternoon, and had visited me that evening. On May 12, John went to the University of Sydney, where he was due to give the first in a series of lectures on Gnosticism; he was taken suddenly ill just before the lecture, and died very quickly. John's body was cremated after a private, family service; a memorial service was held at the Theosophical Society headquarters in Sydney on Sunday, May 17, at which I spoke of John's outstanding work in Theosophical history research, and conveyed messages of condolence to his family from the Editorial Board of "Theosophical History" and all of John's friends and colleagues in the field of Theosophical history research. John was an outstanding and influential figure in this field, less for the quantity of his published works than for the enthusiasm he inspired in others, the breadth of his knowledge and research, and the generosity with which he shared the fruits of his scholarship. John had completed his MA in Religious Studies at the University of Sydney with a dissertation on the history of the Theosophical Society in Australia in the 1920's, and had submitted his PhD thesis on the correspondence of Madame Blavatsky only a few months before his death. John was a man of extraordinary personal qualities: gen-

erosity, great inner peace, sparkling good humour, infectious enthusiasm and the ability to offer undemanding and unconditional friendship. As a close friend for some twenty years, I shall mourn the loss not only of a greatly valued friend, but of an inspiring colleague in scholarship. His death is a great loss for the field of Theosophical history.

\* \* \* \* \*

# Communication

*From Ted G. Davy (Calgary, Alberta)*

William Ashcraft's study, "The Child, Theosophy and Victorian American Culture at Point Loma" (*TH* VII/2) falls short of giving a balanced perspective of the Point Loma experiment in child education at the turn of the century.

The value and effectiveness of any system of education is its human product. In Point Loma "graduates" can be seen proof of the efficacy of the training they received as children. A high level of intelligence seems to be the rule rather than the exception. After leaving Point Loma, various of them demonstrated exceptional organizational, literary or—equally useful—trade skills; and many made their mark in various professions, in business and the arts. The more important humanity factor cannot be measured objectively, but if the dozen or more I have known are representative of their peers, well, the Point Loma school gets the highest rating by my standard. "Moral fortitude" seems to have been a quality they developed from a very early age.

Ashcraft claims, without revealing his source, that "relatively few children from Point Loma remained active in Theosophical organizations" (79). Over the last forty or fifty years there must have been a score who did, some of whom were

very active. Their contribution to the movement is impressive to say the least.

To change the subject, the ludicrous statement that "Tingley made the Theosophical Society more attractive to women, and encouraged the skills and leadership abilities of women more than Judge" (65) cannot be allowed to pass without comment. Such stellar Judge supporters as Julia Keightley, Katharine Hillard and Genevieve Griscom come immediately to mind. Incidentally, none of these remained long with Mrs. Tingley. On the other hand, who were the women leaders Tingley herself recruited in those early years?

\* \* \* \* \*

# Nehru's Theosophical Tutor

Michael Gomes

Some years ago when I was in Madras doing research I was invited to lunch with Muriel Daw, former editor of London's *Middle Way*, who was in town lecturing on Buddhism. The food was appetizing and the conversation entertaining. After our meal I wandered over to the bookshop in the hotel's lobby. Usually such shops are not of interest, catering as they do to those who stay at five star hotels. A brief glance at the selection of novels, western magazines and cassettes, revealed there was nothing for me, but as I reached the door my eye was caught by a children's comic book with the sober title *Jawaharlal Nehru—The Early Years*.<sup>1</sup> Looking through it I found to my delight that four pages of illustrations dealt with Ferdinand Brooks, who had been Jawahar's tutor, and the young Nehru's joining the Theosophical Society. Of course I bought it, and my host and I laughed heartily over my new find.

Portrayed in its 29 pages were the antecedents of the Nehrus and the life of Jawaharlal from his birth in 1889 to his growing involvement with Indian politics in 1920. On page eleven we see Motilal Nehru telling his eleven-year old son about Brooks coming to be his instructor. The next panel shows a blond wavy-haired Brooks introducing his student to the curriculum to be followed, with the caption: "Mr. Brooks, who was to be Jawahar's

resident tutor for the next three years, was a major influence on the boy." Page thirteen reveals that "Brooks was a Theosophist who had been introduced to the Nehrus by Annie Besant," and shows Jawaharlal attending a meeting of the Theosophists and deciding to join the Theosophical Society. The next page depicts his initiation into the Society by Annie Besant at the age of thirteen. Brooks leaves the story with a note that "Jawahar's interest in Theosophy ended abruptly when Brooks met with a tragic accident."

The story line follows fairly closely what had already been provided by Jawaharlal Nehru in his 1936 autobiography. In chapter three, headed Theosophy, he talks about Brooks' influence on his early education, noting that

He used to have weekly meetings of theosophists in his rooms and I attended them and gradually imbibed theosophical phraseology and ideas. There were metaphysical arguments, and discussions about reincarnation and the astral and other super-natural bodies, and auras, and the doctrine of *Karma*, and references not only to big books by Madame Blavatsky and other Theosophists but to the Hindu scriptures, the Buddhist "*Dhammapada*," Pythagoras, Apollonius of Tyana, and various philosophers and mystics. I did not understand much that was said but it all sounded very mysterious and fascinating and

I felt that here was the key to the secrets of the universe.<sup>2</sup>

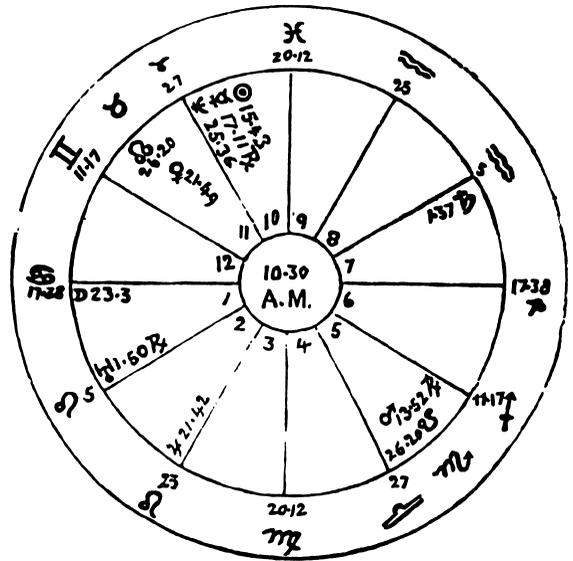
Hearing Annie Besant lecture in Allahabad on Theosophy finally led him to join the Society in August 1903,<sup>3</sup> and he attended the December annual convention at Benares where he remembers seeing the venerable figure of Col. Olcott, the President-Founder. Looking back on that period, he says

I have a fairly strong impression that during these theosophical days of mine I developed the flat and insipid look which sometimes denotes piety and which is (or was) often to be seen among theosophist men and women. I was smug, with a feeling of being one-of-the-elect, and altogether I must have been a thoroughly undesirable and unpleasant companion for any boy or girl of my age. Soon after F.T. Brooks left me I lost touch with Theosophy, and in a remarkably short time (partly because I went to school in England) Theosophy left my life completely. But I have no doubt that those years with F.T. Brooks left a deep impress upon me and I feel that I owe a debt to him and to Theosophy.<sup>4</sup>

This is about as much biographical material that has been available on Brooks. Sarvepalli Gopal in his biography of Nehru devotes a paragraph to the “young and ardent Irish-French theosophist” and his influence on his young charge, but does not add much more. Explaining Brooks departure, he states that “dissatisfied with private tuition, and in particular with Brooks, in May 1905 Motilal took his family to Britain and secured admission for his son at Harrow.”<sup>5</sup>

From a number of sources I have been able to piece together more information on the man

Paris, 5th April 1873.



Brooks' Horoscope from *The Gospel of Life*, 1910.

who helped shape the future Prime Minister of India. Ferdinand T. Brooks was born in Paris April 5, 1873, the seventh and youngest child of an English father and French mother, both Roman Catholics. His mother died in July 1883, his father in 1908. Although educated in Paris, he retained his British nationality. He joined the Theosophical Society November 17, 1896,<sup>6</sup> while at Liège, Belgium, and two years later became actively involved in Theosophical work, translating Annie Besant's *Ancient Wisdom and Man and His Bodies* into French. He met C.W. Leadbeater in London while attending the Theosophical convention there in 1898 and served as his interpreter in Paris and Brussels. Recuperating from ill-health, he stayed with Leadbeater in England during June 1900, and in December

came to India at the invitation of Annie Besant, staying at her home Shanti Kunj in Benares from January to April 1901. From May 1901 to June 1904 he served as tutor to Jawaharlal Nehru in Allahabad. It was during this time that he began studying Sanskrit to be able to read the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the Upanishads in the original. Aside from his scholastic duties and Sanskrit studies, he was also enthusiastically involved in the work of the Theosophical Society. The section magazine of the Society in India noted that “from 1901 to 1904 he was the soul of the theosophical movement here [Allahabad] and three more branches had sprung up besides the old Prayag T.S. with the energy he infused into the minds of the T.S. members.”<sup>77</sup>

After his departure from the Nehru household he served as a teacher at the Chinsurah Training Academy, twenty miles north of Calcutta, from February 1905 to May 1906. His teaching career was brought to an end when he caught jungle fever during the summer of 1906, and he spent the next two years staying with friends in the United Provinces. May to July 1908 were spent working on his translation of the *Bhagavad-gītā* that was published in Amjer in January 1909.<sup>8</sup> From August 1908 to September 1910 he claimed to have addressed close to 1,500 meetings in 131 places throughout India and Ceylon.<sup>9</sup> We get an idea of the subject matter of his discourses from a volume he published after his return to Adyar, Madras, at the end of 1910—*The Gospel of Life*. Its 337 pages dealt with various aspects of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, service, karma, and allied topics. This was followed in close succession by a number of other related booklets issued under his “Vyasa-hrama” imprint: *Kuruksbetra* (1910,

iv, 52 p.), *The Mind Aspect of Salvation* (1910, 112 p.), *Sannyasa* (1911, xviii, 188 p.).

During his tours Brooks had lectured under the auspices of the network of Theosophical lodges scattered throughout India. But when he resigned from the Esoteric Section of the Society in 1912 over the new pledge instituted by Annie Besant, the head of the organization, requiring members “to obey, without cavil or delay, the orders of the Head of the Esoteric Section in all that concerns my relation with the Theosophical Movement; to work with her, on the lines she shall lay down, in preparation for the Coming of the World-Teacher”<sup>10</sup>, he found that Theosophists began closing their doors to him. Brooks made his situation known in a small pamphlet of fourteen pages titled *My Heresies, or “Where I beg leave to..differ from..Mrs. Annie Besant.”* Here he printed his correspondence with the secretary of one of the Indian Theosophical lodges denying him use of its hall for his lectures, and warned that “the Theosophical Society, as conducted by Mrs. Annie Besant, is just a religion like any other, and not at all the *Universal Solvent which it claims to be*. In other words the Theosophical Society has ceased to be Theosophical. It has become a cult.”<sup>11</sup>

Brooks followed *My Heresies* with *My Resignation*, a 46 page pamphlet giving his letter of resignation from the Theosophical Society and a point by point commentary on a letter Mrs. Besant had sent him on Nov. 28, 1913. Writing to the General Secretary of the Indian Section on Dec. 1, 1913, he stated that Mrs. Besant’s “persistent refusal to encourage my independent study and public work...and the consequent attitude of Theosophical lodges...in refusing all support and occasionally even ob-

structing me,” left him no choice but to resign his membership, though he was willing to rejoin if the Theosophical Society officially recognized his work.<sup>12</sup>

From this letter and comments made elsewhere, Brooks obviously felt that he deserved the same support that was being extended to various Theosophical luminaries. His failure to receive this recognition was equated to a failure of the Society. Yet according to its stated objects the Society promised nothing other than the opportunity for fraternal association in the search for truth. Part of the problem arose from the change that was occurring in the Society itself. Caught up by the enthusiasm of its leaders for the promised coming of a World Teacher, Theosophists became actively involved in a number of side organizations such as the Order of Service, Brothers and Sisters of India, Co-Masonry, Order of the Star in the East, Theosophical Education Trust, Knights of the Order of the Round Table, Temple of the Rosy Cross, Pledged Stalwarts of the Service Group, Servants of the Star, etc.<sup>13</sup> For members such as Brooks the identification of these activities with the Theosophical Society was looked upon as a betrayal of what they thought the Society stood for, and he decided to set the record straight.

Within a short space of time he was able to issue two volumes published from his “Vyasashrama” Bookshop at Mylapore across the Adyar River from the Society’s headquarters. He was now calling Mrs. Besant “one of the remarkable religious imposters in history” who had used her position to strengthen her social, educational and political influence in India, and her publishing empire, which included two newspapers, journals and books, to silence

criticism against her. “You have moreover, asserted yourself—and gotten yourself proclaimed—as *the* Ambassadors of a returning ‘Christ’—whom you would fain make followers of *all* the great Religions hail as compound *Avatars* of several great teachers and Saviours known to, and in some cases expected by, their very diverse traditions. So that the earnest followers of *every* great Religion have no choice but to accept *you* as the Prophet of the Lord, or denounce you arrant imposter. *There is no middle way: You have left room for none.*”<sup>14</sup>

In the first volume, *The Theosophical Society and Its Esoteric Bogeydom*, he introduced the apparatus of the Society, explaining its objects, and how it functioned through a network of members, lodges, national sections, general council, and president. The good the Society had done in India, raising Indian consciousness, extolling the virtues of Indian religion and philosophy, its educational efforts for untouchables in Madras and Mrs. Besant’s Central Hindu College in Benares, was acknowledged. But lurking in the background was what he termed the Society’s “Esoteric Bogeydom,” “an Esoteric Section officially acknowledged, named, known, indicated, advertised, looked up to and looked down from.”<sup>15</sup>

Unlike previous exposures on the Society, Brooks’ narrative was the first public revelation by an insider on the inner workings of the movement. He had joined the Society’s Esoteric Section in July 1898 and within a year had advanced to its first degree. And he gave details on the structure of this group which he described as “A Mystic Paradise...On Paper...But a Growing Esoteric...Hell, in Fact,” and the intrigues between various personalities. His

connection with the group was terminated in 1905 when Besant asked him to resign, but two years later he was asked to reapply. No doubt it was Brooks' attitude that got him into trouble, an indication of which is given in the Preface of his 1910 *Gospel of Life*, where he felt it necessary to state: "I, while thoroughly at one with her [Mrs. Besant] as regards the Principles and Ideals of Theosophy and the general interests of the Society, have for years maintained an attitude of complete and deliberate personal independence from her as regards my own special line of work and the whole of my inner life."<sup>16</sup>

As an Appendix to *The Theosophical Society and Its Esoteric Bogeydom* he included an article of his, "A Sober Account of the J. K. Cult," from the *Vedic Magazine* of 1912 giving Jiddu Krishnamurti's rise as "a pagent figure-head" of a new religious movement. Brooks himself was eye-witness to some of the events described, such as the Benares Theosophical Convention of December 1911, where according to Mrs. Besant, "the Lord Maithreya was there embodying himself in his Chosen." Also reprinted in this volume was a letter from Bhagavan Das, former General Secretary of the Society in India, telling of the spread of the World Teacher movement at Besant's Central Hindu College and how such events prejudiced the acceptance of Theosophy when the College became part of the proposed Benares Hindu University.<sup>17</sup>

While *The Theosophical Society and its Esoteric Bogeydom* dealt primarily with Brooks' personal experiences in the Society from 1898 to 1905, Part 2, published as *Neo-Theosophy Exposed*, focused on the statements of leading Theosophists C.W. Leadbeater, C. Jinarajadasa, G.S. Arundale, and of course Annie Besant, with

lengthy commentaries. Leadbeater's fulsome praise of Mrs. Besant that opened the series of quotes is typical. After extolling her "colossal intellect, her unflinching wisdom, her unrivalled eloquence, her splendid forgetfulness of self, her untiring devotion to work for others," he reminded members of the great honor they had in working with her. "You will be wise to follow her implicitly, just because she knows. This is no supposition on my part, no flight of the imagination; I have stood beside your President in the presence of the Supreme Director of evolution on this globe, and I know whereof I speak."<sup>18</sup> The volume was rounded out by chapters showing how Mrs. Besant had handled the American "Slanders" that forced C.W. Leadbeater's resignation from the Society in 1906.

Brooks' solution for the problems he saw troubling the Theosophical Society was to have Besant close her Esoteric School, resign her presidency of the Society and control of the Adyar headquarters, and restrict her activities to the field of Indian politics that she had just entered.

If some such thing is done, with Mrs. Besant's assistance, to acknowledge and put a stop to the psychic aberration of the last few years, and to detach her from the leadership of the Theosophical Society, while she harnesses herself and her deliberate *followers* to the political and social redemption of India, and to other suchlike works in other lands, I shall, while completing my record of the past (for the sake of the lessons it brings home) raise no further obstacles whatever in the way of her future. And I think my fellow-rebels will agree with me in this. For what we want is not that Mrs. Besant shall be ruined, but that the T.S. shall be saved to do its work of *unsectarian*

international enlightenment, harmonisation and uplift. Mrs. Besant may well *proclaim* these aims. But her “leadership” drives out those best fitted to *accomplish* them. In order to draw *them* in and be an instrument *of their* purpose (as per its own motto and objects) the T.S. must not be “led.”<sup>19</sup>

A further volume, “The Coming Christ,” was promised which would continue his survey of things Theosophical, but he died in August 1916 at the age of 43 without it appearing.

Much of the material Brooks quoted had been known to Theosophists for over a decade, in the form of pamphlets, circular letters, and journals. A portion had been republished the year before in *Mrs. Besant and the Alcyone Case* by “Veritas” (Madras: Goodwin & Co., 1913), which provided the evidence in the case brought by Krishnamurti’s father G. Narayaniah in his attempt to regain custody of his sons from Mrs. Besant. Brooks specific contribution was the personal details he provided for one of the least documented periods in Theosophical history—the late 1890s and early 1900s—and the influence exercised by G.N. Chakravarti (referred to as Mr. Gupta in Brooks account) of Allahabad on Besant and other Theosophists. That Chakravarti thought Leadbeater’s psychic approach dangerous and wrote a piece titled “Spirituality and Psychism” as a warning.<sup>20</sup> That Chakravarti’s letters to Mrs. Besant, published by her as *The Doctrine of the Heart*, were recommended to members of her Esoteric School for meditation. That Chakravarti and his group (which included Bertram Keightley and Upendranath Basu, General Secretaries of the Indian Section) parted company with Besant at the time of Col. Olcott’s death, refusing to

# Mr. F. T. BROOKS

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| V. <i>Thursday,</i><br><i>Jan. 29th,</i><br><i>5-15 p.m.</i>   | } <b>Theosophy in Ancient</b><br><b>Indian Scripture.</b>   | { <i>Chairman :</i><br>The Hon. Mr. B. V.<br>Narasimha Iyer.                      |
| VI. <i>Monday,</i><br><i>Feb 2nd,</i><br><i>5-15 p.m.</i>      | } <b>Theosophy in Modern</b><br><b>English Literature.</b>  | { <i>Chairman :</i><br>The Hon. Sir Harold<br>Stuart, I.C.S., C.S.I.              |

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believe that the Masters had appeared and told him to name Annie Besant his successor as President of the Society.<sup>21</sup> That the Colonel thought the Esoteric Section a “dismal failure,” and so on.

Surprisingly there was little negative response to what Brooks published. The only

item I have come across appeared in print a decade later when Mrs. Marie Russak Hotchener, who had been with Col. Olcott when he died, wrote to the Australian Theosophical journal *Dawn* to correct statements quoted from *Neo-Theosophy Exposed* about C. Jinarajadasa's reinstatement in the Society and Olcott's state of mind before he died.<sup>22</sup>

For Mrs. Besant the period just before Brooks issued his books was described as "the most painful year of my life."<sup>23</sup> Custody had been granted to Narayaniah, and the court directed her to return Krishnamurti and his brother to their father by May 26, 1913. She was granted a stay of execution and on December 1st appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London. She went to England for her hearing in May 1914 and obtained a dismissal of Narayaniah's case. On her return to India she grew increasingly involved in Indian politics. In comparison to the events in her life, Brooks revelations were a minor irritation.

Yet the treatment she received from him was mild in relation to what was to come. Four years later when T.M. Nair of Madras examined much of the same area as Brooks had covered, he would charge that "Mrs. Besant has nothing but hatred and malignity to those who do not worship at her shrine." Nair, a leader of the non-Brahmin movement in South India, looked on Besant's Home Rule League with suspicion, and when he published his *Evolution of Mrs. Annie Besant*, her foray into Indian politics was not spared. "The Theosophical Society had been exceedingly reactionary on most social questions connected with the Hindu community with the one exception of early marriage. Mrs. Besant in the past had occupied herself with

defending many superstitious observances of Hinduism connected with caste and family which many Hindus had given up as hopeless relics to defend....She praised everything Indian and ran down everything European till the Indians stood revealed as so many martyrs suffering untold tyrannies at the hands of the British barbarians....The programme suited the Madrasi Brahmin excellently."<sup>24</sup>

A large part of Nair's book consisted of material from British and American members and Mrs. Besant and C.W. Leadbeater dealing with advice he gave to certain boys about sex. Unlike Brooks who was willing to credit part of Besant's problems to the exaggerated praise bestowed upon her by her followers and their failure to criticize her when it would have been helpful, Nair implicated her in the statements of others.

Although most of the documents relating to Leadbeater's resignation from the Theosophical Society in 1906 are now accessible, presentation of what occurred remains so polarized that it tends to reveal more about the position of the presenters. Compared to the standards of the time, C.W. Leadbeater was certainly a pioneer in the field of sex education.<sup>25</sup> Mrs. Besant herself was not unfamiliar with the subject, having been sentenced for publishing an early manual on family planning, and had written her own book on the matter, which she withdrew after becoming a Theosophist.<sup>26</sup> And the reinstatement of Leadbeater after her election as President of the Society in 1907 renewed the controversy. As she explained to Mrs. Helen Dennis, who had brought the charges to her attention, "I cannot treat as an abandoned criminal a man with whom I have lived in intimacy for years, and whom I have found

self-sacrificing and devoted to his Master, simple in life and helpful. All this does not become annihilated because a lamentable error has distorted his views in one respect. And knowing how much influence his last Greek life has on his thought, knowing that Plato, an Initiate, taught a worse form of sexual vice, knowing that Mr. Leadbeater was taught this as a clergyman, I weigh all these facts in my judgement.”<sup>27</sup>

The warnings and calls for reform that Brooks offered the Theosophical Society remained largely ignored. The crescendo of the World Teacher movement increased, spawning further organizations such as the Liberal Catholic Church. It came to an abrupt halt in 1929 when J. Krishnamurti disbanded the Order of the Star, telling members:

For eighteen years you have been preparing for this event, for the Coming of the World-Teacher. For eighteen years you have organized, you have looked for someone who would give a new delight to your hearts and minds, who would transform your whole life, who would give you a new understanding; for someone who would raise you to a new plane of life, who would give you a new encouragement, who would set you free—and now look what is happening! Consider, reason with yourselves, and discover in what way that belief has made you different—not with the superficial difference of the wearing of a badge, which is trivial, absurd. In what manner has such a belief swept away all the unessential things of life? That is the only way to judge: in what way are you freer, greater, more dangerous to every Society which is based on the false and the unessential? In what way have the members of this organization of the Star become different?<sup>28</sup>

His words were a curious echo of what F.T. Brooks had been saying fifteen years earlier. Rightly or wrongly, whatever the validity of the World Teacher movement, public perception of Theosophy had been irrevocably eroded because of the events associated with it. Within the Theosophical Society it served to marginalize a significant minority, starting with Rudolf Steiner and the German membership in 1912. For the disaffected, Brooks studies became an influential source of rebuttal<sup>29</sup>, and his *Theosophical Society and Its Esoteric Bogeydom* and *Neo-Theosophy Exposed* are still in print. Nor has India forgotten him; in a recent study on the *Gita and its Commentators* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1991), its author, S.H. Jhabwala, devotes more space to Brooks than any other Theosophical commentator on the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

Brooks had described his efforts as that of one “crying in the desert,” a voice raised against what he believed to be the evils besetting the Theosophical Society. In opposition to the proclaimed ideals of Brotherhood that were at the very foundation of the movement, he warned that “one of the most dangerous traits of Esoteric Bogeydom is that it automatically lends itself to quite uncontrollable private libelling of this sort. One does not *see* these things (if one happens to be the person concerned) but one hears of them from time to time, and one is silently but efficiently *boycotted*. Nobody ever accosts one frankly, asking one to explain matters and clear oneself.”<sup>30</sup> More than these specifics, he effectively provided the label that would serve to identify the ills of the movement and be a rallying cry for the rest of the century: Neo-Theosophy.<sup>31</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For those unfamiliar with Indian comic books, the subject matter is often drawn from epics such as the *Mahabharata*, and have illustrated the lives of the Buddha, Vivekananda, and Shivaji. This one was no. 436 of the Amar Chitra Katha series, 1991.

<sup>2</sup>Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London: John Lane, 1936), 15.

<sup>3</sup>Nehru joined through the Lotus Branch in Allahabad on "11.8.1903." His diploma number was 24136.

<sup>4</sup>Nehru, 16.

<sup>5</sup>Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 19.

<sup>6</sup>Brooks applied for membership by writing to the London headquarters of the European Section; his diploma was dated the 19th of November.

<sup>7</sup>*Theosophy in India*, 9 (Mar.-Apr. 1912): 61.

<sup>8</sup>*The Bhagavad-gita, or The Chant of the Blessed One*, trans. by F.T. Brooks. Amjer: Syama Behari Misra, 1909. 143 pp.; rept. Amjer, 1910. Second edition, with text and translation, Srirangam, 1909, 139 pp.

<sup>9</sup>Brooks, Preface, *The Gospel of Life*, Vol. I (Adyar: Vyasashrama, 1910), xvii.

<sup>10</sup>*The Link*, August 1911, p. 43. Brooks was listed as "Dropped From the Ranks" on page 166 of the February 1912 issue.

<sup>11</sup>Brooks, *My Heresies* (Madras, 1913), 10.

<sup>12</sup>Brooks, *My Resignation* (1913), 41.

<sup>13</sup>Brooks, *The Theosophical Society and Its Esoteric Bogeydom* (1914, rept. Edmonton, Canada: Edmonton Theosophical Society, 1991), 63.

<sup>14</sup>Brooks, "An Open Letter to Mrs. Annie Besant," in *Neo-Theosophy Exposed* (1914, rept. Edmonton, Canada: Edmonton Theosophical Society, 1991), xxx.

<sup>15</sup>*The Theosophical Society and Its Esoteric Bogeydom*, 143-44.

<sup>16</sup>*The Gospel of Life*, xlv.

<sup>17</sup>This letter gained further circulation as a pamphlet printed by Celestia Root Lang's Chicago Divine Life Press, titled *The Central Hindu College and Mrs. Besant*.

<sup>18</sup>*Neo-Theosophy Exposed*, 5, from *Adyar: Home of the Theosophical Society* by C.W. Leadbeater and J. Krishnamurti (Adyar: Theosophist Office, 1911).

<sup>19</sup>*Neo-Theosophy Exposed*, 415.

<sup>20</sup>Reprinted Benares: Indian Section of the Theosophical Society, 1909, and as Adyar Pamphlet no. 48, 1914.

<sup>21</sup>Brooks revealed that Olcott told him in 1904 that he did not want Mrs. Besant as President of the Society.

<sup>22</sup>"A Slander Refuted." *The Messenger* (Chicago) 12 (July 1924): 5.

<sup>23</sup>"On the Watch-Tower." *The Theosophist* 35 (October 1913): 1.

<sup>24</sup>Nair, *Evolution of Mrs. Annie Besant* (Madras, 1918), 323-24. Dr. Nair (1868-1919), a prominent local physician, journalist, and social reformer, had been a member of the Madras Legislature. His obituary is given in *The Times* of London, 19 July, 1919.

<sup>25</sup>For the beliefs of the period in this matter, see "The Frightful Consequences of Onanism: Notes on the History of a Delusion." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (July-Sept. 1967).

<sup>26</sup>This action brought her a condemnation from the former Indian Minister of Health and Family Planning, S. Chandrasekhar. "By advocating birth control where it was most needed, Besant would have contributed much to the

welfare of the Indian masses through the auspices of the Theosophical Society; instead, she devoted her energies to a fruitless effort to kindle a religious renaissance, an effort that took her on questionable excursions into esoteric realms of occultism.” *“A Dirty, Filthy Book”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 59.

<sup>27</sup>Besant to Dennis, 28 Nov. 1906. Helen I. Dennis Collection, University of Chicago Library. See Besant’s public position in *The Basis of the Theosophical Society* (Adyar: The Theosophist Office, 1910): “It is my profound conviction that a spiritual Society may not, without committing suicide, drive away the sinner instead of seeking to redeem him; that it cannot have a moral code, enforced by penalty on its members.”

<sup>28</sup>J. Krishnamurti, *The Dissolution of the Order of the Star* (Eerde, Ommen, Holland: The Star Publishing Trust, 1929), 8-9.

<sup>29</sup>Witness the parallel between Brooks’ chapter heading “Little Nosegays From a Neo-Theosophic Flower-Bed,” and H.N. Stokes later series “Flowers from a Neo-Theosophical Garden” in the 1922 *O. E. Library Critic*.

<sup>30</sup>Brooks, *The Theosophical Society and Its Esoteric Bogeydom*, 62.

<sup>31</sup>Brooks himself may not have been the originator of the term, though his book certainly helped bring it into prominence. Bhagavan Das had used the words “neo-Theosophy” in his 1913 letter to describe the creed that was growing within the Society. And Mrs. Besant had addressed the issue before that in her lecture *The Growth of the Theosophical Society* (Adyar: The Theosophist Office, 1912), pointing out that while Reincarnation was regarded as Theosophy, the investigation of past lives by Leadbeater and herself was considered negatively as Neo-Theosophy.

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# Book Reviews

**THE ONLY TRADITION.** By William W. Quinn, Jr. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. Pp. xix + 384. ISBN 0-7914-3214-9. \$24.95 (Pb.)

Written in 1981 as a dissertation under the direction of Mircea Eliade at the University of Chicago, revised and up-dated over the next 16 years, *The Only Tradition* has appeared finally in SUNY Press's series in Western Esoteric Traditions. It is a curious and misleading book. It claims to be an objective description and exploration of the *philosophia perennis* of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and René Guénon. In reality it is an argument for *the only Tradition* as the only remedy for the malaise of the modern world. "All that is wrong with the modern West, indeed, the modern world, can be ameliorated *by an affirmative application of first principles to contingent circumstances*" (p. xiii).

Quinn claims he has no thesis ". . . unless it be that recorded history evidences the existence of an esoteric, primordial Tradition based upon a set of a priori and immutable first principles, true now as always, which in all places and in all times have had expositors, and that the two greatest of such Western expositors in the first half of the twentieth century were Coomaraswamy and Guénon" (p. xiv). But when he outlines his argument, we begin to get a different picture: ". . . [T]he first principles of the Tradition . . . are essential, and . . . substance

proceeds from essence . . . Traditional societies were those wholly informed by these first principles and thereby unanimous and substantively reflective of the essential principles . . . a key characteristic of Traditional culture is the absence of bifurcation, or alternatively the fusion, of sacred and secular . . . the description 'Traditional' encompasses both premodern nonliterate or tribal societies and literate civilizations; and . . . due to the inexorable cycles in duration the modern world is at present virtually entirely secular and therefore the antithesis of Traditional" (p. xiv-xv). The book is written for ". . . a wider audience of men and women of intelligence who are impelled to seek answers to the perennial questions . . ." (p. xiv).

The core of the book, Chapter 8 ("The First Principles") is Quinn's effort to distill the principles from the writings of ". . . Coomaraswamy, Guénon, Blavatsky, certain of their followers, and one or two of the established modern perennial philosophers [Frithjof Schuon and Seyyed Hossein Nasr]" (p. 118). Whatever else the book may be, this is a very useful chapter. To summarize his distillation: (1) There is an Absolute beyond all description and there is the One from which all manifest forms emanate; (2) This One is aeviternal—an *eternal now*; (3) Worlds become manifest and disappear periodically and cyclically (or better, spirally); (4) This cosmic process is one of polarity, duality, or *coincidentia oppositorum*; (5) These oppo-

site forces interact according to the law of action or cause and effect (*karma*); (6) These principles are knowable only by *gnosis* or intellectual intuition, a “higher order” of knowledge possessed by a spiritual elite, an “organization of illuminati” (p. 141) known as *mahatmas*.

Chapters 1 through 7 are “. . . a prolegomenon to the first principles. . . , plac[ing] the discussion of content, nature, and taxonomy . . . in their proper setting” (p.115). Chapters 9 through 14 are meant to show how these first principles have appeared in Traditional cultures, and how they have all but disappeared in modern Western culture. Quinn identifies medieval Christendom as a Traditional culture, then argues, following Eliade’s scheme, for an historical fall in the West, from mythology to history, sacred to profane/secular, order to chaos, hierarchical to democratic societies, and cyclic to rectilinear/progressive history.

In the 15th and last chapter, Quinn returns to his thesis: “The ‘Solution’ to the Vicissitudes of Modernity” (the title of the chapter) is the *reinstatement of Tradition*. According to the principle of periodicity, the world is going to get worse, but some elements of the first principles will endure “. . .between the end of this modern phase and the beginning of the next. . .” (p. 295), so that, in a few centuries, Traditional culture will be established once again. Furthermore, Quinn discerns “. . . an historic and inexorable momentum. . .” (p. 298) leading to a planetization of Traditional culture. This planetization will depend upon a spiritual elite who “. . . like the Brahmins of classical Indian culture, might act as the priestly caste . . .” applying first principles to the creation of a “. . . universal brotherhood of humanity. . .” (p. 305). The details are spelled

out by Coomaraswamy and Guénon and embodied in “. . . those small initiatic orders beyond the scrutiny of the public” (p. 304). Quinn is quick to point out, though, that neither Coomaraswamy nor Guénon “. . . were advocates of planetization of culture . . .” (p. 298).

There are four appendices. One explores the definitions and usages of the word *tradition*; another does the same for *culture*; a third deals with *ontology* and a fourth is on *methodology*.

Frankly, I am unclear what the author is up to. He claims to do no more than observe certain “inexorable” trends, but, by the very title of his book, he precludes debate. He says he is studying the thought of Coomaraswamy and Guénon, but when he devotes so much space to the defense of Theosophy I am left wondering if the book is not really about *that* tradition rather than the *only* Tradition. Finally, I wonder why he takes such pains in demonstrating the inevitability of planetization, when he has said that neither of his primary authors advocates it.

These reservations may sound unfair and petty, especially in light of Quinn’s real achievement in summarizing the perennial philosophy. But I am led to them by certain liberties he takes with his sources: he minimizes Coomaraswamy’s interest in art; he forces me to agree with him that Coomaraswamy was strongly influenced by Theosophy; he claims that Coomaraswamy believed in the existence of the *mahatmas*; and he hypostatizes his mentor Mircea Eliade’s theory of the rise and fall of cultures.

In the first place, he mis-quotes my 1965 dissertation. He refers to Coomaraswamy’s notion that “. . .’All true Traditional arts are imitative of the art of the Divine Artificer,’” and then, claiming that I have “unpacked” this statement,

quotes my dissertation, *without* ellipses: “As a symbol . . . a work of art may be made to serve . . . as a *yantra*, a device used in meditation to focus the mind.” Of this misquoted statement, he says: “One wonders if the distinction made here by Hatfield is necessary, since a *yantra* can as easily be described as serving a functional purpose” (p. 185). But that is exactly what I *did* say in the unexpurgated original: “As a symbol, *combining use and beauty*, a work of art may be made to serve *a functional purpose in daily life, or it may be made to serve* as a *yantra*, a device used in meditation to focus the mind.” My next sentence, which Quinn does not include, completes the thought: “Even in the first case, though, the functional object may be a *yantra* at the same time, for any work made by art unites within it both useful and intelligible components, corresponding to the ‘double requirements of a man who can be spoken of as a whole man,’ that is, the requirements of both the physical and the spiritual dimensions of his being, neither of which ought to be neglected.” Quinn thus misleads us into thinking that Coomaraswamy is more interested in abstract essentials than in art. But by not dealing with Coomaraswamy’s understanding of art, Quinn leaves the modern Western reader with no access to the perennial philosophy. He shuts the door rather abruptly by the somewhat patronizing observation that one must activate one’s capacity for “intellectual intuition” because the ultimate realities are “. . . completely imperceptible by the sensory mode and so are empirically nondemonstrable” (p. 337). Yet it is precisely through art that Coomaraswamy finds access to the perennial philosophy and the qualitative life that it advocates. It is through the experience of beauty that

we begin to *feel* (Coomaraswamy’s word for this feeling is *vāsanā*) the realities of the perennial philosophy.

Secondly, in arguing for Coomaraswamy’s indebtedness to Madame Blavatsky and Theosophy, Quinn tries to enlist my support by quoting a member of my dissertation committee, Floyd H. Ross, to the effect that Theosophists “. . . find a unity underlying the mystical traditions of mankind,’ and ‘so have modern scholars like Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.’” (p. 110). In a footnote, he adds: “. . . Ross was one of three professors on the Supervisory Committee of John Hatfield’s dissertation . . .” (150). Guilty by association!

In the third place, Quinn seeks Coomaraswamy’s support of his belief in the existence of the *mabatmas*. He quotes Coomaraswamy: “It is only one who *has* attained to an immediate Gnosis that can afford to dispense with theology, ritual, and imagery: the Comprehensor has found what the Wayfarer is still in search of.” Then he adds: “This is the process within a more developed Traditional culture, in which there exists an organized and initiatory gnostic elite” (p. 203). But Coomaraswamy is not arguing for the existence of an elite group. In the quoted passage, he is merely asking, with the Wayfarer, what *are* “. . . the most appropriate and efficacious supports of contemplation?” (“The Nature of Buddhist Art”, p. 156). Incidentally, those turn out to be works of art that are well and truly made.

Finally, chapters 9 through 14 are an extended elaboration of Mircea Eliade’s notion of the historic fall from sacred to profane. According to Eliade, in the modern West, the sacred has literally fallen into unconsciousness, where it

nevertheless continues to shape experience. Since the sacred is not entirely lost, it can be rescued by what Eliade calls a “creative hermeneutics,” leading to a new, planetary humanism. This hermeneutics requires, though, that we see ourselves locally, as members of one or another culture among many. Eliade says “. . . recognizing the existence of ‘others’ inevitably brings with it the relativization, or even the destruction, of the official cultural world” (*History of Religions* 1/1 (Summer, 1961), p. 3). But Quinn rejects cultural relativity when it comes to the *only* Tradition, and seems to forget that, for Coomaraswamy and Eliade both, *all* knowledge is in the mode of the knower.

Quinn thus forces his sources into the service of his own agenda. (1) He removes from our consideration all reference to contingent experience (especially the experience of beauty); (2) he deletes the human factor from his mentor Eliade’s vision of history; (3) he implies that Coomaraswamy is a Theosophist who believes in the existence of the *mahatmas*; and (4) he leaves us with the impression that Theosophy is to be the bearer of the *philosophia perennis* into the next era.

In light of his obvious erudition, it is puzzling why Quinn has chosen to write such a curious and misleading book.

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**“No Religion Higher Than Truth”: A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922.** By Maria Carlson. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993. Pp. 298 with bibliographical references, index and illustrations. ISBN 0-691-05682-X. \$49.50 (hardcover).

This book, published five years ago, remains the only attempt to give a broad historical picture of the Russian Theosophical Movement. The absence of books on this topic in the West is understandable. Russia is not a great power any longer and Russian studies are in decline everywhere. Who in European and American academia today would research such an esoteric and marginal subject as the history of Russian Theosophy?

Why, however, don’t academic studies of Theosophy appear in Russia? This question is more difficult to answer, considering that the country is going through a real occult boom, far surpassing the one in the beginning of this century. Maria Carlson observed the very start of it in “the heady days of glasnost” (209). What followed was something one could hardly have expected. Occultism today is becoming a part of mass culture and a focus of hot ideological debates. The Orthodox Church, trying to recover from the limbo of Communist times, sees occultism as its major opponent in “the fight for souls.” The leading author of Orthodox apologetics, A. Kuraev, publishes book after book with such telling titles as *Satanism for the intelligentsia* (meaning Theosophy, no less). The Church Council has anathematized quite a few “heretical groups”—Theosophists and the followers of the Roerichs included. This might

be the answer to why no academic research analogous to Carlson's book is taking place in Russia. As the proverb goes, when cannons are firing the trumpets are silent. This silence makes the present study of the Russian Theosophical Movement, a marginal cultural phenomenon of a century ago, an unexpectedly hot reference book. As we were taught in college days, the past helps in understanding the present.

The book opens with an understandably brief sketch of the history of alternative religiosity in Russia. The texture thickens as the author takes us into the labyrinth of the adventurous life of the founder of the Theosophical Movement, Elena Petrovna Blavatskaya. The fact that she is Russian by birth was endowed with symbolic meaning by all generations of Russian Theosophists. However, despite being born in Russia, Blavatskaya wasn't Russian at all. I don't mean to refer to her German and French ancestry. I mean that she was born in a Russian aristocratic family of the last century, and the language spoken at home in all such families was French (Blavatskaya also had an English governess). A cosmopolitan spirit reigned in such families and it helped HPB—in the Western acronym for her name—to feel at home in very different surroundings during her ceaseless wanderings around the globe. This cosmopolitan international spirit was also typical of the Theosophical Society, including its Russian branch. Only in the moments of crisis did Elena Petrovna suffer fits of nostalgia, collecting crumbs of Russian rye bread from her sister's letters and so forth. Similarly, only in times of hardships, during World War I and the Revolution, were fits of patriotism suffered by the Russian Theosophical Society. Otherwise, it steadfastly held

to the extreme "western" side of the Russian spectrum, which ever since the mid-19th century was defined by the dichotomy of Westernizers and Slavophiles.

Paradoxically, the orientalism of the Theosophical Movement was also of borrowed Western origin. Among the Slavophiles the attitude towards the East was rather ambivalent. They were against the West, fighting for Russian originality, but at the same time they were aware that this originality could easily drown in the dangerous proximity of the East. This explains the fears of the Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) about a threat of Panmongolism. And it explains his skepticism and suspiciousness about Theosophy, which he took to be a Trojan horse for neo-Buddhist expansionism. In reality, however, Russian Theosophists looked at the Orient as if from afar, imitating Western romantic longings for it.

There was one exception to this Orientophobia, but it was a prominent one: the famous Russian Theosophist-painter Nikolai Roerich (1874-1947). Developing the ideas of some Russian philologists (one of them, V. Stasov, is mentioned in the book) on the common Indo-European roots of the Russian and Indian languages, he stressed the closeness and affinity of their cultures. His complete immersion in Indian culture after the Revolution had curious parallels with the Eurasian ideology popular among other emigrant intellectuals (N. Trubetskoi, L. Karsavin), who regarded Russia as a part of Asia, a country whose "historiosophical" goals made it one with the Asian countries. This is how Eurasianists understood and justified the "oriental" Bolshevik dictatorship. It was in this spirit that Roerich

made an attempt at a *rapprochement* between Theosophy and the Bolsheviks, bringing to Russia and to Lenin the letters of the Mahatmas. This independent position of Roerich and his wife Elena (who translated Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* into Russian) put them at odds with the pillar of Russian Theosophy, A. Kamenskaia (1867-1952), who after the Revolution lived in Switzerland. It explains the anti-Kamenskaia remarks of Elena Roerich in a private letter cited by the author (246).

Maria Carlson rightly points out that the Russian Theosophists shared the concept of Russian messianism. But theirs was a very special version of it. Like Slavophiles they spoke about the great role that Russia is destined to play in the future of humankind, but in distinction from Slavophiles, this future Russia stopped being herself and became a kind of abstract principle—"the sixth sub-race" of humanity. Only in times of historical hardship (the Revolution and Civil War) did the Theosophical interpretation of Russian messianism come closer to the traditional one, with the suffering country being compared to Christ crucified for the sins of humanity. Later in the twenties, more positive schemes popped up in the heads of those Russian Theosophists who managed to escape the Communist bloodshed. The Bolsheviks were unconsciously fulfilling the great mission of Russia, and the Soviet emblem of hammer and sickle was an esoteric sign of the country's potential transformation. Out of the cleansing fire a new Russia would emerge and lead the world into the bright future (183-84). If we remove the unconscious and esoteric part from this Theosophical reading of Soviet history, we get almost the official Marxist line. It is really not

strange at all; it demonstrates the deep affinity of different versions of utopian thinking.

The relations of Russian Theosophy and the Russian Orthodox Church analyzed in the book can be put into the broader context of the interactions between the Theosophical Movement and Christianity. Postulating the hidden unity of all religions, Theosophical thinkers were eager to find common esoteric elements in all religious traditions of the world. The resulting "esoteric synthesis" could include different elements from them, but there was a general tendency for more active inclusion of Christian elements as time went on (as in *Esoteric Christianity* by A. Besant). However, Christianity, being exclusive by nature, tended to undermine such attempts at synthesis from the inside (the "Christian" Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner is a good example of such a process). From the outside, the Christian churches also demonstrated various degrees of hostility towards these all-embracing Theosophical efforts.

Russian Theosophists found the "esoteric tradition" of the Eastern Church embodied in the famous Orthodox *startsy*. These saintly hermits, living in far-away places, were admired by both common folk and the intelligentsia. The latter were rather suspicious of the official Church, which was fully controlled by the Monarchy, but were eager to open their hearts to old wise men. Being part of the intelligentsia, Russian Theosophists shared this admiration but, being Theosophists, they put it in their own doctrinal form. This appropriation of the *startsy* for Theosophical needs, and the appropriation of Orthodox mysticism in general, irritated those intellectuals who finally turned to Orthodoxy. Hence the heated polemics of leading

Christian thinkers (Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdiaev, Boris Vysheslavtsev, etc.) against Theosophy and Anthroposophy: polemics that are mentioned in the book. The philosophical level of the polemics was very high. I suspect that, in the course of responding to the Theosophical challenge, Berdiaev added some fine points to his philosophy of Christian personalism and Bulgakov developed some aspects of his sophiology.

The official Church was also defensive, but Church apologists definitely lacked the intellectual rigor and sophistication of the famous philosophers. There was a decree of the Holy Synod of 1908 stating that Theosophy was alien to Orthodoxy and forbidding the clergy to participate in the Theosophical activity (82-83). However, it was much milder than the statement of the Church Council of 1994 mentioned at the beginning of this review. Clearly, today's Church is much more frightened by the Theosophical challenge; this is one of the proofs of its internal weakness and diffidence. It might be interesting to remember that, in the earlier period, some *startsy* showed much more tolerance and compassion towards Theosophical seekers who sought their spiritual guidance. This was especially true after the Revolution, when surviving anthroposophists had fruitful contacts with the last *startsy* of the famous *Optyna pustyn'*.

Another important question touched upon in the book is the relation between Russian Theosophists and folk sectarians. M. Carlson rightly mentions certain typological similarities between some sectarian teachings and Theosophy (145). Whether they derive from common Gnostic sources is debatable, but the fact is that

similar trends can be traced in folk religiosity and elitist occultism in all European countries. Russia is no exception. Moreover, at certain periods in Russian history there were *rap-prochements* between folk sects and the occultism of the educated. Usually divided by rigid social barriers, they became aware of their common mystical and magical interests. The first of these periods took place in the beginning of the 19th century and the second at the beginning of the the present century, with Russian Theosophists fully participating in it. Articles on Russian sects appeared in Theosophical periodicals, and there were personal contacts and meetings between the two groups. The main idea of the Theosophists was to educate the sectarians and illuminate the abysses of the "Russian soul" with a bright Theosophical light. But the opposite result could not be excluded. One of the best novels of the brilliant Russian writer Andrei Belyi (a prominent anthroposophist himself), *The Silver Dove*, describes the complete immersion of a Russian intellectual in the milieu of folk religiosity. Finally, the light is lost and its unfortunate bearer is killed in sectarian violence.

Christian thinkers of the time were also very much interested in the sectarians. Their familiarity with folk religiosity made them aware of the problems which had to be solved by creative Christian theology. Curiously enough, according to Berdiaev's memoirs, he invited Belyi for "field research" to the Yama pub, the meeting place of sectarians in Moscow, but the latter came very reluctantly and only once. Evidently, his creative (he himself would prefer the word "theurgical") imagination was self-sufficient and he did not need to dabble in low reality.

In today's Russia we don't have folk sects any longer. They were destroyed by the ruthless regime together with its natural habitat—the traditional Russian peasantry. The Russian intelligentsia was also destroyed by the Revolution it inadvertently prepared. In a certain sense, it could be called a self-destruction. The present day occult boom has a different social foundation—the Soviet intelligentsia (*obrazovanshchina*—half-educated trash—in Solzhenitsyn's abusive term) and former peasants who escaped to the cities from the impoverished countryside. Both are frightened to death by the incomprehensible changes that are shaking the country. The same milieu is also a missionary turf for Orthodox fundamentalists. The level of the polemics between the latter and the rather ignorant occultist writers can be seen on the shelves of bookshops, where the worst samples of occult rubbish stand next to Orthodox brochures on the Jewish-occult conspiracy. But certain changes have taken place lately. A new enlightened branch of Russian occultists seems to have appeared. They are mostly the followers of the Traditionalists (René Guénon and Frithhof Schuon), Gurdjieff admirers, modern anthroposophists and some New Age groups.

I started this review by lamenting the absence of serious academic research on occultism in Russia. There might be one exception to it. In the time of *perestroika*, the GPU-NKVD-KGB archives were briefly opened. Some materials from the Secret Police cases against Russian occultists (Theosophists and anthroposophists included) were published and commented upon by a few researchers. One curious parallel came to my mind when I read them. Like the loyal communists killed in the Great Terror, Theoso-

phists easily confessed to the most atrocious accusations against them. Of course, they were tortured and no wonder—their self-slandering sounded like records of medieval witch trials. But there seemed to be something more to it. In a wonderful book, *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler, the Communist hero recognizes his “guilt” because he believes in the higher justice of the historical process. If he has to die for the sake of the process, even as a traitor, he is willing to do so. The Theosophical mentality seems to share this Hegelian-Marxist concept of “the rightness of history” (or perhaps it was the other way around and the Marxists shared in some mystical attitudes). In emigration it moved Russian Theosophists to decipher the esoteric meaning of the hammer and sickle (see above), in NKVD torture cells to agree with the hidden necessity of their imminent death for the spiritual evolution of mankind.

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