

CWL, the Mahatma and God

Compiled by Pedro Oliveira



Facsimile reproduction of the original envelope which contained Mahatma K.H.'s letter to C. W. Leadbeater, received on 31 October 1884. (Source: Theosophy Wiki)

The Mahatmas on God

Perhaps no other letter from the Mahatmas, Madame Blavatsky's Teachers, presents their views on God, the churches and the clergy more directly and strongly than the famous Letter 10, now Letter 88 in the chronological edition, published in 1993. The text of this letter was copied by A. P. Sinnett from an original in September 1882.

In this letter, like in any other, Mahatma K.H. refutes, both metaphysically as well as from a Theosophical point of view, and in absolute terms, the notion of God. When Hugh Shearman, a respected Theosophist from Northern Ireland, tried to point out in the early 1960s (1) that there are letters from other Adepts that invoke the name of God in their instructions to Col. Olcott during the early days of the Theosophical Society in New York, he was intellectually savaged. Among the students of HPB's writings and of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Letter 10 represents the final and absolute word on the subject.

Here are some of the passages of that famous letter that informed the thought and the practice of several generations of Theosophists:

Neither our philosophy nor ourselves believe in a God, least of all in one whose pronoun necessitates a capital H. Our philosophy falls under the definition of Hobbes.

It is preeminently the science of effects by their causes, and of causes by their effects, and since it is also the science of things deduced from first principle, as Bacon defines it, before we admit any such principle we must know it, and have no right to admit even its possibility. Your whole explanation is based upon one solitary admission made simply for argument's sake in October last. You were told that our knowledge was limited to this our solar system: ergo as philosophers who desired to remain worthy of the name we could not either deny or affirm the existence of what you termed a supreme, omnipotent, intelligent being of some sort *beyond* the limits of that solar system. But if such an existence is not absolutely impossible, yet unless the uniformity of Nature's law breaks at those limits we maintain that it is highly improbable. Nevertheless we deny most emphatically the position of agnosticism in this direction, and as regards the solar system. Our doctrine knows no compromises. It either affirms or denies, for it never teaches but that which it knows to be the truth. Therefore, we deny God both as philosophers and as Buddhists. We know there are planetary and other spiritual lives, and we know there is in our system no such thing as God, either personal or impersonal. Parabrahm is not a God, but absolute immutable law, and Iswar is the effect of Avidya and Maya, ignorance based upon the great delusion. The word God was invented to designate the unknown cause of those effects which man has either admired or dreaded without understanding them, and since we claim and that we are able to prove what we claim — *i.e.* the knowledge of that cause and causes we are in a position to maintain there is no God or Gods behind them.

The idea of God is not an innate but an acquired notion, and we have but one thing in common with theologies — we reveal the infinite. But while we assign to all the phenomena that proceed from the infinite and limitless Space, Duration and motion, *material, natural, sensible* and *known* (to us at least) causes, the theists assign them *spiritual, super-natural* and *unintelligible* an unknown causes. The God of the Theologians is simply and imaginary power, *un loup garou* [a werewolf] as d'Holbach expressed it — a power which has never yet manifested itself. Our chief aim is to deliver humanity of this nightmare, to teach man virtue for its own sake, and to walk in life relying on himself instead of leaning on a theological crutch, that for countless ages was the direct cause of nearly all human misery. Pantheistic we may be called — agnostic never. If people are willing to accept and to regard as God our one life immutable and unconscious in its eternity they may do so and thus keep to one more gigantic misnomer.

The words of the Mahatma are very clear: there is no room for God in their Esoteric Philosophy, the idea of God is just an acquired notion and has no basis in fact. In another passage of that same letter the Mahatma's statement is reminiscent of a recent interview with Stephen Fry in a television programme in London:

How can intelligence proceed or emanate from non-intelligence — you kept asking last year. How could a highly intelligent humanity, man the crown of reason, be evolved out of blind unintelligent law or force! But once we reason on that line, I may ask in my turn, how could congenital idiots, non-reasoning animals, and the rest of "creation" have been created by or evolved from, absolute Wisdom, if the latter is a thinking intelligent being, the author and ruler of the Universe? How? says Dr. Clarke in his examination of the proof of the existence of the Divinity. "God who hath made the eye, shall he not see? God who hath made the ear shall he not hear?" But according to this mode of reasoning they would have to admit that in creating an idiot God is an idiot; that he who made so many irrational beings, so many physical and moral monsters, must be an irrational being. . . .

In his intellectual and relentless demolition of the concept of God the Mahatma points out the contradictions in the very existence of the Church:

According to logic “nothing” is that of which everything can truly be denied and nothing can truly be affirmed. The idea therefore either of a finite or infinite nothing is a contradiction in terms. And yet according to theologians “God, the self-existent being, is a most simple, unchangeable, incorruptible being; without parts, figure, motion, divisibility, or any other such properties as we find in matter. For all such things do plainly and necessarily imply finiteness in their very notion and are utterly inconsistent with complete infinity.” Therefore the God here offered to the adoration of the XIXth century lacks every quality upon which man’s mind is capable of fixing any judgment. What is this in fact but a being of whom they can affirm *nothing* that is not instantly contradicted. Their own Bible their Revelation destroys all the moral perceptions they heap upon him, unless indeed they call those qualities perfections that every other man’s reason and common sense call imperfections, odious vices and brutal wickedness. Nay more he who reads our Buddhist scriptures written for the superstitious masses will fail to find in them a *demon* so vindictive, unjust, so cruel and so stupid as the celestial tyrant upon whom the Christians prodigally lavish their servile worship and on whom their theologians heap those perfections that are contradicted on every page of their bible. Truly and veritably your theology has created her God but to destroy him piecemeal. Your church is the fabulous Saturn, who begets children but to devour them.

The Mahatmas on Religion, the Priesthood and the Churches

Having philosophically dismantled the notion of God, the Mahatma then proceeds to expose religion as the cause of two-thirds of evil in the world. His analysis is not less fierce and dismantling in its consequences:

And now, after making due allowance for evils that are natural and cannot be avoided, — and so few are they that I challenge the whole host of Western metaphysicians to call them evils or to trace them directly to an independent cause — I will point out the greatest, the chief cause of nearly two thirds of the evils that pursue humanity — ever since that cause became a power. It is religion under whatever form and in whatsoever nation. It is the sacerdotal caste, the priesthood and the churches; it is in those illusions that man looks upon as sacred, that he has to search out the source of that multitude of evils which is the great curse of humanity and that almost overwhelms mankind. Ignorance created gods and cunning took advantage of the opportunity. Look at India and look at Christendom and Islam, at Judaism and Fetichism. It is priestly imposture that rendered these gods so terrible to man; it is religion that makes of him the selfish bigot, the fanatic that hates all mankind out of his own sect without rendering him any better or more moral for it. It is belief in God and gods that makes two-thirds of humanity the slaves of a handful of those who deceive them under the false pretence of saving them. Is not man ever ready to commit any kind of evil if told that his god or gods demand the crime?, voluntary victim of an illusionary god, the abject slave of his crafty ministers. The Irish, Italian and Slavonian peasant will starve himself and see his family starving and naked to feed and clothe his padre and pope. For two thousand years India groaned under the weight of caste, Brahmins alone feeding on the fat of the land, and today the followers of Christ and those of Mahomet are cutting each other’s throats in the names of and for the greater glory of their respective myths. Remember the sum of human misery will never be diminished unto that day when the better portion of humanity destroys in the name of Truth, morality, and universal charity, the altars of their false gods.

Although most of the religious traditions are strongly chastised in the above-mentioned quote, it is the Christian tradition that cops a direct hit: ‘It is the sacerdotal caste, the priesthood and the churches; it is in those illusions that man looks upon as sacred, that he has to search out the source of that multitude of evils which is the great curse of humanity and that almost overwhelms mankind. ... The Irish, Italian and Slavonian peasant will starve himself and see his family starving and naked to feed and clothe his padre and pope.’ The passage concludes with a call to ‘the better portion of humanity’ to ‘destroy in the name of Truth, morality, and universal charity, the altars of their false gods’.

The Mahachohan’s and Madame Blavatsky’s Views on God

The above-mentioned point of view about God – and religion – does not seem to be absolute among the members of the Brotherhood of Adepts. The Mahachohan, the Mahatmas’ Master, in his famous communication sent to Mr Sinnet in 1881 through Mahatma K.H., presents another and perhaps more inclusive view:

For as everyone knows, total emancipation from authority of the one all-pervading power or law called God by the priests—Buddha, Divine Wisdom and enlightenment or Theosophy, by the philosophers of all ages—means also the emancipation from that of human law. Once unfettered and delivered from their dead weight of dogmatic interpretations, personal names, anthropomorphic conceptions and salaried priests, the fundamental doctrines of all religions will be proved identical in their esoteric meaning. Osiris, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, will be shown as different names for one and the same royal highway to final bliss, Nirvana.

Mystical Christianity, that is to say that Christianity which teaches self-redemption through our own seventh principle—this liberated Para-Atma (Augoeides) called by some Christ, by others Buddha, and equivalent to regeneration or rebirth in spirit—will be found just the same truth as the Nirvana of Buddhism. All of us have to get rid of our own Ego, the illusory apparent *self*, to recognize our true self in a transcendental divine life. But if we would not be selfish, we must strive to make other people see that truth, to recognize the reality of that transcendental self, the Buddha, the Christ or God of every preacher. This is why even exoteric Buddhism is the surest path to lead men towards the one esoteric truth.

(Quotes from *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, Letter #1)

In Madame Blavatsky’s writings one also finds evidence of a broader view of God. In certain passages she can be extremely fierce and denounce the notion of God as a quasi aberration. In other passages, like in the one below from *The Key to Theosophy* (Section 5, 1889), she addresses what could be termed the esoteric significance of the concept of God:

ENQ. To whom, then, do you *pray* when you do so?

THEO. To “our Father in heaven” — in its esoteric meaning.

ENQ. Is that different from the one given to it in theology?

THEO. Entirely so. An Occultist or a Theosophist addresses his prayer to *his Father which is in secret* (read, and try to understand, *Matthew* vi, 6), not an extra-cosmic and therefore finite God; and that “Father” is in man himself.

ENQ. Then you make of man a God?

THEO. Please say “God” and not a God. In our sense, the inner man is the only God we can have cognizance of. And how can this be otherwise? Grant us our postulate

that God is a universally diffused, infinite principle, and how can man alone escape from being soaked through *by*, and *in*, the Deity? We call our “Father in heaven” that deific essence of which we are cognizant within us, in our heart and spiritual consciousness, and which has nothing to do with the anthropomorphic conception we may form of it in our physical brain or its fancy: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of [the absolute] God dwelleth in you?” Yet, let no man anthropomorphize that essence in us. Let no Theosophist, if he would hold to divine, not human truth, say that this “God in secret” listens to, or is distinct from, either finite man or the infinite essence—for all are one.

As we shall see later, it is interesting to note that in their campaign to discredit him, the critics of C. W. Leadbeater emphasize only Mahatma K.H.’s views on God but not the Mahachohan’s nor Madame Blavatsky’s.

CWL and the Church of England

C. W. Leadbeater was ordained a priest in the Church of England on 21 December 1879 and took residence in the village of Liphook with his mother Emma. At Church he organised several activities for young people. He was also very interested in psychic phenomena and conducted his own investigations in the Scottish Highlands.



CWL as a Curate in the Church of England

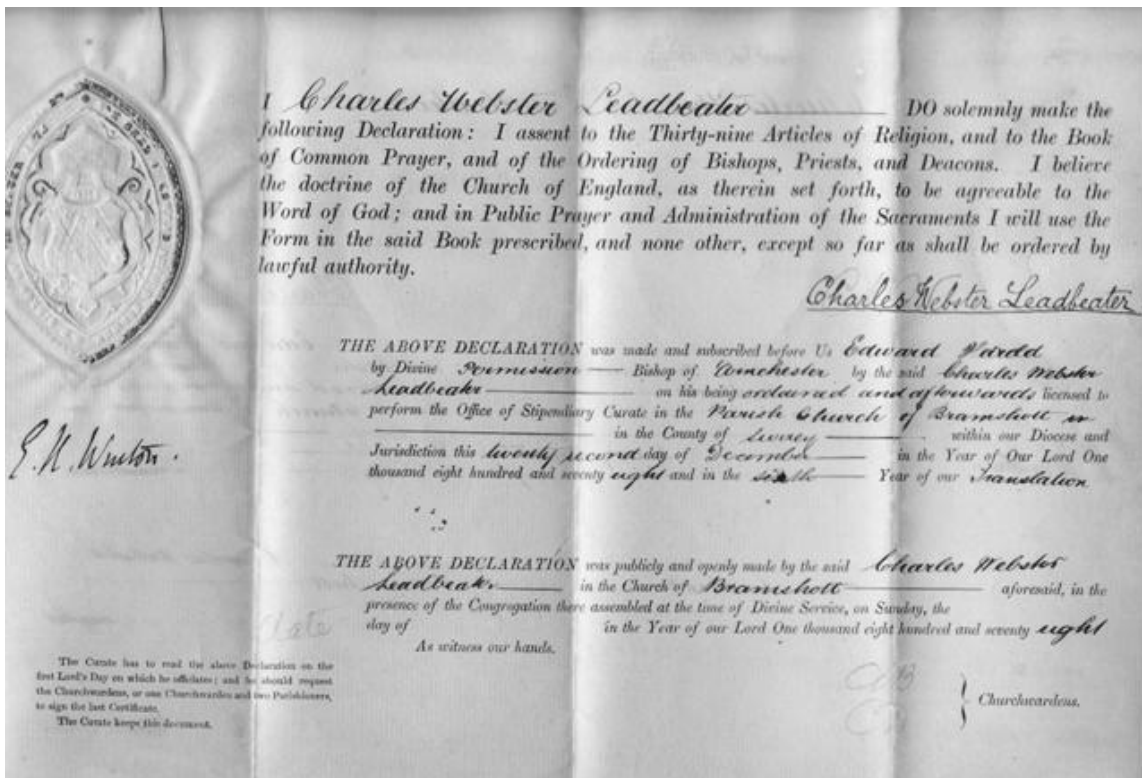
However, before his ordination, he had to sign the following declaration before Edward Harold, Bishop of Winchester, on 22 December 1878:

I, Charles Webster Leadbeater, do solemnly make the following Declaration: I assent to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and to the Book of Common Prayer, and of the Ordering of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. I believe the doctrine of the Church of England, as therein set forth, to be agreeable to the Word of God; and in Public Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments I will use the Form in the said book prescribed, and none other, except so far as shall be ordered by lawful authority.

The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, as presented in the Church of England website, are as follows:

1. Of Faith in the Holy Trinity.
2. Of Christ the Son of God.
3. Of his going down into Hell.
4. Of his Resurrection.
5. Of the Holy Ghost.
6. Of the Sufficiency of the Scriptures.
7. Of the Old Testament.
8. Of the Three Creeds.
9. Of Original or Birth-sin.
10. Of Free-Will.
11. Of Justification.
12. Of Good Works.
13. Of Works before Justification.
14. Of Works of Supererogation.

15. Of Christ alone without Sin.
16. Of Sin after Baptism.
17. Of Predestination and Election.
18. Of obtaining Salvation by Christ.
19. Of the Church.
20. Of the Authority of the Church.
21. Of the Authority of General Councils.
22. Of Purgatory.
23. Of Ministering in the Congregation.
24. Of speaking in the Congregation.
25. Of the Sacraments.
26. Of the Unworthiness of Ministers.
27. Of Baptism.
28. Of the Lord's Supper.
29. Of the Wicked which eat not the Body of Christ.
30. Of both kinds.
31. Of Christ's one Oblation.
32. Of the Marriage of Priests.
33. Of Excommunicate Persons.
34. Of the Traditions of the Church.
35. Of the Homilies.
36. Of Consecrating of Ministers.
37. Of Civil Magistrates.
38. Of Christian men's Goods.
39. Of a Christian man's Oath. The Ratification.



C. W. Leadbeater's Declaration to the Church of England

It is not difficult to see how subscribing to the above Articles puts one completely outside the views – and practices – expressed by Mahatma K.H. in what is known as the famous Letter 10 (Letter 88 in the chronological edition). However, these were the Articles to which CWL, as a Candidate to Holy Orders, assented to in 1878.

Letter from the Mahatma

CWL joined the Theosophical Society in November 1883 after reading A. P. Sinnett's *The Occult World*. In March 1884 he wrote a letter to Master K.H. and sent it to him through the agency of a well-known medium in England, William Eglinton. In his letter he said that 'ever since I had first heard of Theosophy my one desire had been to place myself under Him [Master K.H.] as a pupil'. He did not receive a reply until October of the same year. This was the Master's reply:

Last spring – March the 3rd – you wrote a letter to me and entrusted it to "Ernest". Tho' the paper itself never reached me – nor was it ever likely to, considering the nature of the messenger – its contents have. I did not answer it at the time, but sent you a warning through Upasika.

In that message of yours it was said that, since reading Esot. Bud: and Isis your "one great wish has been to place yourself under me as a chela, that you may learn more of the truth." "I understand from Mr. S." you went on "that it would be almost impossible to become a chela without going out to India". You hoped to be able to do that in a few years, tho' for the present ties of gratitude bind you to remain in this country. Etc.

I now answer the above and your other questions.

[1] It is not necessary that one should be in India during the seven years of probation. A chela can pass them anywhere.

[2] To accept any man as a chela does not depend on my personal will. It can only be the result of one's personal merit and exertions in that direction. Force any one of the "Masters" you may happen to choose; do good works in his name and for the love of mankind; be pure and resolute in the path of righteousness [as laid out in our rules]; be honest and unselfish; forget your Self but to remember the good of other people – and you will have forced that "Master" to accept you.

So much for candidates during the periods of the undisturbed progress of your Society. There is something more to be done, however, when theosophy, the Cause of Truth, is, as at the present moment on its stand for life or death before the tribunal of public opinion – that most flippantly cruel, prejudiced and unjust of all tribunals. There is also the collective karma of the caste you belong to – to be considered. It is undeniable that the cause you have at heart is now suffering owing to the dark intrigues, the base conspiracy of the Christian clergy and missionaries against the Society. They will stop before nothing to ruin the reputation of the Founders. Are you willing to atone for their sins? Then go to Adyar for a few months. "The ties of gratitude" will not be severed, nor even become weakened for an absence of a few months if the step be explained plausibly to your relative. He who would shorten the years of probation has to make sacrifices for theosophy. Pushed by malevolent hands to the very edge of a precipice, the Society needs every man and woman strong in the cause of truth. It is by doing noble actions and not by only determining that they shall

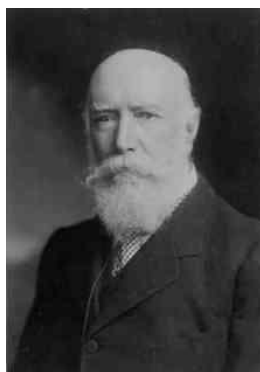
be done that the fruits of the meritorious actions are reaped. Like the “true man” of Carlyle who is not to be seduced by ease – “difficulty, abnegation, martyrdom, death are the allurements that act” during the hours of trial on the heart of a true chela.

‘You ask me – “what rules I must observe during this time of probation, and how soon I might venture to hope that it could begin”. I answer: you have the making of your own future, in your own hands as shown above, and every day you may be weaving its woof. If I were to demand that you should do one thing or the other, instead of simply advising, I would be responsible for every effect that might flow from the step and you acquire but a secondary merit. Think, and you will see that this is true. So cast the lot yourself into the lap of Justice, never fearing but that its response will be absolutely true. Chelaship is an educational as well as probationary stage and the chela alone can determine whether it shall end in adeptship or failure. Chelas from a mistaken idea of our system too often watch and wait for orders, wasting precious time which should be taken up with personal effort. Our cause needs missionaries, devotees, agents, even martyrs perhaps. But it cannot demand of any man to make himself either. So now choose and grasp your own destiny, and may our Lord’s the Tathagata’s memory aid you to decide for the best.

K.H.

(Source: *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, First Series, Edited by C. Jinarajadasa, letter #7)

Among the many interesting passages of this remarkable letter is the statement ‘There is also the collective karma of the caste you belong to – to be considered.’ At that time Christian missionaries in Madras were actively conspiring with the Coulobms, them residing at Adyar, in order to launch a concerted attack against Madame Blavatsky. This process culminated in both parties providing false evidence against HPB to Richard Hodgson, an investigator sent by the Society for Psychical research from London to investigate phenomena at the TS Headquarters at Adyar.



A. P. Sinnett

The passage of the Mahatma’s letter mentioned in the last paragraph clearly indicated that although CWL was a priest in the Church of England, he did come for consideration of Master K.H. in what concerned Chelaship or Discipleship. It is therefore important to review how the Mahatmas view such a concept. (Quotations are from Letter #30, the online edition of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* (Theosophical University Press, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/mahatma/ml-30.htm>.)

Probation and Chelaship

PROBATION; something every chela who does not want to remain simply ornamental, has *nolens volens* to undergo for a more or less prolonged period;

A chela under probation is allowed to think and do whatever he likes. He is warned and told beforehand: you will be tempted and deceived by appearances; two paths will be open before you, both leading to the goal you are trying to attain; one easy, and that will lead you more rapidly to the fulfilment of orders you may receive; the other — more arduous, more long; a path full of stones and thorns that will make you stumble more than once on your way; and, at the end of which you may, perhaps,



Headquarters building, Adyar, Madras, circa 1882

find failure after all and be unable to carry out the orders given for some particular small work, — but, whereas the latter will cause the hardships you have undergone on it to be all carried to the side of your credit in the long run, the former, the easy path, can offer you but a momentary gratification, an easy fulfilment of the task.

...we — leave it to our menials — the *dugpas* at our service, by giving them *carte blanche* for the time being, and with the sole object of drawing out the whole *inner* nature of the chela, most of the nooks and corners of which, would remain dark and

concealed for ever, were not an opportunity afforded to test each of these corners in turn. Whether the chela wins or loses the prize — depends solely of himself.

This seems to be the process that CWL was submitted to for, after receiving Master K.H.'s letter through the mail on 31 October 1884, which was reproduced above, he was to receive on the night of that same day, phenomenically, through the agency of HPB, a second letter from the Master which indicated a new and life-altering development in his life:

Since your intuition led you in the right direction and made you understand that it was my desire you should go to Adyar immediately — I may say more. The sooner you go the better. Do not lose one day more than you can help. Sail on the 5th if possible. Join Upasika at Alexandria. Let no one know you are going and may the blessing of our Lord, and my poor blessing shield you from every evil in your new life.

Greeting to you my new chela.

K. H.

Show my notes to no one.

(Source: *Letters of the Masters of the Wisdom*, First Series, letter #8)

The Clergyman Becomes A Chela

The evidence produced above shows that when The Rev. Charles Webster Leadbeater was accepted as a Chela or Disciple by Mahatma K.H. in 1884 he was still a Priest of the Church of England, having solemnly accepted the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and being the Curate in the Parish of Bramshott, Hampshire, England.

How is one to interpret such a development in the Theosophical Society? Does it contradict the statement in Letter 10 (88 in the chronological edition) regarding God, the priesthood, and the Churches? Or does it show that in spite of that association CWL was found by the Master to be inwardly worthy of such a pivotal step in his spiritual life? Was this the same reason why HPB encouraged and supported him during the seven years of her association with him? Could this be also the reason why T. Subba Row included CWL in the private group in Madras to which he was imparting esoteric instruction?

No one in the long history of the TS, not even Madame Blavatsky, was subjected to such a concerted campaign of fierce and sometimes vitriolic opposition as CWL. He actually inaugurated, within the TS, the 'trial by the press'. And yet, he never stopped working, writing books, articles, travelling, writing hundreds of letters, encouraging many in many countries to study and practice Theosophy.

In his second letter to him Master K.H. may have offered a possible glimpse for such a determined endeavour till the end, against all odds, almost constantly under fire from friend and foe, even now:

... may the blessing of our Lord, and my poor blessing shield you from every evil in your new life.