

A Theosophical Conundrum: Why is Religion Part of the Second Object of the TS?

Compiled by Pedro Oliveira

The attitude of the Theosophical Society (TS) towards religion may be encapsulated in its motto: 'There is no Religion higher than Truth'. Although the Society never identified itself, as an organization, with any religion, a number of its leaders have: Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky (HPB) took the Pañcaśīla (Five Precepts) in Colombo, on 19th May 1880, and thus became Buddhists. Annie Besant, since her arrival in India, in November 1893, became an earnest student of the Hindu tradition and wrote several books about it. She was instrumental in the creation of the Bharata Samaj Puja, a reformed Hindu ceremony which gathered together essential prayers of the Hindu tradition. And the two Mahatmas who inspired the Founders, M. and K.H., declared themselves Buddhists in a famous letter written to A. P. Sinnett. The TS, however, remained non-affiliated with any religion.

One of the objects of this article is to understand why, in view of some statements by the Mahatmas, and also by HPB, religion continued to be part of the second Object of the TS. As we shall see, in some of the statements which were made religion is described as 'two thirds of the evil' existing in the world.

From the Preamble of the By-Laws of the TS

(Adopted on 30th October 1875)

As we can see in this excerpt from the Preamble, the TS was started with a positive attitude towards religion (source: Theosophy Wiki):

They look in vain to the Church for such evidence of immortality as will satisfy the exactions of a fearless reason; in vain to her opponents for an explanation of the preterhuman experiences of mankind, from the earliest periods.

In Europe, we see Materialism gradually encroaching upon the domain of the Church, and even gaining ground among her clergy; the congregations are composed almost exclusively of women; adult males, as a rule, are free-thinkers; the Roman Catholics are losing their political influence; and the whole Christian hierarchy is arraigned at the bar of public opinion by the philosophical scientists, who, in searching after the secrets of mere material nature, have had their own views of a God almost, if not wholly, obscured. Russia, in civilization the youngest of European nations, has just begun, through its Imperial University, a scientific investigation of the spiritualistic phenomena. In Great Britain, the safety of the Established Church is threatened by the non-conforming sects, and all by the principles promulgated by many members of the British Association, who, in indirectly teaching the doctrine of rationalism, strike a fatal blow at an establishment which is based upon simple reactionary faith, and is incapable of appeasing the newly awakened spirit of reasonable inquiry.

In the United States, the rebellion of the public mind against ecclesiastical authority has been comparatively more general than in the parent country, and at the present time, so inconsiderable has the influence of the Protestant Church become, that it may almost be said that the conflict is between the Romanists and the Spiritualists — the former representing the idea of ultramontanism and intolerance; the latter, that of the absolute sovereignty of the

individual in the matter of belief as regards their assumed intercourse with a spirit-world, and, with many, that of unbridled license in the relations of the sexes.

In view of the existing state of things, it will be seen that the Theosophical Society has been organized in the interest of religion, science, and good morals; to aid each according to its needs.

Formulations of the Second Object

Below are the different formulations of the second Object of the Society, approved by its Council, in chronological order (source: Theosophy Wiki):

to make known among Western nations the long-suppressed facts about Oriental religious philosophies, their ethics, chronology, esoterism, symbolism; (1878)

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to counteract, as far as possible, the efforts of missionaries to delude the so-called "Heathen" and "Pagans" as to the real origin and dogmas of Christianity and the practical effects of the latter upon public and private character in so-called civilized countries; (1878)

to disseminate a knowledge of the sublime teachings of that pure esoteric system of the archaic period, which are mirrored in the oldest Vedas, and in the philosophy of Gautama Buddha, Zoroaster and Confucius; (1878)

To oppose and counteract--after due investigation and proof of its irrational nature--bigotry in every form, whether as an intolerant religious sectarianism or belief in miracles or anything supernatural. (1879)

Second — To study [Aryan](#) literature, religion and science, which the Founders believe to contain certain valuable truths and philosophical views, of which the Western world knows nothing. (1881)

2. To promote the study of [Aryan](#) and other Eastern literatures, religions and sciences. (1886)

2. To promote the study of [Aryan](#) and other Eastern literatures, religions, philosophies and sciences, and to demonstrate their importance to Humanity. (1890)

2. To promote the study of [Aryan](#) and other Eastern literatures, religions, philosophies and sciences, and to demonstrate the importance of that study. (1894)

2. To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science. (1896)

Two Statements from *The Mahatma Letters*

For a considerable number of students of Theosophy, the following passage from *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* represents a definitive Theosophical approach to religion: it is seen as a source of evil in the world. Curiously, this seems also the view of well-known militant atheists in the twentieth century, like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. The latter defined religion as 'the root of all evil'. As we shall see later, other Theosophical

leaders see it differently:

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.

(Letter No. 10, transcribed from a copy in Mr. Sinnett's handwriting. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, <https://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/mahatma/ml-10.htm>, TUP Online)

The following is an excerpt from a letter which was dictated to HPB by Mahatma M. and sent to A. P. Sinnett, while he was in India. It is considered to be one of the most controversial of the *Mahatma Letters* collection for it not only reaffirms the Mahatmas' contempt for the idea of God but declares that the gods of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam to be nothing but "Chohans [Lords] of Darkness" which amounts to nullify the spiritual significance of these three religious traditions:

Faith in the Gods and God, and other superstitions attracts millions of foreign influences, living entities and powerful agents around them, with which we would have to use more than ordinary exercise of power to drive them away. We do not choose to do so. We do not find it either necessary or profitable to lose our time waging war to the unprogressed Planetaries who delight in personating gods and sometimes well known characters who have lived on earth. There are Dhyan-Chohans and "Chohans of Darkness," not what they term devils but imperfect "Intelligences" who have never been born on this or any other earth or sphere no more than the "Dhyan Chohans" have and who will never belong to the "builders of the Universe," the pure Planetary Intelligences, who preside at every Manvantara while the Dark Chohans preside at the Pralayas. Explain this to Mr. Sinnett (I can't) — tell him to read over what I said to them in the few things I have explained to Mr. Hume; and let him remember that as all in this universe is contrast (I cannot translate it better) so the light of the Dhyan Chohans and their pure intelligence is contrasted by the "Ma-Mo Chohans" — and their

destructive intelligence. These are the gods the Hindus and Christians and Mahomed and all others of bigoted religions and sects worship; and so long as their influence is upon their devotees we would no more think of associating with or counteracting them in their work than we do the Red-Caps on earth whose evil results we try to palliate but whose work we have no right to meddle with so long as they do not cross our path.

(Letter No. 134, Received Allahabad, November 4, 1881; the “Prayag Letter”, *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, <https://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/mahatma/ml-134.htm>, TUP Online)

The Relationship between the Founders and the Masters

The quotes below address the question of the relationship between the Founders and the Masters:

They had to oppose in the strongest manner possible anything approaching *dogmatic faith and fanaticism* – belief in the *infallibility* of the Masters, or even in the very existence of our invisible Teachers, having to be checked from the first. On the other hand, as a great respect for the private views and creeds of every member was demanded, any Fellow criticising the faith or belief of another Fellow, hurting his feelings, or showing a reprehensible self-assertion, unasked (mutual friendly advices were a duty unless declined) -- such a member incurred expulsion. The greatest spirit of free research untrammelled by anyone or anything, had to be encouraged.

(*The Original Programme of the Theosophical Society* by H. P. Blavatsky, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1974, pp. 5-6.)

Belief in the Masters was never made an article of faith in the T.S. But for its Founders, the commands received from Them when it was established have ever been sacred.

(*Original Programme of the Theosophical Society*, p. 45.)

One or two of us hoped that the world had so far advanced intellectually, if not intuitionally, that the occult doctrine might gain an intellectual acceptance, and the impulse given for a new cycle of occult research. Others — wiser as it would now seem — held differently, but consent was given for the trial. It was stipulated, however, that the experiment should be made independently of our personal management; that there should be no abnormal interference by ourselves. So casting about we found in America the man to stand as leader — a man of great moral courage, unselfish, and having other good qualities. He was far from being the best, but (as Mr. Hume speaks in HPB’s case) — he was the best one available. With him we associated a woman of most exceptional and wonderful endowments. Combined with them she had strong personal defects, but just as she was, there was no second to her living fit for this work. We sent her to America, brought them together — and the trial began. From the first both she and he were given to clearly understand that the issue lay entirely with themselves.

(*Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, <https://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/mahatma/ml-44.htm>, letter 44, TUP Online)

HPB on Religion

Although consistently criticizing the notion of a personal God, HPB seems to have valued, not uncritically, the contribution of different religious traditions, apparently taking a different viewpoint from that of her Teachers on the subject. Below are some of her statements on the subject (all quotations are from *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois, USA):

For, all religions divested of their man-made theologies and superlatively human ecclesiasticism rest on one and the same foundation, converge towards one focus: an ineradicable, congenital belief in an inner Nature reflected in the inner man, its microcosm; on this our earth, we can know of but one Light—the one we see. The Divine Principle, the WHOLE can be manifested to our consciousness, but through Nature and its highest tabernacle—man, in the words of Jesus, the only “temple of God.” Hence, the true theosophist, of whatever religion, rejecting acceptance of, and belief in, an extra-cosmic God, yet accepts this actual existence of a Logos, whether in the Buddhist, Adwaitee, Christian Gnostic or Neo-Platonic esoteric sense, but will bow to no ecclesiastical, orthodox and dogmatic interpretation. (BCW, vol. 5, p. 355)

... all religions and all philosophies are but the variants of the first teachings of the One Wisdom, imparted to men at the beginning of the cycle by the Planetary Spirit?
(BCW vol. 6, p. 331)

All that is grand and noble in Christian theology comes from Neo-Platonism. It is too well-known now to need much repetition that Ammonius Saccas, the God-taught (theodidaktos) and the lover of the truth (philalethes), in establishing his school, made a direct attempt to benefit the world by teaching those portions of the Secret Science that were permitted by its direct guardians to be revealed in those days.‡ The modern movement of our own Theosophical Society was begun on the same principles; for the Neo-Platonic school of Ammonius aimed, as we do, at the reconciliation of all sects and peoples, under the once common faith of the Golden Age, trying to induce the nations to lay aside their contentions—in religious matters at any rate—by proving to them that their various beliefs are all the more or less legitimate children of one common parent, the Wisdom-Religion.
(BCW, vol. 14, p. 305)

Soon after our arrival at Bombay our society began to grow, branches rapidly sprang up, and it became necessary to hold annual conventions of delegates representing the new widely-expanded society Responsive to the President’s call, thirty odd branches sent as their representatives Hindu, Parsi, Buddhist, Mohammedan, Hebrew, and Christian fellows to the first convention at Bombay. The spectacle was unique in Indian history, and provoked wide journalistic comment. At the public meeting in Framji Cowasji Institute the platform was successively occupied by speakers of the above-named religions, who vied with each other in fervent declaration of mutual tolerance and good will, to the accompaniment of tumultuous applause from the audience. Thus the clear note of universal brotherhood was struck and the evangel of religious tolerance declared in a part of the world where previously there had been only sectarian hatred and selfish class egotism. (BCW, vol. 12, p. 305)

It is perhaps necessary, first of all, to say, that the assertion that “Theosophy is not a Religion,” by no means excludes the fact that “Theosophy is Religion” itself. A Religion in the true and only correct sense, is a bond uniting men together—not a particular set of dogmas and beliefs. Now Religion, per se, in its widest meaning is that which binds not only all MEN, but also all BEINGS and all things in the entire Universe into one grand whole. This is our theosophical definition of religion; (BCW, vol. 10, p. 161)

Buddhism and Adwaitism—are as much religions as any theistic system. A “religion” does not necessarily imply the doctrine of a personal God or any kind of God in it. Religion, as every dictionary can show, comes from the Latin word *relegere*, to “bind” or collect together. Thus whether people pursue a common idea with, or without, a deity in it, if they are bound together by the same and one belief in something, that belief is a religion. Theology without the vital warmth of Theosophy is a corpse without life, a dry stick without sap. Theosophy blesses the world; Theology is its curse. Our whole endeavor is to test Theology by the theosophical *experimentum crucis*. (BCW, vol. 5, p. 99)

There is, and can be, but one absolute truth in Kosmos. And little as we, with our present limitations, can understand it in its essence, we still know that if it is absolute it must also be omnipresent and universal; and that in such case, it must be underlying every world-religion—the product of the thought and knowledge of numberless generations of thinking men. Therefore, that a portion of truth, great or small, is found in every religious and philosophical system, and that if we would find it, we have to search for it at the origin and source of every such system, at its roots and first growth, not in its later overgrowth of sects and dogmatism. Our object is not to destroy any religion but rather to help to filter each, thus ridding them of their respective impurities. (BCW, vol. 11, p. 8)

The divine essence permeating nature and being diffused throughout the universe which is infinite, what the *hoi polloi* call the gods, are simply the First Principles . . .*
in other words, the creative and intelligent forces of Nature. It does not follow from the fact that Buddhist philosophers recognize and know the nature of these forces, as well as anyone else, that the Society, as a Society, is Buddhist. In its capacity of an abstract body, the Society does not believe in anything, does not accept anything, and does not teach anything. The Society per se cannot and should not have any one religion. Cults, after all, are merely vehicles, more or less material forms, containing a lesser or greater degree of the essence of Truth, which is One and universal. Theosophy is in principle the spiritual as well as the physical science of that Truth, the very essence of deistic and philosophical research. Visible representative of universal Truth—as all religions and philosophies are contained therein, and as each one of them contains in its turn a portion of that Truth—the Society could be no more sectarian, or have more preference, or partiality, than an anthropological or a geographical society. (BCW, vol. 11, p. 124)

And it [Theosophy] is also the ally of every honest religion—to wit: a religion willing to be judged by the same tests as it applies to the others. Those books, which contain the most self-evident truth, are to it inspired (not revealed). But all books it regards, on account of the human element contained in them, as inferior to the Book of Nature; to read which and

comprehend it correctly, the innate powers of the soul must be highly developed.

(BCW, vol. 2, p. 103)

Like the spectrum in optics, giving multicoloured and various rays, which are yet caused by one and the same sun, so theologies and sacerdotal systems are many. But the Universal religion can only be one, if we accept the real, primitive meaning of the root of that word. We, Theosophists, so accept it; and therefore say: We are all brothers—by the laws of Nature, of birth, and death, as also by the laws of our utter helplessness from birth to death in this world of sorrow and deceptive illusions. Let us, then, love, help, and mutually defend each other against this spirit of deception; and while holding to that which each of us accepts as his ideal of truth and reality—i.e., to the religion which suits each of us best—let us unite ourselves to form a practical ‘nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity WITHOUT DISTINCTION OF RACE, CREED, OR COLOUR.’ ” (BCW, vol. 9, p. 134)

Col. Olcott’s Views on Religion

Henry Steel Olcott presented his views on religion out of his pragmatic personality, a man of wide experience in life, outspoken, and chosen as the President-Founder of the TS. He did not refrain from exercising critical thinking about the subject, but was equally prepared to appreciate the value of religion in human life:

The evolution of the grander from the lower intellectual conception in this graded sequence is now conceded, alike by the scientist and the theologian. This evolution is accompanied by an elimination, for in religion, as in all other departments of thought, the light cannot be seen until the clouds are cleared away. Primitive truth is the light, theologies the clouds; and they are clouds still, though they glitter with all the hues of the spectrum. Fetish worship, animal worship, hero worship, ancestor worship, nature worship, book worship; polytheism, monotheism, theism, deism, atheism, materialism (which includes positivism), agnosticism; the blind adoration of the idol, the blind adoration of the crucible—these are the Alpha and the Omega of human religious thought, the measure of relative spiritual blindness.

All these concepts pass through a single prism—the human mind. And that is why they are so imperfect, so incongruous, and never see the whole light by looking from inside his body outwardly, any more than one can see the clear daylight through a dust-soiled window-glass, or the stars through a smeared reflecting lens. Why? Because the physical senses are adapted only to the things of a physical world, and religion is a transcendentalism. Religious truth is not a thing for physical observation, but one for psychical intuition. One who has not developed this psychical power can never *know* religion as a fact; he can only accept it as a creed, or paint it to himself as an emotional sentimentality. Bigotry is the brand to put upon one; gush that for the other. Back of both, and equally threatening them, is Scepticism.

Like man his religion has its ages; *first*, proclamation, propagandism, martyrdom; *second*, conquest, faith; *third*, neglect, self-criticism; *fourth*, decadence, tenacious formalism; *fifth*, hypocrisy; *sixth*, compromise; *seventh*, decay and extinction. And, like the human race, no religion passes *as a whole* through these stages *seriatim*. A glance at religious history shows us the cropping up of highly heretical schools and sects in each great religion, of which each represents some special departure from primitive orthodoxy, some separate advance along the road towards the final goal that we have sketched out. And also note, as the physician

observes the symptoms of his patient, that history constantly shows in the bitter mutual hatreds of these cliques and sects for each other, the clearest proofs that our postulate is correct when we say—as just now—that Religion can never be really known by the physical brain of the physical man. All these hatreds, bitterness and cruel reprisals of sect for sect, and world's faith for world's faith, show that men mistake the non-essentials for essentials, illusions for realities.

(Applied Theosophy and Other Essays, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1975, pp. 46-48)

So then conceding the plurality of births, and coming back to our argument, we see that even though anyone of us may not have the capacity for acquiring adeptship in this birth, it is still a possibility to acquire it in a succeeding one if we make the beginning we create a cause which will, in due time and in proportion to its original energy, sooner or later, give us adeptship and with it the knowledge of the hidden laws of being, and of the way to break the shackles of matter and obtain Mukti—Emancipation. And the first step in this beginning is to cleanse ourselves from vicious desires and habits, to do away with unreasoning prejudices, dogmatism and intolerance, to try to discover what is essentially fundamental and what is non-essential in the religion one professes, and to live up to the highest ideal of goodness, intelligence, and spiritual-mindedness that one can extract from that religion and from the intuitions of one's own nature. I regard that man as a mad iconoclast who would strike down any religion—especially one of the world's ancient religions—without examining it and giving it credit for its intrinsic truth. I call him a vain enthusiast who would patch up a new Faith out of the ancient Faiths, merely to have his name in the mouths of men. I call him a foolish zealot who would expect to make all men see truth as he sees it, since no two men can even see alike a simple tree or shrub, let alone grasp metaphysical propositions with the same clearness. As for those who go about the world to propagate their peculiar religious belief, without the ability to show its superiority to other beliefs which they would supplant, or to answer without equivocation the fair questions of critics—they are either well-meaning visionaries or presumptuous fools. But mad, or vain, or stupid, as either of these may be, if they are sincere they are personally entitled to the respect that sincerity always commands. Unless the whole world is ready to accept one infallible chief and blindly adopt one creed, the wisest, the only rule must ever be to tolerate in our fellow man that infirmity of judgment which we are ourselves always liable to, and never wholly free from. And that is the declared policy and platform of the Theosophical Society—as you may see by reading the pamphlet containing its Rules and Bye-Laws. It is the broad platform of mutual tolerance and universal brotherhood.

(Applied Theosophy and Other Essays, pp. 72-74)

We profess, in a word, the religion that is embodied in the Golden Rule of Confucius, of Gautama, and of the Founders of nearly all the great religions; and that is preserved for the admiration and reverence of posterity in the Edicts of the good king Asoka on the monoliths and rocks of Hindustan. Following this simple creed, we find no difficulty whatever in living upon terms of perfect peace with the adherent of any creed who will meet us in a reciprocal spirit. If we have been at war with the pretended Christians, it is because they have belied the teachings of Him whom they pretend to call Master, and by every vile and unworthy

subterfuge have tried to oppose the growth of our influence. It is they who war upon us, for defending Hinduism and the other Asiatic religions, not we who war upon them. If they would practise their own precepts we would never use voice or pen against them, for then they would respect the religious feelings of the Hindu, the Pārsī, the Jain, the Jew, the Buddhist and the Musalmān, and deserve our respect in return. But they began with calumny instead of argument, and calumny, I fear, will be their favourite weapon to the bitter end. In comparison with the unmanly conduct of my brawling countryman who lectured here the other day, denouncing the Vedas as filthy abomination and the Theosophists as disreputable adventurers, how sweet and noble was the behaviour of that Muhammadan lawyer who defended Raymond Lully when a Musalmān tribunal was disposed to punish him for trying to propagate his religion in their city. "If you think it a meritorious act, O Muslims, for a Musalmān to try to preach Islam among the heretics, why should we be uncharitable to this Christian whose motive is identical?" I cannot remember the exact words, but that is the sense. The tender voice of Charity spoke by that lawyer's lips, and his words were the echo of the Spirit of truth.

(Applied Theosophy and Other Essays, pp. 78-79)

Annie Besant's View of Religion

Mrs Besant had the capacity to search for the very heart of a subject and to show how such connection could elevate human life. The following quote is an example of her attitude:

There is one Religion — the knowledge of God, and all religions are branches of that stem, the Tree of Life, the roots of which are in heaven while the branches are outspread in the world of men. The heavenly root is the WISDOM — not faith, not belief, not hope, but the knowledge of God which is Eternal Life. From any one of its branches a man may pluck a leaf for the healing of the nations. Let none deny that which to another man is truth, for he may see a truth which others do not see; but let none try to impose his own vision on others, lest he should blind them in forcing them to see what is not in their field of view. There is but one sun, and every energy on our earth is but some form of solar force; as one sun feeds the whole earth, so one Self shines in every heart. There is only one blasphemy — the denial of God in man. There is only one heresy — the heresy of separateness, which says: "I am other than thou, we are not one." We need, for the redemption of the world, more than altruism, noble as that is. We may learn unselfishness, sacrifice, self-surrender, but we do not stand established in the One, until we can say: "There are no others; it is my Self in all". When all men say this, the world will have its Golden Age: when one man says it in life, his presence is a benediction wherever he goes. We are brothers, but more than brothers. Brothers have only a common father; we have a common Self. In all around us, then, let us see the Glory of the Self, and let us remember that to deny the Self in the lowest, is to deny it in ourselves and in God.

(The Brotherhood of Religions, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1919, p. 31)

Views of a Great Adept

One of the important documents in the history of the TS is the one called ‘The Maha-Chohan Letter’, which was not really a letter but a communication from a great Adept to A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume, through Master K.H., when the correspondence with the Mahatmas was taking place. The quotation below comes from that document. It can be seen that the views of the Maha-Chohan differ somewhat from previous excerpts from the Mahatmas’ views on religion:

For as everyone knows, total emancipation from [authority of] the one all pervading power or law called God by the Theists — 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 means for one and the same royal highway to final bliss - Nirvana.

(The Maha-Chohan Letter, *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom 1870-1900*, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1973, p. 5.)

The Second Object and the Spirit of the Theosophical Society

As it was seen earlier, after a number of reformulations, the second Object of the Society, since 1896, has the following wording: ‘To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.’ Since religion was retained as one of the fields of study in that Object it may be useful to enquire why that happened.

The first point to consider is that, from the evidence provided in their letters, the Masters did not expect their views to become official views in the TS, although their teachings did influence a number of individuals, both in the early days of the Society until now, particularly in drawing attention to what is the essential work before the Society: Universal Brotherhood without distinctions.

Col. Olcott and HPB certainly had different views about religion, judging by the quotes presented in this article, but as leaders of the Society they, together with the TS General Council, they decided to keep the study comparative religion as part of the second Object. And the reason for this is clear and its stated in the Preamble to the By-Laws of the TS in 1875:

Whatever may be the private opinions of its members, the society has no dogmas to enforce, no creed to disseminate. It is formed neither as a Spiritualistic schism, nor to serve as the foe or friend of any sectarian or philosophic body. Its only axiom is the omnipotence of truth, its only creed a profession of unqualified devotion to its discovery and propagation. In considering the qualifications of applicants for membership, it knows neither race, sex, color, country, nor creed.

Although the Society has no creed, its membership is open to individuals of any creed. Another important point in this regard was mentioned by HPB in her book *The Key to Theosophy*, Section 1: 'Theosophy is not Buddhism'. Although embraced by the Founders and the Mahatmas, Buddhism did not become a creed nor an ideology in the TS, although a number of members around the world feel drawn towards its teachings.

Coming back to the motto of the TS, 'There is no Religion higher than Truth'. One of its implications may be that religious traditions, for various reasons, fall short of encouraging a genuine search for Truth and may become entrenched in belief. Therefore, in its second Object, the TS encourages the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science, almost like suggesting that these three fields of investigation could perhaps be seen as in a dialogue with each other. An enquiring mind goes much beyond belief and acceptance of creeds or philosophical concepts, and finds the truth hidden in ageless teachings in many traditions.

The original Sanskrit wording of the TS motto is *satyān nāsti paro dharmah*. A spirit of enquiry is part of the very dharma of the Theosophical Society for it is not a belief-based organization but an enquiry-based one. And that seems to be spirit of its second Object.