

1897

Theosophy and Christianity compared as to the doctrine of man in each

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/47518>

"Downloaded from OpenBU. Boston University's institutional repository."

Theosophy and Christianity Compared
as to the
Doctrine of Man in each.

Arthur Bohner.

Theosophy and Christianity Compared
as to the
Doctrine of Man in each.

The doctrine of man in Theosophy is so affected by its doctrine of God that a discussion of the former could not be considered complete unless account should be taken of the bearing of the one upon the other. Briefly, therefore, we call attention to the fact that in the occult teaching, "God is all and all is God"; in other words the doctrine of God is Pantheism, pure and simple. In a little book entitled "Why I became a Theosophist", Mrs Annie Besant writes, "The next matter impressed on the student of Theosophy is the denial of a personal God. In theology, theosophy is pantheistic - God is all and all is God". It is true that Madam Blavatsky stoutly denies the charge of pantheism and atheism at one moment and then proceeds to teach such doctrine as can be called by no other name.

It will be well to bear this view of God in mind as we proceed since it bears somewhat upon the doctrine of man.

Again there are phases of thought in the system under consideration which have to do with the doctrine of man directly or indirectly which we shall do well to consider.

The esoteric doctrine teaches that spirit and matter are one. In the language of a writer on theosophy, "matter and spirit are identical in the ultimate reality". Madame Blavatsky also teaches the same doctrine when she says in substance

"Matter is conceived of as containing the spirit of man dormant and needing the monad to wake it to life".

Passing by what many theosophist authorities tell us in regard to their having been various races of men- spiritual men, astral men and water men in the earth before physical men came, we pause to notice the reason for man's being in his present physical state.

According to Theosophy, this is due to a desire on the part of spiritual or astral men to propagate the race. Little by little the race materialized in this way beginning on the lowest plane of existence and developing upward through the three kingdoms, mineral, vegetable and animal to the present state. In other words man's origin is explained by lust.

For this reason a premium is put upon celibacy by many theosophical writers. The best things of this life we are told have come to us through the celibates.

Once more according to many theosophists, the occult teaching finds no place for religion and all who espouse it must pledge themselves to renounce every form of religion, for religion is said to be a superstition.

We are now ready to present the doctrine of man more specifically, yet briefly, as found in theosophical lore.

Man is a being of seven fold nature. "He consists of one spirit, three souls, a life principle and two bodies. The spirit is that atom which is indivisible, imperishable, the primate of the ultimate of all things visible and invisible".

The soul is of a three fold nature yet one, spiritual, human and animal.

The human soul is the mind, the ego, and is in affinity with the spirit, in its higher individuality, but in its lower is in affinity with the animal soul or desire. This animal soul or desire is the emotional force which governs the operation and use of organic functions. "It is the impulse which creates hunger, thirst &c and which sets in motion the relation of organs and conditions which sustain life. It leads man blindly, involuntarily to multiply his own species." It is pure passion in greater or less degree.

The body though seeming to be one is really two. The outward and appearing one is called the physical body, the inward and ordinarily invisible one is known as the "astral" body.

The principle of vitality is called Prana or breath. It has no personality or qualities in itself but gains both by its relation to matter and modes of force.

The physical body decomposes at death. The astral body may exist for a time after death and be the shadowy continence of the person who died. The animal soul or desire continues to exist after death with a certain degree of vitality, and then at a certain stage it separates itself from the mind, the ego, and becomes a wondering irrational thing - a ghost seeking to find indwelling in mediums and highly super-sensitive earthly organizations.

But the ego itself passes on into another and equally subjective state. This state will either be blissful or other-

wise strictly in accordance with the life lived on earth. The good go to Devachan, a state of sweet dreams and blessed delusions, while those whose lives were evil pass into Avitchi, a state of horrid dreams and delusions of terror. The one is a heaven, the other a hell of hallucination.

From this state of dream like existence the ego finally begins to wake "and longs for clothes to wear" and "finds itself drawn into a psychic vortex produced by the relation of the sexes," becomes reincarnate and is born into the world again in another human body. This re-incarnation is not optional, but a necessity in order that the ego may attain to perfect knowledge.

At last after perhaps millions of re-incarnations the ego will succeed in reaching Nirvana - perfect annihilation of personal being, a merging of the personal into the impersonal and the round of existence is complete. From impersonal God back to impersonal God. The drop as it falls into the ocean loses its identity, and yet continues on a part of the great all.

We submit this brief outline of the theosophical belief concerning man and his destiny.

Omitting any mention of the philosophical and scientific difficulties found in this doctrine, let us immediately compare the various conceptions of man with those of Christianity.

We hold it to be of no small import that Christianity posits a personal God as the ground of all existence and in whom man lives, and moves and has his being. From such a

being he receives his spirit, his life. "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (R.V.) may not make ~~so~~ clear to us the method made use of by the Creator in giving man being but the fact is incontrovertible.

Contrast this matchless conception with that of the doctrine now before us. An impersonal monad - whatever that may be - comes from the impersonal all and enters into union with matter. By the aid of a cold, lifeless mechanism working magic in the three kingdoms, mineral, vegetable and animal, there is brought into existence the being man. His spirit is only matter. He is one with all things about him, no more, no less, except by a later or higher stage of development.

But this leads us to the thought that such a view of man and God leaves no room for a kind providence which has so large a place in the Christian system. Theosophy has nothing to offer a man as a rule of life except the blunt and heartless one "Take care of yourself". Man absolutely shapes his own destiny. The things we term providences are merely the actions or re-actions of great cosmic laws and forces in their ever on moving development. Only nature rules inexorably over all.

Now turn to the Christian conception of God in wise providence watching over man's welfare, restraining, loving and guiding him in certain unmistakable ways, providing in a beneficent way for his wants, at the same time checking the evil and approving the good.

A step further we take and find ourselves before the great fact that all humanity gropes after an existence extrahuman and exalted which it may adore, upon which it may lean for dependence and with which it may commune. What religion meets this universal need more than does Christianity? Where shall we find a being more worthy of adoration than the one true God of the Christian - the Almighty creator, the righteous ruler, the beneficent Father? We emphasize this the more because of the bearing of religion upon the life of an individual and of a people. That every race is ennobled and exalted according to the excellence of its conceptions of the Supreme, we have no need to contend in this presence.

But turn to Theosophy for its strongest utterance and we are totally denied the privilege of a religion by many of its strongest advocates. Religion of every kind must be renounced. There is no Supreme, and since man is the noblest of nature's works, must not man logically be driven in his extremity to satisfy the cravings of a religion-hungry soul by worshipping some of the best specimens of his kind? Such a life could not be worth the living and could not but degenerate the race.

An easy transition at this point may be made to the fatalism of the system. The law called Karma reigns supreme in all the world of being. This law is fairly interpreted by the scripture statement that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap". This law is inexorable. If man does well, all is well and he is rewarded; if ill, all is ill,

and he is punished. There is no escape. The code of life then is simply this, "Thou shalt not do ill, but the rather do well" - the old Jewish law over again. No place for vicarious atonement here. No help from a higher source to assist in doing the right.

Now to Christianity. Here we find a conception of God's assisting grace richly bestowed upon the believing soul to aid in right conduct. But if one has fallen, witness the sublimity of the conception which provides a sacrifice for the repentant soul in the person of Christ the one who is both Son of God and Son of man and who secures the renewal of the God-life by regeneration.

But let us pass the border-land and enter the realms of immortality. Recall the doctrine as to Devachan, the heaven of dreams. There is nothing real in its pleasures. All is a great delusion, a heavenly void indeed, which the mind peoples in its great sleep. The joys and delights of that happy land may be exquisite, but they are deceptive and cease at last as the soul wakes to pursue further earthly existence.

Not so is the Christian's heaven. If there be one thing about which the Christian is dogmatic and positive it is that his heaven is a reality - a blessed reality.

Again we linger long enough to notice the contrast between the systems as regards the doctrine of re-incarnation in the one, and that of the resurrection in the other. In the one the soul simply wakes to pursue its endless round of earthly existences now lower, now higher as the case may be,

now a refined personality, now a coarse and brutal being; and so on "world without end". In the other the soul takes on its heavenly dress and passes into the presence of its Lord with exceeding great joy.

Finally we stand on the last round of existence in this strange system when the soul has completed its earthly course and after repeated re-incarnations is at last fitted to enter Nirvana - the great impersonal "thought force". Here the personality entirely ceases. Annihilation, though a detested term, is expressive of what takes place. The personal one is absorbed in the impersonal whole. What a wonderful accomplishment. Sublimest of achievements is this, after millions of incarnations, happy, to be merged into nothingness and to forget all as if we had not been. / Such a thought is almost enough to inspire us to give vent to our feelings in that doleful song, "Oh to be nothing, nothing". /

Let us however, recall the teaching of Christianity respecting the immortal life. The identity of the soul with itself, the unbroken fellowship with kindred souls, the perfect bliss as a result of perfect accord with the Supreme - all this is but a part of the unsullied existence, never ending, which is held out to the Christian soul.

We have found space to but briefly touch the most important comparisons which may be drawn of the two systems as touching the doctrine of man. But we bring the paper to a close. In doing so however, we would beg leave to add as a commentary upon the thoughts presented here the following

quotation from a theosophical writer which doubtless contains more truth than its author imagined when he wrote: "There are two gigantic obstacles in the way of (spiritual) progress viz: the misapprehension of God and the misconception of man".

List of Works and Authorities consulted.

The Secret Doctrine -----Madam Blavatsky.

Why I became a Theosophist -----Mrs Annie Besant.

Man, fragments of forgotten history--By two Chelas (pupils).

Theosophy or Christianity, Which?--by E.M. Haldeman is a contrast of Theosophy and Christianity.

: : :
:-----:-----:
: : :