

Why I am an O. C.-Phobe.

By

H. N. STOKES, Editor of

—*THE CRITIC*—

(*Washington D. C.*)



Published by

CELESTIA ROOT LANG, Editor & Publisher,

—*DIVINE LIFE MAGAZINE*—

614 OAKWOOD BOULEVARD, CHICAGO, ILL. U.S.A.

1918.

“No one man can at once and the same time be a
Catholic and a Theosophist.”

—Monsignor Mathew, Archbishop
of the Old Roman Catholics in Great Britain and Ireland.

WHY I AM AN O. C. PHOBE

(Reprint from Divine Life)

Editor of DIVINE LIFE :—

I have the honor of being one of those whom the President of the American Section of the Theosophical Society calls “O. C. Phobes”. I am not an enemy of the Theosophical Society, but on the contrary I am a member as loyal to its original purposes as any, and I have used my influence both publicly and privately to persuade those who would leave it because of its recent freaks to remain in it. I am an O. C.-Phobe, not because of anything which enemies of the Theosophical Society, or of Mrs. Besant, or of the Old Catholic Church have said, but because of what I have personally heard Bishop Wedgwood state, because of what he and Bishop Leadbeater and other lights of this church have said in the publications of the Theosophical Society, and because of what I have read in its own documents, including the Liturgy of the Holy Mass, authorized and approved by Wedgwood and performed at Krotona. Further I am an O. C.-Phobe because I have been convinced by the numerous letters of remonstrance, protest and abuse which I have received, that the contact with the teachings of this church with Theosophy has a tendency to destroy the power of logical thinking on ethical and theosophical subjects.

You deserve commendation for your recent publication regarding a certain bishop of the Old Catholic Church. The necessity is to be regretted, for I deprecate indulging in personalities, delving into the private lives of individuals and dealing with scandal no matter how true. I recognize that there may be black sheep in the best of folds But the ease is quite different here. It is not a case of the casual violation of principles—it is one of the consistent working out of a principle, a principle publicly announced and now publicly illustrated. I do not suppose that the Roman Catholic Church teaches openly that moral purity is unessential in its priests, that the man of impure or otherwise false life is fitted to be a spiritual teacher and guide if only he has conformed to certain formalities. Even if one does not give it the credit of honor it is quite too astute to compromise itself with its constituents by admitting that the priest whom it entrusts with the guidance of its members, with receiving the confessions of its women and girls, may quite properly be a reprobate.

But the Old Catholic Church, according to Bishop Wedgwood, does this very thing. He has stated publicly, and I heard him say it, that while it is of course to be desired that a priest in his church should be a good man, this is all a secondary consideration, that the one essential is that he should have received orders from some other man in line of apostolic succession. Bishop Leadbeater has said precisely the same thing. God moves in a

mysterious way, but not even a supposed direct personal revelation could possibly convince me that any magical process, any imagined divine afflatus, or power, or authority, handed down through apostolic succession, can possibly fit a man of impure, false or dishonest life to be a proper person to teach others spiritual truths, to be the guide, counsellor or confessor of women and girls. For, mind you, this process of ordination is not simply the conferring of the right to perform certain rituals, to sprinkle with water, to anoint with oil, to hand out bread and wine; it is conferring of the authority to guide and teach, to come into the very closest relations of confidence with others in the name of Christ; it involves a sacred trust which can be, and as history shows too often has been abused by the unscrupulous. Its very claim to absolute authority makes it the more dangerous.

No one will deny, I suppose, that he who would assume the role and functions of a priest should have his qualifications passed on by those who are competent to judge them. But this is not at all the doctrine of the Old Catholic Church. Qualifications, educational and spiritual, are no doubt required, as far as they can be ascertained. But these are wholly ineffective and worthless unless certain magical formulas are pronounced over the candidate, thereby placing him in the line of apostolic succession, and which are supposed to work some mysterious change in his "vehicles," to give him powers which he would not otherwise possess. Bishop Leadbeater tells us in so many words that a minister of a dissenting church cannot possibly administer the sacraments effectively, that as seen by a clairvoyant nothing whatever happens. So absolutely important is this process of passing on the spiritual germ plasm that if no one could be found willing to receive it the church would inevitably come to an end, as did the race of pterodactyls when the last pterodactyl failed to find its mate with which it could procreate. This untimely fate nearly befell the Old Catholic Church recently. Willoughby, although his history was known to the bishop who ordained him, was the only person who could be found at the time to receive the "succession," (see letter of Bishop Wedgwood in the *Occult Review*, July 1918, page 44). The conception, even if not immaculate, was apparently effective, for we now have a swarm of Old Catholic Priests at Krotona and elsewhere, owning Willoughby as their spiritual grandfather.

No sane human being would hand down a sacred trust to future generations without the least precaution to prevent its falling into base hands, yet this is what we are asked by the Old Catholic Church to believe of the Founder of Christianity. And the result? History is filled with the misdeeds of those who were in line of Apostolic succession and therefore specially authorized by Christ to be his successors and administrators, not only misdeeds which were the outcome of bigotry and ignorance, but the grossest breaches of the law of God; not only persecutions, tortures, burnings, but simony, theft, murder, adultery, almost every imaginable sin, and these have been committed not only in spite of, but under the cloak of the powers conferred on the offenders. All of these things are to be laid at the door of the dogma of apostolic succession which the Old Catholic Church is attempting to foist

on the Theosophical Society, not only through its teachings, but by filling, as it is already doing, the positions of trust and responsibility in the Society with its emissaries and defenders.

And on what does this remarkable dogma rest? It rests partly on tradition, and mainly on the claims of its beneficiaries and on their personal interest in maintaining it. It has precisely the same basis as the dogma of the divine right of kings. Just as the Kaiser claims to rule by divine right which none may dispute, so the priest of the Old Catholic Church claims to be God's appointed representative. And the dogma of apostolic succession is as much out of place in a spiritual democracy, where everyone stands on his own qualities, rises or falls through his merits or demerits. as is the dogma of the divine right of kings out of place in a worldly democracy.

Bishop Wedgwood's actions speak even louder than his words. There seems to be no question whatever that Willoughby, the man who, as an agent of God, made a bishop of Wedgwood, had been thrown out of the priesthood of the Church of England because he was a sex pervert and practised his peculiar speciality in this direction on the boys who were entrusted to his care. This is the polluted source through which Bishop Wedgwood secured his ordination. I give Bishop Wedgwood the credit of having been ignorant of this fact at the time. But he certainly knows it now. Does that make any difference? Not one bit. Does he have himself re-ordained by a man against whom no such score stands? Not at all. He simply goes about saying that it makes no difference any way. Thus far, to be sure, I agree with him. Bishop Wedgwood's value to the world as a spiritual teacher depends on his ability to teach, on the truth and value of what he teaches, on his sincerity, on his honor and morality, and on the conviction of those who learn from him that he means just what he says and lives it to the best of his ability. It does not depend on whether he has been ordained by a rake, by a saint, or by nobody at all. What does make the difference is that he maintains in the name of his church that any man, like the sodomite who ordained him, is fitted by virtue of apostolic succession not only to act as Agent of the Almighty in making him a bishop, but to be a spiritual guide. There's the rub. He poses as a bishop, not because of any qualifications of his own entitling him to such distinction, and recognized officially by his church, but because he contracted the power or authority from a supposed representative of God who turned out to be a scoundrel. And he maintains that this is God's way of saving the world! And this is the doctrine of a church which Mrs. Besant endorses and proclaims as the future religion of humanity!

What surprises me is that Wedgwood, Leadbeater, and all those American Old Catholic priests who are the spiritual offspring of Willoughby do not betake themselves to the river Jordan to be purged of possible spiritual leprosy.

I am an O. C.-Phobe because this church degrades women. A writer in the July *Vahan* (page 371, and in the *Occult Review*, August, page 113) tells us that Bishop Wedgwood

informed her that the Old Catholic Church will not admit women to its priesthood. This is doubtless in accordance with precedent and tradition and the usage of other churches which claim divine authority for the inferiority of women. But it is in dead conflict with the principles of Theosophy which knows no distinction of sex in spiritual matters. Any sort of man may be a priest of the Old Catholic Church no matter what his character, but a woman, no! She is fit only to sing responses in the Mass to some possible he-reprobate in livery. This is the church which is trying to gain control of a society some of whose greatest leaders have been women. The church which would refuse the priesthood to women like H. P. Blavatsky and hundreds of others I might mention, while it would accept any man, irrespective of character, has no place in our modern civilization, to say nothing of with theosophists. It is astonishing that theosophical women should countenance such a reaction.

I am an O. C.-Phobe because the Old Catholic Church teaches directly, and in the theosophical organs to which it has access, that sin is something which cannot be worked off or remedied by the sinner himself—is “a twist in the ether,” as Bishop Leadbeater calls it but that it can quickly be set right by a man who has had the apostolic succession conferred on him— Willoughby, for instance,—leaving the sinner as good as new, a doctrine which is flatly and absolutely in contradiction to the theosophical conception that man is the sole arbiter of his own destiny, that he must inevitably suffer for his faults, must reap as he has sown, in short, the doctrine of Karma. Theosophy teaches that in the moral world there is no such thing as persuading the judge to acquit you if you are guilty, no bribing the jailer to let you get away. The Old Catholic Church teaches that a formula gone through by a priest removes your sin, enables you to escape the punishment and puts you in a position where you can do the same thing over with perfect impunity, whenever it suits your cupidity or your lust to do so. “Oh, but you must first truly repent; you must first firmly resolve to sin no more!” What criminal does not repent when he finds himself confronted with the prison or the gallows! What lifelong sinner does not repent and have himself forgiven when he suddenly finds himself confronted by death and the fear of hell! Is it not a notorious fact that this Doctrine of absolution is directly used by many to enable them to lead pretty much any sort of life they dare to, in the expectation of “repenting in time”? How many of us have been taught that it is hazardous to sin because we might through sudden death be “sent to our account” without a chance to get absolution? The Old Catholic Church claims to be a liberal church, that you can believe almost any thing you wish. It is indeed a liberal church; you cannot only believe whatever you wish but you can *do* whatever you wish and it will fix it up all right with the Judge; you really don’t have to suffer for your misdeeds; it is all a matter of a little magic, a little stunt performed by the sacerdotal go-between who has more pull with the Judge than you have. That is the doctrine of absolution, a doctrine now preached at the theosophical headquarters at Krotona and endorsed by the President of the Theosophical Society at Adyar and by the supposed reincarnated Blavatsky, who appears astrally to Bishop Leadbeater and tells him what fine things the Theosophical Society is doing—the same Blavatsky, by the way, who said, “WE

BELIEVE NEITHER IN VICARIOUS ATONEMENT, NOR IN THE POSSIBILITY OF THE REMISSION OF THE SMALLEST SIN BY ANY GOD.” [Capitals added]

I am an O. C. Phobe because the Old Catholic Church teaches that ceremonial magic is to be the religion of the future. This is distinctly stated by both Wedgwood and Leadbeater in the most unmistakable terms. “The wave of devotion is receding; the wave of ceremonial is advancing,” so says Wedgwood in his Washington address under the patronage of the Theosophical Society. Leadbeater says the same. The future object of the church is to be in the use of ceremonial magic. I say that the Old Catholic Church practices and justifies the use of black magic and that it is allying itself directly with the forces of evil! This will of course be denied, but it is a fact. It does not openly advocate the use of magic for securing personal and selfish ends at the expense of others. But it does provide and openly assert its readiness to use magical processes to enable him who takes advantage of others to escape from the results. It does not furnish the tools to the burglar who cracks the safe, but it has its automobile standing at the door to enable him to make his get-away and escape punishment. Its doctrine is that Willoughby after he had debauched and corrupted the boys for whose moral guidance he was directly responsible, might have absolved himself or had a fellow priest to do it, while the boys went to perdition. One may steal and make restitution, but for the corrupter of youth, the seducer of girls, there is no such remedy. Yet the offender, if we are to believe in the doctrine of the Old Catholic Church, can be relieved of all responsibility by a few words pronounced over him by one of its priests. It is a cowardly and dastardly notion, fit only for defaulters and shirkers.

I am an O. C.-Phobe because the teachings of this church, put forward under a “theosophical” guise by Bishop Leadbeater, are grossly materialistic. It reduces the divine influence to a refined sort of matter or force, stored in tanks and let down by the action of a priest—a recent writer tells us that Christ set aside a definite portion of this stuff in a “reservoir” for this purpose—and which runs through the body of the priest and along the metal parts of his vestments, like electricity, producing an effect on those within a certain distance not unlike the stimulating effect of alcohol. Witness also Bishop Leadbeater’s assertion that gum benzoin “purifies the soul,” and the assertion that Great Spirits are attracted by the smell of burning incense—as a buzzard is drawn by the smell of carrion.

The soil has been well prepared in advance. Members of the Theosophical Society have been taught to think, not in terms of spirituality, but in terms of matter of varying degrees of fineness, of ethers and essences, of forces, rays and what not, which may or may not exist, but which, if they do exist, have as much relation to the spiritual life, as chemical compounds or electricity. Theosophy has become a system of super-physical materialism. Are you spiritually out of tone? Your astral body has absorbed the wrong kind of matter; stop eating meat. Have you robbed or seduced? Your ether is twisted. Do you perceive a great spiritual truth? Some sort of superior etheric juice has been injected into your vehicles. And except that finer sorts of matter are assumed all of this is on the level of those

physiologists who attribute love to the secretion of the sexual glands and hate to the secretion of the suprarenals. Mrs. Besant in *The Changing World* (quoted in *Divine Life*, page 292) explains the efficacy of the “host” on the basis of isomeric chemical changes wrought by the words of the priest. The stuff begins to shine and this can be seen by a clairvoyant. What if it does? A decayed fish shines also, and it takes no clairvoyant to see it. And while I do not deny the effect of the sacrament of the communion if partaken in the right spirit, I am as little prepared to attribute inherent spiritual value to a piece of phosphorescent bread as to a rotten and therefore luminous fish. The theosophical atmosphere has been poisoned by this constant talk about “vehicles,” and the things which affect them, till theosophical literature resembles the conversation on the piazza of a sanatorium. And it is just the soil for the theosophical quacks of the Old Catholic Church to sow their doctrines about magic in, an opportunity which they are not slow to avail themselves of.

I am an O. C.-Phobe because the Old Catholic Church, like a cuckoo, and notwithstanding its denials that it is engaged in propaganda, has laid its eggs and is hatching them in the theosophical nest. It has squatted on Krotona and with the direct sanction and encouragement of the Sectional President maintains a baptismal outfit, a church and a propaganda office on the premises paid for by people who were led to believe that they were giving their money for the cause of Theosophy; it is using the name of Krotona, which everybody associates with Theosophy, as a means of hoodwinking thoughtless people with the idea that it is officially endorsed by the Section, which, in fact, it is. For note this: one of the two propaganda secretaries is an Old Catholic priest; one of the four trustees is an Old Catholic priest; the newly elected vice-president is an Old Catholic Priest; *the Messenger*, the official organ of the Section is, or was until recently, edited by a member of this church. Mass is said every day on the premises, which could not be done without official sanction, while the place swarms with people who have been induced to join it. The Sectional President denies being a member of the Old Catholic Church, and we must accept his statement. It makes no difference whatever as long as he is openly encouraging its doctrines and practices in the Society. Probably the Church is better served in its efforts to pervert Theosophy by the tacit testimonial of a non-member in its favor. Many an F. T. S. who now looks on with tolerance or indifference would open his eyes should the Section be presided over by one who was a communicant of what is to all intents and purposes, the Roman Catholic Church with the Pope left out.

I regret that the Sectional President has no stronger term than O. C.-Phobe which would express my utter detestation of the influence which this church is exerting on the Theosophical Society. Until he has devised some more emphatic epithet which I can use, I must continue to sign myself,

H. N. Stokes, F. T. S., O. C.-Phobe.