

# The Making of an Avatar

## Examining Adyar's Attempt to Fabricate the Return of Christ

by Carlos Cardoso Aveline

“Night before last I was shown a bird’s-eye view of the Theosophical Societies. I saw a few earnest, reliable Theosophists in a death-struggle with the world in general, and with other — nominal but ambitious — Theosophists.”

[ H. P. Blavatsky in a letter to William Q. Judge<sup>1</sup>]

Error is doomed to imitate truth, and real Theosophy has always been surrounded by a host of often brilliant or spectacular forms of pseudo-theosophy. One significant example of this occult law can be found in the creation of a *theosophical cult* around the personality of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986). Even now the *Krishnamurtian* creed still subsists, although in a rather quiet way, and Mrs. Radha Burnier — the president of the Adyar Theosophical Society since 1980 — is one of its staunchest leaders.

Krishnamurti was 14 years old when he was “discovered” in Adyar by a clairvoyant of lower Iddhis, Mr. C. W. Leadbeater. By then, both Annie Besant and Leadbeater used to have long imaginary conversations with some kind of “Lord Christ”. Soon after the “discovery”, the boy was officially presented to the world as being a high initiate and future avatar — the vehicle for the second coming of “Lord Christ” himself.

It is true that, with regard to the expected return of Christ, H.P. Blavatsky had explained, in plain words:

Two things become evident *to all* (...): (a) “the coming of Christ,” means *the presence of CHRISTOS* in a regenerated world, and not at all the actual coming in body of “Christ” Jesus; (b) this Christ is to be sought neither in the wilderness nor “in the inner chambers,” nor in the sanctuary of any temple or church built by man; for Christ — the true esoteric SAVIOUR — *is no man*, but the DIVINE PRINCIPLE in every human being. He who strives to resurrect the Spirit *crucified in him by his own terrestrial passions*, and buried deep in the “sepulchre” of his sinful flesh; he who has the strength to roll back *the stone of matter* from the door of his own *inner* sanctuary, he *has the risen Christ in him*. (“For ye are the temple of the living God” (II *Cor.*, vi, 16)).<sup>2</sup>

In this as in other occasions, HPB’s words had been most clear. Yet, as the popular saying goes, “there is no one so blind as they that won’t see”. The Adyar leaders were so busy fabricating Lord Christ that they did not have time to take real Theosophy into consideration.

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in *The Friendly Philosopher*, Robert Crosbie, Theosophy Co., Los Angeles, 1945, p.389.

<sup>2</sup>“The Esoteric Character of the Gospels”, by HPB, in *The Collected Writings of Helena P. Blavatsky*, TPH, Adyar, volume VIII, p.173.

A “Liberal Catholic Church” was then organized to serve as a “vehicle” for Krishnamurti, the Christ. The Order of the Star was to be the main messianic organization. The Adyar Theosophical Society and Esoteric School were transformed in auxiliary instruments for the Adventist experiment. The new Master’s catechism was to be the little book *At the Feet of the Master*, cleverly written by Leadbeater but presented as being the result of instructions of an Adept-Teacher to Krishnamurti, who then supposedly had taken notes.

Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti’s close friend and main biographer, reports in Chapter One of her book *The Life and Death of Krishnamurti* that the would-be notes and originals written by Krishnamurti “disappeared”. The only originals anyone ever saw of that devotional booklet were the ones typewritten by C. W. Leadbeater. Once Krishnamurti reached adulthood, he denied being the author of *At the Feet of the Master*. The booklet was never included among Krishnamurti’s works. Krishnamurti Foundations do not sell it. Yet its “authorship” is still nominally ascribed by Adyar publishers to “Alcyone”, which is the pseudonym created by Leadbeater for Krishnamurti in his phantasy-book *The Lives of Alcyone*.

Written in Leadbeater’s unmistakable style, *At the Feet of the Master* repeats many of his misconceptions about the spiritual path. The false authorship of this little book is one of the leading literary frauds in the long career of “Bishop” Leadbeater. Since its first edition, the booklet has been put in a very special place by members of the Adyar TS. Thousands of theosophists still believe in the authenticity of such a book. Few of them have read the testimony given by the former international secretary of the Adyar Society, Ernest Wood, who for long years was a personal assistant to C. W. Leadbeater. In his autobiographical book, Wood relates the story of a distinguished young Adyar Theosophist, Mr. Subrahmanyam. In 1910-1911 Subrahmanyam happened to be the witness of a revealing conversation between young Krishnamurti and his father. Questioned in Subrahmanyam’s presence about the authorship of *At The Feet of the Master*, Krishnamurti answered to his father, in Telugu language: “The book is not mine; they fathered it on me.”

Deeply surprised, Subrahmanyam related the dialogue to his close friend Wood. “Bad news run fast”, according to a popular saying. As soon as the all-powerful Annie Besant was informed of the fact, she called Subrahmanyam to her presidential office. Mrs. Besant told him that it was simply “not possible” that Krishnamurti had ever said such a thing. She then presented Subrahmanyam with the alternative of “immediate recantation — or banishment from Adyar”.

Unfit to live in a world of “officially idealized fancies”, Subrahmanyam resisted the pressure. He did not recant and, therefore, had to leave Adyar at once and for good. He returned to his native town, and Wood reports that, for some reason, Subrahmanyam — “died there shortly afterwards, while still himself little more than a boy”.<sup>3</sup>

Since its appearance in 1910, the best-selling booklet *At the Feet of the Master* was a great and spectacular event. Its success gave strength to the creation of the messianic organization “Order of the Star in the East”. From the viewpoint of Mrs. Besant, the creation of a new Messiah could never be disturbed by such uncomfortable facts like that dialogue witnessed by Subrahmanyam. The mere idea that a young boy had written a ‘grown-up text’ was used and presented as a ‘phenomenon’ in itself. It was something “quite extraordinary”. It seemed to be a hard evidence that Christ/Maitreya had indeed decided to come back. All that people had to do was to *believe* in the pyrotechnic display of imaginary wonders.

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<sup>3</sup>*Is This Theosophy?*, Ernest Wood, London: Rider & Co., 1936, Paternost House, E.C., reprinted by Kessinger Publishing LLC, MT, USA, 318 pp., see p.163.

Ernest E. Wood writes about the “Order of the Star”, which was rapidly growing worldwide:

Thousands of the members of the Theosophical Society flung themselves into the new movement. Some held aloof, among them myself. Some few criticized it on various grounds. One or two pronounced the opinion that Krishnamurti did not know enough English to write the sentences in the book. I quite agreed with them, but I explained the difficulty away to myself by saying that the preface announced that Krishnamurti had not written it himself — they were the words of the Master. Still the difficulty remained that Krishnamurti could not have linked the sentences together and punctuated them so well. Nor could he have written the preface, in my opinion. These problems I left in suspense. We could very well wait to see if the Teacher came.<sup>4</sup>

Ernest Wood found that the book was too simple and too narrow to have such an importance as a social event. Wood narrates a frank conversation he had with Leadbeater:

I delivered my opinion — a delightful little book, but extremely simple. Would the instructions contained in it be sufficient to bring one to the “Path proper,” to the First Initiation, which Mrs. Besant had described in her book? Yes, said Mr. Leadbeater, more than that, if completely carried out these instructions would lead one to Adeptship itself.

Here Leadbeater spoke as if he were a great sage. Self-important fancies were so strong in Adyar that some years later, in 1925, Annie Besant would announce a most remarkable fact: she herself, as well as C.W. Leadbeater, J. Krishnamurti, George Arundale and others, had all achieved Adepthood and were now “Masters and Initiates of the fifth circle”. For some reason, though, soon after that announcement it became obvious that Besant had lost both her mind and her balance, as duly reported by Mary Lutyens and Ernest Wood.

Mr. Wood goes on describing his conversation with Leadbeater:

I remarked that there were one or two curious things about the manuscript. It was very much in Mr. Leadbeater’s own style, and there were some sentences which were exactly the same as in a book of his which we had already prepared for the press. He told me that he wished indeed that he might have been able to write such a book himself. As to the sentences I mentioned, he had usually been present when Krishnamurti was being taught in his astral body by the Master; he remembered these points . . . .<sup>5</sup>

Leadbeater explained everything away. As to Annie Besant, Wood reports that she herself decided for the title *At the Feet of the Master*. Of course, at that age, Krishnamurti was not very interested in books or in writing. All he was expected to do was to play the outer role of a young Initiate and future Messiah. On the other hand, what the booklet says is also very different from the teachings of the Masters. Ms. Jean Overton Fuller, an English theosophist, reports on a talk to Ms. Lutyens:

I talked with Mary Lutyens about this. She inclined to think the composition was very largely Leadbeater’s.<sup>6</sup>

The content of the booklet confirms that idea. In *At the Feet of the Master* the word "God" is used a number of times. “God has a plan”, says the booklet. “If [anyone] is on God’s side he is one with us”, it

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<sup>4</sup>*Is This Theosophy?*, see p.162.

<sup>5</sup>*Is This Theosophy?*, see p.161.

<sup>6</sup>*Krishnamurti and the Wind*, by Jean Overton Fuller, The Theosophical Publishing House, London, 2003, 300 pp., see p.23.

insists. Its author says: “For *you* are God, and you will only what God wills”.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in the foreword, Krishnamurti is made to say: “These are not my words; they are the words of the Master who taught me.”

It is worth examining what the very same Master who according to Leadbeater dictated the booklet to Krishnamurti had to say about God, in his famous Letter 10 in *The Mahatma Letters*. The real Adept said:

Neither our philosophy nor ourselves believe in a God, least of all in one whose pronoun necessitates a capital H.<sup>8</sup>

Leadbeater — the undercover author of the booklet — makes his imaginary Master say, “listen to His voice, which is *your* voice” (p.9). On the other hand, the real Adept teaches:

A constant sense of abject dependence upon a Deity which he regards as the sole source of power makes a man lose all self-reliance and the spurs to activity and initiative. Having begun by creating a father and guide unto himself, he becomes like a boy and remains so to his old age, expecting to be led by the hand on the smallest as well as the greatest events of life.<sup>9</sup>

Leadbeater makes his “Master” say: “God is Wisdom as well as Love; and the more wisdom you have the more you can manifest of Him” (p.12). Whereas in the *ML* Letter 134 (the Prayag Letter) one reads this from a Mahatma:

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.<sup>10</sup>

The Master thus explains that Adepts can hardly get near persons who believe in superstitions like “Gods and God”. Why such a deep contrast between the two viewpoints? In fact, C.W. Leadbeater — Krishnamurti’s teacher — had failed in discipleship soon after being put on probation in the 1880s. As a result, later on, he was never admitted to HPB’s Esoteric School as long as she lived.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>*At the Feet of the Master*, by Alcyone, The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, IL, USA, Pocketbook edition, 1984, 32 pp. See p.9.

<sup>8</sup>*The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, T.U.P., Pasadena, CA, USA, 1992, 494 pp., see Letter X, p.52. The quotation is in the opening lines of the letter. In the Chronological Edition of *The Mahatma Letters* (TPH Philippines), it corresponds to Letter 88.

<sup>9</sup>*Letters From the Masters of the Wisdom*, 1870-1900, First Series, transcribed by C. Jinarajadasa, TPH, Adyar, Madras (Chennai), India, 1973, see Letter 43, p.95.

<sup>10</sup>*The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, T.U.P., Letter CXXXIV, p.462. In the Chronological edition, Philippines, Letter 30, p.95.

<sup>11</sup>Living once more in London after several years in Asia, instead of having access to HPB’s Esoteric School, Leadbeater joined the “Inner Group” of Mr. Alfred P. Sinnett, as Sinnett says in his *Autobiography* (Theosophical History Center, London, 1986, 65 pp.). It was in that group that Leadbeater developed his lower siddhis, during mesmeric and mediumnistic sessions in which they talked to false Adepts. By that time, Sinnett’s group was already inimical to HPB’s work. After HPB’s death, it did not take a long time for Annie Besant to join that group of deluded people, which she actually did in 1894. Coincidence or not, in the same year the persecution against William Q. Judge, who was loyal to HPB, started.

As to the “God issue”, it is no mere question of “personal opinion”. It is linked to a technical and practical matter of decisive importance in occult learning. Belief in an all-powerful God — just as adoring imaginary Adepts of “unlimited power” — is an essential article in the idealized version of discipleship which Annie Besant and Mr. Leadbeater created in their messianic attempt. According to them, individual autonomy is to be entirely left aside “out of devotion”. In this, as in other aspects, they thought very much like Vatican priests.

Issue by issue, *At The Feet of the Master* contradicts real Theosophy. The booklet says, for instance, that an extreme physical cleanliness is of great “occult” importance. Leadbeater was slightly obsessive about that, and in *At the Feet of the Master* the following recommendation is made to all aspirants to discipleship:

The body is your animal — the horse upon which you ride. Therefore (. . .) you must feed it properly on pure food and drink only, and keep it strictly clean always, even from the minutest speck of dirt. For without a perfectly clean and healthy body you cannot do the arduous work of preparation, you cannot bear its ceaseless strain.<sup>12</sup>

Let us remember the words “strictly clean always” as we see what the Masters themselves say about personal hygiene at the physical plane. In *The Mahatma Letters*, an Adept explains to Mr. Sinnett:

Our best, most learned, and holiest adepts are of the races of the “greasy Tibetans”; and the Penjabi Singhs — you know the lion is proverbially a dirty and offensive beast, despite his strength and courage.<sup>13</sup>

The word ‘Singh’ as used here is a mystical/symbolical name used by the same Mahatma who writes the letter. The metaphorical identity between the Mahatma and ‘lions’ comes from the fact that in Sanskrit the word ‘Singh’ means ‘lion’.

From this we may conclude that eastern Adepts can often be physically “greasy” and “dirty”. Their regular disciples sometimes even refuse to present themselves in clean clothes, as the Mahatma narrates in the same letter. In fact, one of his chelas emphatically refused to deliver a letter to Alfred Sinnett, the reason being that HPB had simply asked him to present himself with a “cleaner personal appearance”, in order not to offend Mr. Sinnett’s *western prejudices* against “dirty people”. The Master explains to Sinnett that the young disciple would not accept acting like the chelas of illegitimate and rival sects, which do recommend physical cleanliness (see p.16 in TUP edition).

The episode shows that both Masters and disciples pay scarce attention to the question of physical cleanliness or dirtiness. It also shows that a true Master entirely preserves the autonomy of a disciple, who is therefore entitled to have and to keep *his own prejudices against physical cleanliness*. In the same letter, besides admitting his chela’s mistake, the Master also offers a Western example of “saintly resistance” against physical cleanliness:

Prejudice and dead letter again. For over a thousand years, — says Michelet, — the Christian Saints never washed themselves!<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>*At The Feet of the Master*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>13</sup>*The Mahatma Letters*, TUP, see Letter IV, first paragraph, pp.15-16. In the Chronological Edition (Philippines TPH), Letter 5.

<sup>14</sup>Letter IV, p.16.

What is the real reason, then — one may ask — for Leadbeater to recommend such an “occult phobia” against any physical dirtiness? In his essay “Totem And Taboo”, Sigmund Freud offers us a psychiatric explanation. Such a phobia, Freud says, is connected to compulsive neurosis: “The most common of these obsessive acts is washing with water (washing obsession).”<sup>15</sup>

In reality, discipleship or esoteric learning is an inner process which not only preserves but enhances the learner’s autonomy; and this is quite the opposite of what one can find in *At the Feet of the Master* and other books dating from the Besant period.

According to most Adyar authors, the would-be disciple should develop a total and automatic obedience to the supposed Master. This, they say, must be done out of devotion. Such in fact is the *blind-obedience principle* of “doing whatever the Master wants”. Of course, the idea has been most convenient to Adyar leaders, who place themselves as “intermediaries” between imaginary Masters and the rest of the movement, and thus concentrate every power in their own hands.

Up to the early 1950s, direct “orders” coming from supposed Masters were received through the leaders of the Adyar TS and its esoteric school. The system operated until C. Jinarajadasa’s time. It formally stopped with N. Sri Ram by 1953, yet power has since then remained concentrated in the hands of the international presidents and “heads” of the esoteric school, who, according to custom, must be implicitly treated as Popes by the rest of Adyar members — since they behave as “occult representatives of the Masters”.

In *At the Feet of the Master*, as in many other works by Besant and Leadbeater, one can read a direct recommendation of devotional blind obedience:

When you become a pupil of the Master, you may always try the truth of your thought by laying it beside His. For the pupil is one with his Master, and he needs only to put back his thought into the Master’s thought to see at once whether it agrees. If it does not, it is wrong, and he changes it instantly, for the Master’s thought is perfect, because He knows all. Those who are not yet accepted by Him cannot do quite this; but they may greatly help themselves by stopping often to think: “What would the Master think about this? What would the Master say or do under these circumstances?” For you must never do or say or think what you cannot imagine the Master as doing or saying or thinking.<sup>16</sup>

The false assumptions in the quotation above deserve some examination.

- First, the text supposes that a disciple is able to fully understand his Master’s consciousness and thoughts. The absurd idea is that there is no difference, in *mental horizons* or in *karma*, between an Adept and his poor, ignorant disciple.
- Second, the text supposes that a disciple should mimic his Master trying to imitate his thoughts, his words and actions. In reality, since master and disciple are two different beings who have widely different amounts of wisdom, they must inevitably think, speak and act in different ways, if they are true to themselves.
- This would-be student totally renounces thinking for himself, or being responsible for his own life and actions. He hides behind that which he fancies to be his Master’s thoughts. Of course, in

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<sup>15</sup>*Totem and Taboo — Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, by Sigmund Freud, Dover Thrift Editions, Dover Publications, Inc., Mineola, New York, USA, 1998, 138 pp., see p.25.

<sup>16</sup>*At The Feet of the Master*, pp.13-14.

order to make “discipleship” easier, such “thoughts from the Masters” will be implicitly or explicitly “transmitted” to him by the popish Adyar authorities. It is enough for him to “believe”.

Things are much deeper than that in esoteric philosophy, and more democratic, too. True, students can’t compare their individual thoughts to the *individual* thoughts of any Adept. On the other hand, they can easily compare their views about discipleship to the general teachings of the Masters on the same subject, as they are safely recorded in the *Mahatma Letters* and elsewhere.

Such a comparative study is a revealing if not revolutionary experience. What the Masters actually teach about discipleship is absolutely antithetic to what one sees in *At The Feet of the Master* and — *alas* — in many other “later time” writings. As early as 1882, the Masters were directly fighting the “blind obedience heresy”, which can also be called the “mental laziness principle” of mechanical, if not mediumnistic, obedience to an imaginary Master. An Adept of the Himalayas wrote:

The objections of last year are creeping out also, you have a letter from me in which I explain *why* we never *guide* our chelas (the most advanced even); nor do we forewarn them leaving the effects produced by causes of their own creation to teach them better experience. Please bear in mind that particular letter. Before the cycle ends every misconception ought to be swept away. I trust in and rely upon you to clear them entirely in the minds of the Prayag Fellows.<sup>17</sup>

This central pedagogical *Principle of the Autonomy of the Learner* is scattered all over HPB/Masters writings. In the *Letters from The Masters of the Wisdom*, for instance, one reads this appeal made by a Mahatma to a certain lady of altruistic intentions:

You have offered yourself for the Red Cross; but, Sister, there are sicknesses and wounds of the Soul that no Surgeon’s art can cure. Shall you help us teach mankind that the soul-sick must heal themselves?<sup>18</sup>

Conscious individual responsibility before Life is the basic and fundamental condition for any student of Theosophy, if he wants to have a reasonable amount of success in his endeavours. The same applies to lay disciples and aspirants to lay discipleship.

Although the 20<sup>th</sup> century messianic attempt made by Adyar leaders and “bishops” clearly failed as a project, its false notions and unconscious attachment to *comfortable illusions* still intoxicate minds and hearts of theosophists, worldwide. Related mayavic trends influence many who are *not* situated within the Adyar TS itself. Both truth and illusions are implicitly and thoughtlessly shared by several theosophical groups, at an occult level. Even now the majority of nominal theosophists indirectly accept and thus are limited by the same “avatic” and clairvoyant assumptions and delusions created in the first three decades of last century. This is one of the reasons why the motto of every true theosophist must be, as H.P. Blavatsky states in *Isis* —

“I accept *unreservedly* the views of no man, living or dead”.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>*The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, TUP, Letter LXXII, p.374. In the Chronological Edition (TPH Philippines), this is Letter 95, p.333.

<sup>18</sup>*Letters From the Masters of the Wisdom*, transcribed by C. Jinarajadasa, TPH, Adyar, India, second edition, 1973, see Letter 72, p.129.

<sup>19</sup>*Isis Unveiled*, H. P. Blavatsky, Theosophy Company, Los Angeles, vol. I, P.x.

