

THE ASS IN THE LION'S SKIN

The Relation Of The Old Catholic Church

To

Theosophy And The Theosophical Society

BY

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A Fable From Aesop

An Ass, having put on a Lion's Skin, roamed about frightening all the silly animals he met with, and seeing a Fox, he tried to alarm him also. But Reynard, having heard his voice, said, "Well, to be sure! And I should have been frightened too, if I had not heard you bray."

The Future of the Theosophical Society (From "The Key to Theosophy," by H.P. Blavatsky)

Its future will depend almost entirely upon the degree of selflessness, earnestness, devotion, and last, but not least, on the amount of knowledge and wisdom possessed by those members, on whom it will fall to carry on the work, and to direct the Society after the death of the Founders.

I do not refer to technical knowledge of the esoteric doctrine, though that is most important; I spoke rather of the great need which our successors in the guidance of the Society will have of unbiased and clear judgment. Every such attempt as the Theosophical Society has hitherto ended in failure, because, sooner or later, it has degenerated into a sect, set up hard-and-fast dogmas of its own, and so lost by imperceptible degrees that vitality which living truth alone can impart. You must remember that all our members have been bred and born in some creed or religion, that all are more or less of their generation both physically and mentally, and consequently that their judgment is but too likely to be warped and unconsciously biased by some or all of these influences. If, then, they cannot be freed from such inherent bias, or at least taught to recognize it instantly and so avoid being led away by it, the result can only be that the Society will drift off onto some sandbank of thought or another, and there remain a stranded carcass to molder and die.

KARMA

From "Key to Theosophy," by H.P. Blavatsky

We believe neither in vicarious atonement, nor in the possibility of the remission of the smallest sin by any god, not even by a "personal Absolute" or "Infinite," if such a thing could have any existence. What we believe in, is strict and impartial justice. Our idea of the unknown Universal Deity, represented by Karma, is that it is a Power which cannot fail, and can, therefore, have neither wrath nor mercy, only absolute Equity, which leaves every cause, great or small, to work out its inevitable effects.

The Ass in the Lion's Skin.

By H. N. Stokes, F.T.S.

Having for some time observed the flirtation going on between the Old Catholic Church and the Theosophical Society, I am reminded of nothing so much as of Aesop's fable of the Ass in the Lion's Skin. The camouflage was tolerably effective until the ass attempted to roar. The ass is a very respectable animal and as churches go, the Old Catholic Church is a very respectable church. I have not the least desire to reflect on the ass by the comparison—nor on the church. But when the Old Catholic Church dresses itself in the theosophical lion's skin—it is but skin, for there is none of the lion inside of it—and parades before theosophists, those who know what the true theosophical roar is, those who know the voice of the Master, are not likely to be deceived when it opens its mouth and emits—the Mass.

The reason that it is possible to delude so many members of the Theosophical Society into thinking that the animal inside the skin is really a theosophical lion is due to a variety of causes. Membership in the Society has been increased largely by sensational methods of propaganda. Its public lectures and propaganda literature appeal largely to those who are interested in the psychic and in the invisible world, and who are ready to accept as truth the so-called revelations of any clairvoyant, especially when endorsed by Adyar. What the clairvoyant-in-chief says goes, without the least regard to sense, or to its consistency with the fundamental principles taught by the Masters, or laid down by the founders of the Society. If it disagrees with those principles, so much the worse for the principles—they are simply ignored, and a shout goes up for a new teacher. Another reason is the craving for devotional excitement, natural enough, and quite justifiable when it is controlled by reason and by a true understanding of the meaning of devotion, by a real effort to realize that devotion means service, that it means sacrifice, not sacrament, but which is quite likely, especially among women, to run off into all sorts of vagaries. The instinct for devotion has its own justification, but between devotion to a Hindu boy instigated by a clairvoyant, and devotion to a pet poodle, dictated by the heart, the latter is decidedly to be preferred and is not likely to lead to misconceptions.

These conditions, combined with the almost entire neglect of the study of real Theosophy and of the duties devolving on a theosophist, have afforded just the opportunity for the animal parading in the theosophical skin to carry on his operations.

It is claimed that the Old Catholic Church is not carrying on a propaganda in the Theosophical Society. Bishop Wedgwood, in the September, 1917,

Messenger, says: "Members of the Theosophical Society are not solicited to join this movement."

The agent of the Old Catholic Church located on the theosophical premises known as "Krotona" says, in *Publicity Leaflet No. 1*, issued from Krotona, "The Old Catholic Church is not a proselyting church, but, on the other hand, it places no obstacles in the way of those who desire formally to unite with it."

Just how far it is true that the Old Catholic Church is not fishing in the theosophical pond will be seen from the following. It is just as true that it does not solicit membership in the Theosophical Society as it is true that I am not fishing when I hang a worm on a hook in the water. I do not solicit the fish to bite. I only "place no obstacles in the way of" those fish who "desire formally to unite with" the worm. The Old Catholic Church hangs its bait everywhere in the Theosophical Society and has the face to say it is not proselyting!

What is the meaning of the Old Catholic pabulum which is constantly put before members in the official organs of the Society, not only in Mr. Warrington's organ, *The Messenger*, but in Mrs. Besant's organ, *The Theosophist*, to say nothing of others? What is the meaning of the statement in another of Mrs. Besant's organs, *The Adyar Bulletin* (Feb., 1918, page 40), that the Theosophical Society "has given birth to the Old Catholic Church," when that church itself claims an apostolic pedigree?

Why did the President of the American Section of the Theosophical Society escort a bishop of the Old Catholic Church over the country last autumn and have him lecture in theosophical lodge rooms and in public, under the auspices of the Society, and parade in the lion's skin before his audiences? Why was he invited to perform Mass at Chicago, at the Convention in New York? Was Mr. Warrington taking him about like a performing bear, for the amusement of his listeners, or just for their "information," as I might hang the bait in the water for the "information" of the fish?

Why has an Old Catholic Church been established on the premises at Krotona, on property purchased with the understanding that it was to be devoted to theosophical uses, and which has been largely paid for by cash contributions from members with this understanding?

Why is Mass regularly performed on the premises at Krotona?

Why is the Assistant Publicity Director of the American Section a priest of the Old Catholic Church?

Why is Old Catholic literature issued by this same gentleman, under his title "Priest in charge," with the heading "Krotona," thus giving the impression to members and others that it is specially endorsed by the Section?

Why is it attempted to hoodwink members who become too inquisitive with the excuse, “Oh, we are just renting accommodations to the Old Catholic Church?” Does any one suppose that a business or other irrelevant concern to which space had been rented would be allowed to print “Headquarters of the Theosophical Society” on its letterheads? For that is just what “Krotona” stands for in the minds of most members, and for nothing else. It is an endorsement of whatever is written under it.

In short, why is there every evidence of the existence of a “ring” within the Theosophical Society, which is clearly dominated by the Old Catholic Church and which proposes to use its powers for furthering the interests of that church?

Let us suppose that Mr. Warrington had traveled about with a bishop of the Church of Rome, had had him address lodges on Roman Catholicism and perform Mass at theosophical meetings or on theosophical premises? Suppose that the Assistant Publicity Director was a Roman Catholic priest, who issued Roman Catholic tracts from the headquarters once sacred to Theosophy? Imagine that a Roman Catholic Church was established at Krotona and that many of the theosophists there had been baptized into it? Suppose that Mass was regularly said at theosophical headquarters, that is, at Krotona, by a Roman Catholic priest, regularly ordained on the spot by a Roman Catholic bishop?

Would any one believe for a moment that the Roman Catholic Church was not proselyting within the T. S., not secretly, but with the connivance of officials elected to protect and further Theosophy? They would not, and they would very properly denounce any statement to the contrary as a lie.

Whether Old Catholic or Roman Catholic is a matter of little practical importance in this connection. The question is not whether the Old Catholic Church is or is not openly or secretly subject to the Pope at Rome, or whether its claim to apostolic lineage is justified. That it calls itself a church of religious liberty and that it “welcomes to its membership those who are still earnestly *seeking* truth” are statements which may be admitted without dispute. We are not in the least concerned with any of these things, but we are concerned with the question whether its teachings are essentially those of the Church of Rome, and if so whether they are consistent with the teachings of Theosophy. We are concerned with the question whether Adyar or Krotona is foisting a good imitation of Romanism on the members.

If any one wants to know what the Old Catholic Church teaches, let him read the recent writings of Bishop Leadbeater, and the “Liturgy of the Holy Mass,” issued by the Book Concern at Krotona (for “information!”), and

certified by Bishop Wedgwood as authentic and authorized. Can you find in any of the teachings of the Masters imparted to the Founders of the Theosophical Society and communicated by them to the world a single reference endorsing “the wonderful grace and virtue declared in holy Mary, the ever-virgin Mother,” the immaculate conception, the Apostles’ creed, the absolution and remission of sin by the Lord at the request of a priest, the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine, and a hundred other things in this remarkable document? Whether one prefers these crossings and bowings and genuflections to the methods of dancing dervishes or Holy Rollers for securing divine attention is doubtless largely a matter of taste. I do not doubt that he who devoutly dances, or rolls on the ground, or stands on his head as a matter of sacrament will derive from his gymnastics whatever good there is in a sacrament, but it is an insult to the Higher Powers to imagine that they will be pleased by such performances. The whole ritual of the Mass as endorsed by Bishop Wedgwood assumes that the Almighty is a sort of Hindu Maharaja, who delights in adoration and flattery and who sprinkles his favors on those who shout his praises loud enough, and so liberally that they slop over on everybody for miles around. It is a flat denial of the command of Christ, “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.” “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” And yet it is hinted about that this same Christ, as the Lord Maitreya, is soon to appear again and that he will be the head of the Old Catholic Church and tolerate these exhibitions! And today Theosophy is being so prostituted as to use it as justification for these things. It is claimed that they rest on clairvoyant evidence, and the theosophical reputation of the official clairvoyant—Bishop Leadbeater—is the lion’s skin which is being used to deceive those who would never otherwise think of listening to them.

Read the writings of that old theosophical lion, H. P. B., read *Light on the Path*, a direct communication from one of the Masters, and you will not only not find a line in support of these methods of lip service, of artificial stimulation of the emotions, but you will find everything against them. Compare the fundamental principle of Theosophy, the “Third Great Truth,” that “Each man is his own absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself, the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment,” in other words, the law of Karma, with the doctrine of the Old Catholic Church of the absolution and remission of sins by the Lord at the behest of a priest, who, it is openly admitted, does not have to be a morally presentable person, does not have to possess the qualifications of one who can “stand in the presence of the Master,” as defined in *Light on the Path*, provided only he has the right sort of spiritual pedigree, that is, provided he has been ordained by another priest,

and so back to some apostle. To put forth such doctrines under the cloak of Theosophy is worse than camouflage in a lion's skin; it is using it to spread a pestiferous spiritual dry-rot in the Theosophical Society fatal to all the laws of the higher life as inculcated by the Masters.

This is an old story re-acted. The Church has always degenerated into an exponent of lip service and patent methods of salvation by proxy. Theosophy came into existence largely as a protest against the perversion of Christianity by the Church; it came to point out the true Path, to revive the knowledge of the Narrow Way. The Old Catholic Church accepts and advocates these very things which Theosophy opposes, and by clothing them in a theosophical skin and putting them under a theosophical patronage it thinks to make them acceptable to those who have but a smattering of the unessentials of Theosophy, to those who have been moved to join the Society through a desire for psychic information and emotionalism. While the right to "worship" as one pleases cannot be denied, one must not be misled by the stock notation that "all paths are mine." Doubtless all paths lead to God, to say nothing of the ditches alongside them. No path will lead to God, not even the theosophical path, if you face about and walk in the opposite direction. It is of the highest importance that those who have been attracted to Theosophy should study its real meaning in the works of its Founders, and should see, as they will if they study seriously, that these things are not Theosophy and are incompatible with it. The subtle insinuation of the teachings of the Old Catholic Church, with its incense, its Mass, its sacraments and vestments and its sky rocket methods should be resisted in every possible way. How can this be done?

While one may frankly admit that no one writer has presented every phase of the subject, and that there may be aspects of Theosophy outside of the writings of H. P. Blavatsky, a return to a more serious study of this great teacher is imperative. Equally so is the study of *Light on the Path*, which is indisputably a revelation from one of the Masters, the *Bhagavad Gita* and one or two other books. It is not sufficient to study these privately; they should be used for class work, and if, as is likely, official lodge recognition and encouragement of such classes cannot be obtained, they should be organized privately under the leadership of such students as are competent to guide them. H. P. B.'s *Key to Theosophy* is an admirable book for class study. The study of the four Gospels should be undertaken in conjunction with *Light on the Path* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, as it will not only show the intimate connection between theosophical teachings and the teachings of Christ, but will help to distinguish between the Christianity of Christ and the pseudo-Christianity of the church, including Bishop Leadbeater. The United Lodge of Theosophists, Metropolitan Building, Los Angeles, is an independent organization devoted to the study of Blavatsky and the earlier writers, which

offers its help to all who wish to pursue it. Membership is without obligation and in no sense implies disloyalty to the Theosophical Society. Every one who undertakes such work should remember that Theosophy is above all a mode of life, not an intellectual exercise, and that devotion to a Master, in other words, loyalty, is of little value if it manifests itself in emotionalism and sentimentality, and that it is best shown by self-discipline and service to the world. No one who earnestly undertakes this program will feel the need of peering through his telescope in search for a coming teacher.

Members of the theosophical Society who desire to see real Theosophy flourish should recognize the fact that there appears to exist a determined effort on the part of what in politics would be called a "ring" to run the American Section in the interest of the Old Catholic Church. I have pointed out some of the indications of the above. The new set of By-laws imposed on the Section is clearly adapted, or not actually designed, to place autocratic power in the Hands of the sectional President, whose affiliations are well known, and to suppress freedom of discussion. Care should be taken in the case of proxies not to place them in the hands of those who are not loyal to real Theosophy. It is not a time for those who are displeased with the present trend of affairs to skulk in their tents or to leave the Society in disgust. On the contrary, true loyalty to the cause of Theosophy demands that these stand up openly for their convictions, as well as use whatever private influence they may have towards unmasking the animal parading in the lion's skin.

There is a feeling prevailing among some members, which has come to my attention through correspondence and conversation, that while they have no use for the Old Catholic Church themselves, they consider it none of their business what is done or thought by other members. It is a distinctly disloyal attitude. What this church, or any other church, in fact, may do outside of the Society may be none of their affair. But to say that one does not care what is done within the Society, that is to express indifference to the cause of Theosophy itself. Surely if Theosophy is worth while, it is worth fighting for! surely the sword of the Masters is worth keeping clean and sharp.

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