

INTERNATIONAL  
**THEOSOPHICAL**  
HISTORY CONFERENCE 2021



**THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT AND GLOBALISM  
INTERCONNECTIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND COMPARISONS**

ONLINE VIA ZOOM, 8-10 OCTOBER 2021



Since 1986 a series of International Theosophical History conferences (ITHCon) have been held, mostly in London, at which scholars within the Theosophical Movement and from the academic world in general, have gathered together to share and discuss Theosophical History.

This year the ITHCon will be hosted on Zoom. The conference will count on the participation of sixteen speakers from across the world, offering a unique forum for discussion and exchange of ideas on Theosophical history.

#### **Keynote Speaker**

**Karl Baier** (Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Vienna, Austria).

#### **Conference Committee**

- **Conference Chair: Tim Rudbøg** (Associate professor, Science of Religion, director of the Copenhagen Centre for the Study of Theosophy and Esotericism, University of Copenhagen)
- **James Santucci** (Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at California State University, Fullerton.)
- **Secretary: Erica Georgiades** (MRes Religious Experience Cand, University of Wales Trinity Saint David; PgD Merit Ancient Religions UWTSD; BA, Hons, Philosophy and Psychological Studies OU).

**With the support of the Blavatsky Trust.**

COVER IMAGE:

#### **THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY CONVENTION GROUP, BOMBAY 1882**

Chandra Shckar (Bareilly), Nabin K. Bancrji, P. Nityananda Misra, A. P. Sinnett, J. A. Unwalla, Abraham D. Ezekiel, P. Gopinath, Rai Bishen Lal, Ramaswamier, H. P. Blavatsky, H. S. Olcott, Tripada Banerji, Narendra Nath Sen, Thomas Perera L. V. Varadarajulu Naidu, Dr. Abinash Chandra Bancrji, Damodar K. Mavalankar, Mohini M. Chatterji, Dr. Mahendranath Gangool

# PROGRAMME / TIMETABLE

ZOOM MEETING ID 832 7587 1124

**FREE OF CHARGE**

Contact e-mail: [eustheosophy@gmail.com](mailto:eustheosophy@gmail.com)

## OCTOBER 08, FRIDAY \*Opening at 17:00 GMT

- 17:00** K. Paul Johnson **From Ghost Land to The Light of Egypt and Back Again**  
**17:40** Marina Alexandrova **"The Making of a Global Community: Blavatsky's Travelogues from 1879 to 1886"**  
**18:30** Simon Magus **The Case of the Theosophist's Egg: Haeckel, Blavatsky, and the East-West Dichotomy**  
**19:10** Paulina Gruffman **The Relationship between the Theosophical Society and Western Esotericism**  
**19:40** Erica Georgiades FOTA **Round Table**
- 

## OCTOBER 09, SATURDAY \*Opening at 17:00 GMT

### **India, Asia, East-West Debate**

- 17:00** Karl Baier **Theosophical Occidentalism and the Implantation of Theosophy within Europe**  
**17:40** Bjarke Stanley Nielsen **A Theosophical Perspective on the West**  
**18:30** Julian Strube **The Theosophical Society in India between Reform and Tradition**  
**19:10** Bruno Carlucci **Gelugpa Theosophy and Mainstream Gelugpa: Differences and Similarities**  
**19:40** Boyko Zlatev **H.P. Blavatsky and G.S. Rakovski – XIX Century Globalists  
Biographical and Worldview Parallels**  
**20:15** James Santucci **Theosophy's Sanskrit Revival**
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## OCTOBER 10, SUNDAY \*Opening at 17:00 GMT

### **Global Visions, Interchanges and Interactions**

- 17:00** Muriel Pécastaing-Boissière **"Ought Theosophists to be Propagandists?":  
a Discussion of the Paradoxes of Annie Besant's Global Missionary Strategies**  
**17:40** Samanta Viziale **The (Sad) Story of the Artist who Wanted to Forge New Theosophical Art**  
**18:30** Andres Rivero Aponte **The Cuban Section of the Theosophical Society.  
A Path Towards the Institutionalization of Theosophy in Cuba, Central America and the Caribbean**  
**19:10** Yves Mühlematter **Education, Initiation and Theosophy "in-between" "East" and "West".  
Annie Besant's Quickening of Evolution**  
**19:40** Tim Rudbøg **Theosophical Visions of a Future Global Religion**
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08-10 OCTOBER 2021

17.00  
GMT

## From Ghost Land to The Light of Egypt and Back Again

K. Paul Johnson

The second volume of *Ghost Land* appeared only as serial articles in 1891-92 after the first volume that appeared in 1876.

Paul's literary sleuthing shows that between the first and second volumes another book, *The Light of Egypt*, appeared in 1889 and then another volume of that second book appeared in 1900. Both authors were English occultists who spent years of their lives in America. A woman and man a generation apart but with many common interests appear to have been cooperating, tossing a ball back and forth with their publications 1876-1900. Paul's ongoing effort to disentangle the situation will be the focus of this talk.

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### bio

**K. Paul Johnson's** first book from SUNY Press described the international origins of the Theosophical Society. Followed by a 1995 sequel *Initiates of Theosophical Masters* and reprinted in India in 1997, *The Masters Revealed* was featured in a 1999 public radio documentary in New York City and a 2008 Toronto television documentary that appeared on Canadian and US networks. It was excerpted in a chapter for a 2004 collection *The Inner West* from J.P. Tarcher /Penguin which appeared two years later in Portuguese translation in Brazil. In 2018 a Turkish translation appeared as a trade paperback in Ankara. His work co-editing the correspondence of Thomas Moore Johnson (*Letters to the Sage*, 2016-2018) with Patrick D. Bowen led to their both being included as chapter authors in the 2020 collection *Imagining the East* from Oxford University Press. In December 2019 Paul edited and published the *Collected Works of Sarah Stanley Grimke* which presents the information provided here about Chevalier Louis as an appendix.

OCTOBER 08, FRIDAY

## “The Making of a Global Community: Blavatsky’s Travelogues from 1879 to 1886”

Marina Alexandrova

This paper presents the history of publication and analysis of Blavatsky’s three works written in Russian about India, *The Mysterious Tribes of the Blue Mountains*, *Durbar of Lahore*, and *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan*, all initially published in serialized form in the leading Russian periodicals and separate editions between 1879 and 1886. While introducing her Russian readership to Indian cultural and spiritual heritage, Blavatsky not only fostered a better understanding of India, but used it as a chance to dismantle stereotypes and reveal deep similarities between seemingly disparate cultures, serving a main goal of Theosophy of building a universal global community. I address three central issues related to the form and content of those three works.

First, I show the continuities and innovation of Blavatsky’s hybrid narratives in the context of the popular genre of “Oriental” travelogue in Russia and in Western Europe. Secondly, I discuss “spiritual censorship” in Russia, and how Blavatsky, operating under these strict censorship laws, used her travel narratives as a Trojan horse to disseminate Theosophical ideas under the guise of colorful and exotic tales. Finally, I analyze

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**bio**

**Marina Alexandrova**, PhD, teaches a variety of courses on Russian history, culture, and language at the University of Texas at Austin. She is currently working on a monograph about Helena Blavatsky’s works and legacy in Russia.

17.40  
GMT

OCTOBER 08, FRIDAY

18.30  
GMT

OCTOBER 08, FRIDAY

## The Case of the Theosophist's Egg

*Haeckel, Blavatsky, and the East-West Dichotomy*

Simon Magus

The German philosopher-physician Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) is most famous for his Law of Biogenesis, 'Ontogeny Recapitulates Phylogeny', presenting the erroneous hypothesis that all vertebrate species pass through earlier stages of evolution *in embryo*. In addition, he stated that all vertebrate embryos were identical at an early stage of development. Whilst opposed to Haeckel's thought in a number of aspects, in her *Esoteric Instructions* (1889), Helena Blavatsky appears to have taken him at his word, presenting an image of an early embryo as human when structurally it is clearly that of a different species. This paper uses this example as a springboard to analyse the under-explored interface and exchange between Romantic Science and Esotericism. Focusing on Haeckel's *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* ('The History of Creation') (1868), and *Die Welträtsel* ('The Riddle of the Universe') (1895-99), it examines the imbrication of biological and spiritual evolutionism, and *Naturphilosophie* in Haeckel's oeuvre, alongside the conceptual exchange with Blavatsky's Theosophy. Expanding upon this domain, the paper problematises and analyses the East-West dichotomy and globalisation in terms of Blavatsky's syncretic mélange of a quasi-Vedantic philosophy with Western science in the form of Romantic embryology.

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**bio**

**Dr Simon Magus** is a psychiatrist based in London. He holds an MA and PhD in Western Esotericism from the University of Exeter. His book *Rider Haggard and the Imperial Occult: Hermetic Discourse and Romantic Contiguity* is forthcoming with Brill, Leiden Publishers in the Aries Book Series.

## The Relationship Between the Theosophical Society and Western Esotericism

Paulina Gruffman

Since its conception, scholars in the field of Western esotericism have counted the Theosophical Society among its subjects of study (Faivre 1994). Given the fact that there are several competing ways of conceptualizing esotericism today, the question of whether and/or how the Theosophical Society fits within the category has no easy answer. This paper will consider whether and how the Theosophical Society can be conceived of as an esoteric group from several standpoints in regards to different understandings of esotericism. Drawing on recent debates within the field of (Western) esotericism, as well as studies on until recently neglected aspects of the Theosophical Society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (such as its function as a global society, debates and differences within the organization as well as focus on individuals who have not made it into the standard canon of Theosophical history, such as G.R.S. Mead), I aim to give a nuanced and complex account of how we can best conceive of the Theosophical Society today prior to and after the passing of H.P. Blavatsky.

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**bio**

**Paulina Gruffman**, M.A. History of Religions, Stockholm University, is an independent researcher in the field of (Western) esotericism. Her M.A. thesis, “The Quest for Gnosis: G.R.S. Mead’s Conception of Theosophy” is the first extensive study of Mead from a critical perspective.

19.10  
GMT

OCTOBER 08, FRIDAY

19.40  
GMT

## FOTA - THE FRIENDS OF THEOSOPHICAL ARCHIVES - ROUND TABLE

The round table will focus on strategies for cataloguing, preservation, digitisation, and the web presence of Theosophical archives and library material.

FOTA (The Friends of Theosophical Archives) is an organisation that aims to offer support and incentives for the preservation, cataloguing, and digitalisation of Theosophical archives and libraries around the world; to avoid physical deterioration and render the material more readily accessible for researchers.

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**Facilitator** Erica Georgiades, MRes Religious Experience (Candidate) UWTSO; PgD (Merit) Ancient Mediterranean Religions UWTSO; BA (Honours) Philosophy and Psychological Studies (Open). Editor of the FOTA Newsletter.

OCTOBER 08, FRIDAY





# INDIA, ASIA, EAST-WEST DEBATE

Olcott with Sinhalese monk scholar Hikkaduve Sumangala. Courtesy of Dr. C.V. Agarwal.

17.00  
GMT

## Theosophical Occidentalism and the Implantation of Theosophy within Europe

Karl Baier

When Theosophy emerged in New York as an innovative transnational religious movement represented by the Theosophical Society it was not based on any particular religious tradition, but on the idea of an ancient universal wisdom religion that had been largely buried for centuries and was to be revived and spread under the guidance of the theosophists and their mysterious masters. Although Blavatsky identified mainly with what she called “Oriental Occultism” she integrated and thereby transformed many concepts of European origin into her doctrines. Nevertheless, from its US American beginnings and even more so after the shift of its headquarters to Adyar, Theosophy was no more “at home” in Europe than in other parts of the world. Like elsewhere, special efforts, e. g. translation work, the reinterpretation of native traditions and the reshaping of Theosophy according to diverse local contexts were necessary to gain a foothold there. Among other factors, a certain model of “the West” plays an important role in this, which will be analysed in the lecture under the heading of Theosophical Occidentalism. It connects the establishment of European Theosophy with Colonial issues and racism. Examples for the process of europeanisation of the theosophical trajectory will be mainly taken from Germany and Austria.

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**bio** **Karl Baier** is Associate Professor (2009-2020) Emeritus, serving as Head of the Department of Religious Studies between 2013 and 2020. He holds an M.A. in Catholic Theology (1993) and a Ph.D. in Philosophy (1987). From 1987 to 2009 he was a postdoctoral research assistant and Assistant Professor at the Department of Christian Philosophy, University of Vienna. From 2000 to 2005 he designed and coordinated a postgraduate course on Interreligious Theology of Spirituality at Paris Lodron University, Salzburg. In 2008 he submitted his habilitation thesis for Religious Studies on the history of meditation in modern times, which was published in two volumes in 2009. The same year he became associate professor at the Department of Religious Studies. From 2003 to 2016 he served as a member of the editorial board of *Polylog: Zeitschrift für interkulturelles Philosophieren*. Since 2010, he is co-editing the *Wiener Forum für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*. Professor Baier is a board member of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies. He is a member of the Austrian Association for the Study of Religions (ÖGRW) and of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE). His current research interests include nineteenth and twentieth century alternative religion, mesmerism, occultism, modern yoga research, and psychedelics.

OCTOBER 09, SATURDAY

## A Theosophical Perspective on the West

Bjarke Stanley Nielsen

In 1889, Blavatsky spoke of the Theosophical Society (TS) as “international in the highest sense”. While many often primarily associate the TS with occultism or western esotericism, this statement alluded to a wider emerging intellectual and political “international” debate of the 19th-century. This paper intends to show how the TS actively entered these debates in a number of significant, but overlooked ways. The TS for example articulated a radical ‘cosmopolitan’ perspective of an international society “in the highest sense” that was particularly critical of the concept of “nationality” and the “West” itself.

This paper seeks to move beyond addressing the TS as “western esotericism” by approaching it from the perspective of global history. However as this paper will argue this does not mean that we need to exclude the ‘West’ from the study of esotericism. Rather, it suggests that global history, with its focus on global connectedness can help us better navigate national as well as western oriented discourses. In fact, it provides us with tools to reflect on these issues. Such tools can for example help us locate a highly anti-national, anti-western discourse within the early TS at a time where most European narratives were occupied with Eurocentric ideas.

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**bio**

**Bjarke Stanley Nielsen** is a PhD-fellow at the University of Copenhagen, with an MA in history. His research project aims to investigate Theosophy from a global history perspective, with emphasis on global ideas.

17.40  
GMTIME

OCTOBER 09, SATURDAY

18.30  
GMT

## The Theosophical Society in India between Reform and Tradition

Julian Strube

There is a curious contradiction in portrayals of the Theosophical Society in both the accounts of historical observers and present-day scholars: on the one hand, the Society was and is often perceived as an integral part of so-called “Hindu revivalism” that insists on “tradition” and “orthodoxy”; on the other hand, the Society was counted among the “reform” movements of the period. In this paper, I will demonstrate that this seeming paradox can be explained through the contested nature of reform versus tradition within the colonial context. I will focus on the engagement of Bengali Tantrics with the Society, specifically in the Bengali Theosophical journal *Kalpa* and other publications in Bengali. I will show how debates about the origin of “true religion” in a supposed pristine “Aryan” civilization formed a crucial basis for exchanges between Western orientalist, philologists, and reformers (such as Unitarians) with learned Indians who identified both as traditionalists and reformers. These exchanges predated the arrival of the Society in India and structured its subsequent development. The focus will rest on the contributions of learned Indians to illustrate how Theosophy was shaped through complex and often ambiguous entanglements between the local and the global.

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**bio**

**Julian Strube** is assistant professor in religious studies at the University of Vienna. He works from a global historical perspective about the relationship between esotericism and politics across the political spectrum. His next monograph, *Global Tantra: Religion, Science, and Nationalism in Colonial Modernity*, is forthcoming with Oxford University Press.

OCTOBER 09, SATURDAY

# Gelugpa Theosophy and Mainstream Gelugpa: Differences and Similarities

Bruno Carlucci

In theosophical literature, references to Gelugpa school, 'the school of the yellow caps' abound as well as the important status ascribed to its founder, Je Tsongkhapa. Such emphasis on this school of Tibetan Buddhism happened at a time when little was known of Vajrayāna Buddhism in the West. Despite Gelugpa's Prasangika-Madhyamika emphasis, theosophical literature upholds the views of the Yogācāra School, often employing yogācārin terminology in *The Secret Doctrine* and in *The Voice of The Silence*. Hence 'Gelugpa theosophy' is not the same as 'mainstream Gelugpa'. Therefore, we present here a terminological analysis of what is said of Tsongkhapa, Gelugpa and its teachings in some of the works of theosophical authors that approached this topic, such as Blavatsky, A.L.Cleather, the *Mahatma Letters*, and Geoffrey Hodson so as to address how we can best define a 'Gelugpa Theosophy', and what are the differences and similarities regarding mainstream Gelugpa.

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**bio**

**Bruno Carlucci** is currently a PhD student in the field of Applied Linguistics at Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp) in Brazil. He has an MA in Translation Studies (Universidade de Brasília - UNB). His focus of research has been the translation of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist texts, and Sanskrit terminology.

19.10  
GMT

OCTOBER 09, SATURDAY

19.40  
GMT

## H.P. Blavatsky and G.S. Rakovski

### XIX Century Globalists Biographical and Worldview Parallels

Boyko Zlatev

Without evidence that they ever met in person, H.P. Blavatsky and the prominent Bulgarian revolutionary Georgi S. Rakovski (1821-1869) shared many in common. Both travelled to the East, having “lost years” in their biographies. Both were Garibaldi’s acquaintances and both received recognition in India. Both were globalists in terms of promoting the world brotherhood and the interconnectedness of various religious and philosophical traditions through the ages. Both presented to the world texts of Ancient Wisdom (*The Book of Dzyan* and *Veda Slovena*, respectively), which were rejected by the scholarly community. Rakovski did not define himself as a theosophist. However, several lines of influence can be traced from his circle to XX century Bulgarian theosophists. Blavatsky was not a political globalist, but the idea of one-world government persisted in the XX century Theosophical Society. G. S. Rakovski’s project of Indo-European Unites States influenced the globalist project of the early Soviet Union, proposed by his nephew Christian Rakovsky. During the Cold War ideas of H. P. Blavatsky and G. S. Rakovski merged in the non-communist “parallel ideology” of the 1970s Bulgaria, which culminated in the UN-supported “Banner of Peace” World Children Assembly, established in Sofia in 1979 as an oriented to the future unifying initiative in then polarized world.

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**bio** Boyko Zlatev has MSc. degree in Applied Mathematics (Sofia University, Bulgaria). In 2007 he moved to Edmonton, Canada, where he held various teaching and consulting positions at local universities. He authored more than 30 publications in Statistics, Mathematical Sociology, History and Philosophy of Science, History of Theosophy and other topics.

OCTOBER 09, SATURDAY

## “Theosophy’s Sanskrit Revival”

James Santucci

The role of Sanskrit in Indian culture has occupied a special place in South Asian culture from ancient times. In recent times, Sanskrit, despite its small number of native speakers, was awarded the status of an official language within the Constitution of India and therefore included with the other twenty-one official languages in the “Eighth Schedule,” It was also given the status of second official language of Uttarakhand, India’s twenty-seventh state established in 2000.

Although the current Sanskrit revival is in part the result of nationalistic tendencies in keeping with Vinayak Savarkar’s vision of Hindutva or Hindu uniqueness initiated in 1923, the Theosophical Sanskrit revival, conceived during the New York period of the Society and initiated in earnest during the 1880s, was constituted for entirely different reasons. This presentation will explore the actions taken by members of the Theosophical Society to revive Sanskrit learning in India and to introduce and popularize Sanskrit in the West.

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### bio

James A. Santucci is Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at California State University, Fullerton. He received his Ph.D. at the Australian National University in Canberra in the field of Asian Civilization and M.A. in history at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. He has been editor of *Theosophical History* since 1990 and editor of the *Theosophical History Occasional Papers* series since 1993. In addition, he has written numerous articles covering topics in Theosophy, Buddhism, and Hinduism and has also authored *La società teosofica*, *An Outline of Vedic Literature*, and co-authored *America’s Religions*.

20.15  
GMT

OCTOBER 09, SATURDAY



The first International Convention held in Adyar in 1883

# GLOBAL VISIONS, INTERCHANGE AND INTERACTIONS



# The Cuban Section of the Theosophical Society. A Path Towards the Institutionalization of Theosophy in Cuba, Central America and the Caribbean

Andres Rivero Aponte

This research aims to analyze the process of introduction and institutionalization of the Theosophical Society in Cuba, this process begins at the end of the 19th century, reaching greater dimensions in the first decades of the 20th century, with the establishment of the first Cuban theosophical lodges among 1901-1904 and the foundation of the Cuban Section of the Theosophical Society in 1905. It is also analyzed how the foundation of the Cuban Section of the Theosophical Society, became the detonator that catalyzed the rise of the theosophical movement in Cuba, Central America and the Caribbean, locating Havana as the central node of the theosophical-esoteric network that was born and developed between 1905 and 1926 in Central America, the Caribbean and the rest of the jurisdictional area of the aforementioned section.

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**bio**

**Andres Rivero Aponte.** Independent investigator. Bachelor of Education. Master in Interdisciplinary Studies on Latin America, the Caribbean and Cuba, from the University of Havana, member of the Transdisciplinary Chair of Historical Studies of Cuban Freemasonry, Vicente Antonio de Castro y Bermúdez, (CTEHMAC) from the University of Havana and member of the Center for Studies on Western Esotericism of the Union of South American Nations (CEEQ-UNASUR).

17.00  
GMT

OCTOBER 10, SUNDAY

17.40  
GMT

## The (Sad) Story of the Artist who Wanted to Forge New Theosophical Art

Samanta Viziale

The painter Piet Mondrian wanted to create a new “Theosophical art”, keeping distance from symbolism, which was the main expression of many Theosophically oriented artists at the beginning of 20th century. He was member of the Theosophical Society for most of his life, but since the beginning of his membership, he faced the difference between the doctrines of Theosophy, in which he believed, and the theosophists. Furthermore, from the 1910s, Mondrian’s writings on art were a controversial subject within the theosophical milieu, as many found them too radical. This paper analyses why Mondrian’s new artistic approach failed. Despite his attempts to integrate theosophical concepts in his artworks, e.g. the absolute, his ideas were largely rejected. This paper seeks to understand why this happened. In connection to Mondrian’s innovations and the theme of globalism, it is also relevant to point out that it was through Theosophy that concepts inspired by Asian religions, such as Brahman slipped into European art. Through a semiotic approach and a transcultural perspective, the artistic theory of Mondrian will be investigated in its controversial role connected with Theosophy. The aim of this paper is to offer a perspective on the inter-semiotic translation of Theosophical ideas into visual components, still not fully explored in contemporary scholarship.

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**bio** Samanta Viziale is a PhD candidate in Arts and Humanities at the University of Torino and at the University of Copenhagen. Presently, her research project aims to investigate transcultural artistic expressions in Theosophy, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of authorial concealment.

OCTOBER 10, SUNDAY

## **“Ought Theosophists to be Propagandists?”: a Discussion of the Paradoxes of Annie Besant’s Global Missionary Strategies**

Muriel Pécastaing-Boissière

“Ought Theosophists to be Propagandists?” was the title Annie Besant gave to her editorial of the December 1891 issue of the London-based theosophical monthly *Lucifer* — a question to which she answered: “So far as I am personally concerned, propaganda in every suitable form, by platform, pen, private conversation and correspondence, all in their several ways are equally available and equally right”. So, just a few months after the death of Helena Blavatsky, Besant embarked on a global theosophical mission. Drawing mostly from contemporary primary sources, this paper will open a discussion of the paradoxes of her missionary strategies. First, in spite of the Theosophists’ criticism of the Christian missionaries in India, Besant resorted to many of the same means of action there, to promote her theosophical vision of Hinduism. Meanwhile, in the West, Besant’s missionary proselytising conflicted both with her claim that Theosophists had “no dogma,” and with Theosophy’s esoteric and elitist dimensions, which Besant also encouraged. In the end, those unsolved paradoxes could explain the failure of Besant’s global promotion of Krishnamurti as the “World Teacher”.

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**bio**

**Dr Muriel Pécastaing-Boissière** is Senior Lecturer in British Civilisation English Department, Sorbonne University Author of *Annie Besant: Struggles and Quest*. London: TPH, 2017.

17.00  
GMT

OCTOBER 10, SUNDAY

19.10  
GMT

## Education, Initiation and Theosophy “in-between” “East” and “West”. Annie Besant’s Quickening of Evolution

Yves Mühlematter

I will argue that Annie Besant’s concept of the “Quickening of Evolution” is at the core of her Theosophy. Tracing this concept through Theosophy and beyond will show how modern Theosophy was shaped within a global colonial discursive continuum in which the Indian Theosophists played a key role. I argue, based on considerations from postcolonial studies and translational studies, that in the process of the uptake of Advaita Vedanta new hybrid knowledge emerged. The central concept of Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial approach, the “in-between,” can be applied to that new knowledge, this illustrates that categories like “East” and “West” must be fundamentally rethought. From this standpoint I will critically discuss the concept of “Western esotericism.”

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**bio** **Yves Mühlematter** is a Research and Teaching Assistant at the University of Freiburg, Switzerland and a Lecturer at the PHBern, Switzerland. In his doctoral dissertation (2021), Mühlematter examines hybridization processes between Theosophy and “Hinduism.” These processes resulted in the publication of two textbooks which were used in several schools in India and became the basis for religious instruction in the Benares Hindu University.

OCTOBER 10, SUNDAY

## Theosophical Visions of a Global Future Religion

Tim Rudbøg

This paper explores the emergence of the idea of a global future religion in Theosophy, particularly as it was formulated by four central women Theosophists, namely Helena P. Blavatsky, Annie Besant, Katherine Tingley and Alice A. Bailey. The paper intends to show how their notion of a universal future religion is different from similar versions and how their new Theosophical version has become central to the emergence of many contemporary religious narratives about the current world-religions. Today the notion that 'spirituality' is different from organized religion is common. Similar assertions, such as the two following are equally common: 'there is a truth in all religions', and 'there are many paths, but they all lead to the same truth'. Such perspectives have become dominant in a wide array of ways and they have almost become the foundation of a new pluralistic religious discourse, but their genealogical connection with Theosophical envisages of a future religion remain relatively unexplored.

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**bio**

Dr. Tim Rudbøg is Associate professor and director of the Copenhagen Centre for the Study of Theosophy and Esotericism, at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. As a trained historian of religions, Rudbøg has published on a wide array of topics, but his particular focus is on Helena P. Blavatsky, Theosophy, and the history of esotericism. More recent publications include the co-edited books *Imagining the East: The Early Theosophical Society* (Oxford: 2020) and *Innovation in Esotericism from the Renaissance to the Present* (Palgrave: 2021).

19.40  
GMT

OCTOBER 10, SUNDAY



International Headquarters of the Theosophical Society, Adyar Campus.