



The European School of Theosophy Venice October 2008 Report

Theme: The Wisdom of The Sages

The venue this year was the tranquil island of the Venice Lido and we were all amply rewarded with the setting, the weather and a very full programme of talks and discussions.

Eight countries were represented, including the U.S.A., and having introduced and welcomed all present, Harold Tarn expanded the theme by not only briefly outlining the How, Why, When and Where the Message was introduced in recorded history but stressing its vital importance today because of the vital debates on Creationism, Evolution and Consciousness plus the explosive impact of the latest advances in Physics and the New Biology.

The guest speaker **Dr Joscelyn Godwin**, Professor of Music and Medieval & Renaissance Studies at Colgate University in New York State, gave four talks.

He gave us the welcome news that the academic world now takes the *Esoteric Tradition* very seriously indeed – with degree courses at the Sorbonne, Amsterdam, Exeter and with yearly conferences in U.S.A. and Europe. He then briefly outlined the four main categories in Esotericism -now defined as a ‘formamentis’ (a way

of thinking) : Correspondences / Living Nature / Use of Imagination/ Transmutations.

These cover a vast range of topics such as Hierarchies, Cosmogonies, esoteric doctrines such as the Kabala..... the universe as self-regulating and conscious the impact of the Arts ... the subtle changes in the mind and the body due to the unique style of the literature – and how to study it - to take one example. Notwithstanding some seemingly radical differences in the various doctrines, religions are reconciled –although perhaps not apparent to many of the devotees – and here he cited the 19C Magnum Opus of Madame H.P Blavatsky, the “Secret Doctrine”, as the ultimate concordance. All of this was backed up by many examples – a comprehensive survey of the Pythagorean World-View for one. This encompassed language, number, musical harmonies / ratios, intervals. tone / vowels, harmonics and modes – lamenting on the fact that the west now uses only the major and minor modes.....and underlining the point that frequencies and harmonics are invariantin touch with The Ground of Being, in a sense. He dwelt on the authors of the Mahatma Letters, commenting on the shock to 19th and 20th century society of the many startling observations and views contained therein and finishing with a survey of the influence of Italian Philosophy down through the centuries, from such as Marcus Aurelius onwards – emphasizing the crucial role of Freemasonry and the impact of thinkers like Reghini, Kremmerz and Julius Evola on the 20th century.

The theosophical author and historian **Michael Gomes** of New York, began with an in-depth exposition of Hermetic Lore [the Corpus Hermeticum] – of the Greek god and philosopher-king Hermes Trismegistus (the Egyptian Thoth, god of learning and healing) . He was one of the divine men - an aspect of the unknowable One – said to be the first teachers and lawgivers of the human race. Other examples are Krishna, Zoroaster, Dionysus,

Quetzalcoatl and Odin. Hermes (Mercury) was the father of alchemy – dealing in particular with the inner transformations within the human being. Michael dwelt at length on one particular text – the *Emerald Tablet* – the

“essence of Hermetic Wisdom” with its famous axioms. This surfaced in the fourteenth century and was a basic document of Renaissance esotericism (Isaac Newton wrote a commentary on the Tablet). All of this triggered a sparkling discussion on the various translations and to the three levels of reading this class of literature viz.: Literal / Symbolic / Transformative.

As Hermes is a ‘mediator’ – unlocking Intuition (as does the Indian God Ganesha, the ‘Remover of Obstacles’) these texts remind us of the potency of analogy and may provide a key to a means of accessing knowledge through the function of Buddhi, the divine intuition latent in all.

The lower mind is blocking the path and our speaker reminded us that this present stage of human development is striving to develop this Buddhi Manas Principle.

Michael then talked in detail of the Hierarchy of Compassion – those divine teachers, the Bodhisattvas, whoever await the aspirant striving to break out of limitation.

Certainly there is a hunger for access (witness the popularity of Harry Potter, for example) and it may help to realize that the Artist certainly has greater access to this greater Knowledge. The question is – how much are you living that fulfilled life?

Dr. Edi Bilimoria – theosophical scholar and author – in outlining his “Essential Principles and Practises” reminded us that the Divine Plan & Purpose operates under LAW with special Agents being its custodians. That the Secret Doctrine is not a pastiche but points to the origin of content (although “the bee makes its honey from several flowers”) with the doctrinal core being personal experience over many centuries, although he reminded us of H.P.B.’s warning - that those ‘walking the thorny path’ will

encounter many trials and tribulations together with eventually becoming aware of our true character. The ‘inner knowing’, he asserted ‘flushes out the outer ignorance’ and rounded off this part of his presentation by listing some of the essential qualifications and qualities that a theosophical worker should strive to acquire.

Then, armed with many quotations and diagrams, he proceeded to outline the present position of Science on Evolution and its interface with the Esoteric – remarking from the outset that the Occult Doctrine is ignored by the men of science. Of primary importance in any such examination is the problem of Consciousness and Intelligence – now the subject of fervent controversy all over the globe. Is it Primal – not of this material world - or is it an epiphenomenon of the brain ? and here Nobel laureates Crick and Edelman (materialist v holist) were quoted, the latter declaring absurd the view of the former. The limitations and assumptions of the scientific view of evolution were listed, followed by much of the anomalous evidence that undermines orthodox Darwinism.

Neo-Darwinism came under severe criticism – with its stance on randomness/chance and spontaneous mutations, it touches only on physical characteristics, with no place for the mind. Posing many leading questions e.g. Surely purpose comes before function ? How can things regenerate if there is only machinery ?, Edi then posited that there must be a non-physical causal Director – for one thing it cannot explain the sudden appearance of geniuses – and then declared that Cremo & Thompson (*The Hidden History of the Human Race*) and Milton (*Shattering the Myths of Darwinism*) had largely (Natural Selection having a vital but minor role) demolished Darwinism (taught as a fact, not a theory) and Dawkins.

Occult Science, on the other hand, has every atom and cell acting under Law as a conscious unit. Evolution is both a “Top-Down”

and a “Bottom-Up” process – not just the latter, as the majority of scientists insist..

Finally the presentation was rounded off with a comprehensive survey of the esoteric version of the evolutionary process, concentrating mainly on human development, stressing the vital role of the ‘Root Races’ as stated in the “Secret Doctrine”.

A “*Tour de Force*” indeed!

Colin Price (Research Scientist) gave two talks, the first “The Myth of the Beginning of Time” took us through the intriguing hypotheses which arise when the Big Bang theory about the start of the universe is questioned. Our limited conception of the nature of time was considered as were the wider implications of the inter-relationship between consciousness and duration in the esoteric sense. Occult space and time are linked inextricably just as space and time on the physical plane.

The second was “The World of Deep Silence”. Anyone who has tried to meditate knows that the absence of sound does not result in inner silence. The mind with its input from the five senses plus the creative imagination and intuition is desperately in need of a technique for control so that deeper levels of silence can be achieved. Only then does the ‘Voice of the Silence’ become inwardly audible to the spiritual seeker.

It is a lifetimes work and many techniques need to be understood and deployed in the task – as the ‘self’ becomes increasingly aware of the ‘SELF’.

Harold Tarn (Engineer) gave two talks entitled “Wagner – an Unlikely Sage”. He used the famous ‘Tristan Chord’ – containing its antithetical intervals (which include the Tritone or ‘Devil’s interval) – to illustrate the paradox of this very worldly man who produced such sublime music, teeming with spiritual symbolism.

Echoing Blavatsky [S.D.111 p 451] , Wagner, in 1880 was “ convinced that there are universal currents of Divine Thought vibrating the ether everywhere”

Using piano and disc Harold then portrayed many examples of esoteric wisdom in Wagner’s mature works – Lohengrin, Tristan & Isolde and the Music Dramas The Ring and Parsifal. In the last two, Wagner created a new art form a Unity.... on three indivisible planesDrama – Literature (he was his own librettist) – and Music, not only making the voice an integral part of the orchestra, but also developing ‘Leit-motives’ as symbolical images. These are works that reflect not only major aspects of Theosophy but also the human personality in all its vast complexity.

Anita Sieff (Venice) who worked so hard in easing our task in the area, gave us one talk on her work as an artist and film- maker.

Anita, who specialises in the influence of group psychology in art, showed us pictures she had painted as a result of her research with a group of friends who met every week for several years to explore the field in a variety of experiments. She also showed us a film of hers which portrayed the subtle effects produced on the artist and her art as various psychology states were engendered as a result of group participation. According to the perspective of the principle of participation, there are two ways to participate: from the view of the participant or from the internal movement of the part taken as such. In this case participation is an emanation inducing effects that do not remain only within the action of experience.

We also had a visit from the President of the Italian Section who gave us a warm welcome to Italy. In a short address he extolled the work and ethics of this School, wishing us all well for the future.

As usual, we all had a very enjoyable 'rest-day' (!) toddling round the city in small groups, each armed with excellent guide-notes drawn up by Joscelyn.

Michael chaired a very successful group discussion, Harold gave us a musical evening and finally, our work for the whole week was summed-up in splendid style by Colin.

In closing the School he thanked everyone, singling out for special praise our very efficient lady-directors, Secretary Mrs Ingrid Eberhard-Evans and Mrs Cornelia Crowther

Harold Tarn
March 2009.