

THEOSOPHY AND ORTHODOXY

By Pedro Oliveira

Henry S. Olcott, President-Founder of the Theosophical Society, whose death centenary was commemorated on February 17, 2007, may have sounded the essential keynote of the work before the fledgling Theosophical Society when he said in his Inaugural Address at the Mott Memorial Hall in New York, 17 November 1875:

We are of our age, and yet some strides ahead of it, albeit some journals and pamphleteers more glib than truthful, have already charged us with being reactionists who turn from modern light (!) to medieval and ancient darkness! We seek, inquire, reject nothing without cause, accept nothing without proof: we are students, not teachers.

His colleague and co-worker, Helena P. Blavatsky, may have gone a step further in declaring one of the central aspects of the Society's work:

In its capacity of an abstract body, the Society does not believe in anything, does not accept anything, and does not teach anything. ("The New Cycle", *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. XI)

The above statements, by two principal co-founders of the TS, clearly delineate the fact that though deriving its name from the Greek word *theosophia* ("divine wisdom"), the Theosophical Society does not make of Theosophy an orthodoxy nor an ideology. In other words, the position of "official" theosophical teacher has been declared vacant from the very inception of the Society! It encourages its members to inquire, to investigate and to study for themselves the vast breadth and depth of the Wisdom Tradition and to come to their own realisation of its eternal truths.

Alas, the energetic vision of the founders did not prevent some members over the decades from erecting pedestals to "authorities" in the theosophical philosophy, going so far as to say who was "right" and who was "wrong." But the Theosophical Society, as an organic body, has always refused to buy into the "authority" game and has remained faithful to its three Objects which point to an unsectarian and undogmatic direction for its life and work.

At the very core of the great spiritual traditions of the world there is a compelling call: *one must see with one's own eyes*. When religion, philosophy or even science become an ideology, that is, a set, irreversible, exclusivist worldview, the beauty and transformative power of direct seeing is absent and the forces of separation and suspicion grow stronger, thus making the world a darker place. When we see for ourselves any intrinsic truth, like suffering, it leads to a new understanding as well as to compassionate action, for it represents the awakening of a deeply integrated perception within ourselves called *buddhi* in the theosophical tradition. In such a perception, seeing and acting are one.

As long as the Theosophical Society remains true to the spirit that animated its foundation it will remain relevant in a turbulent world. The words of Madame Blavatsky, in her message to the American Convention of 1888, deserve reflection and consideration:

Orthodoxy in Theosophy is a thing neither possible nor desirable. It is diversity of opinion, within certain limits, that keeps the Theosophical Society a living and a healthy body, its many other ugly features notwithstanding. Were it not, also, for the existence of a large amount of uncertainty in the minds of students of Theosophy, such healthy divergencies would be impossible, and the Society would degenerate into a sect, in which a narrow and stereotyped creed would take the place of the living and breathing spirit of Truth and an ever growing Knowledge.

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