



Contact

The members' newsletter of the Brisbane Theosophical Society

2010 Issue 1 January - April



The "Mosque-Church" at Pecs, Southern Hungary

This was built as a mosque during the time of the Ottoman Empire rule of Hungary from Turkey which began in 1543, on the site of an earlier Christian church. After the Ottoman defeat by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 17th century it was adapted for use as a Catholic church. But most of its original Moslem features were retained alongside the added Christian elements. The minarets were demolished however. Note the combined cross and crescent on top of the dome. The remains of the 4th century (Aryan) church are in the gardens in front of the Mosque-Church. (G Harrod)

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See our website for additional material and for the latest version of the current programme list. If you would like to receive email advice of changes or news please send us your email address.

Brisbane Theosophical Society

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BOOKSHOP & LIBRARY: (Closed on Public Holidays)
Monday to Thursday 10:30 am to 2:30 pm
Friday 1.00 pm to 4.00 pm & 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm

The programme of Lodge meetings is enclosed and is also placed on the Lodge website which will always be the most up-to-date source of information. Whenever there are changes to the programme an email circular is sent to all people who have given us their email address.

The Theosophical Society has no official statements of belief. It encourages members to seek the truth by various avenues, but always subject to respect for others. All views expressed in these pages are entirely those of the authors – not of the Society.

PRESIDENT'S NOTES

The following report was read to those who attended the Annual General Meeting in December 2009. It was not circulated to the full Brisbane Lodge membership list and is therefore repeated in this issue of Contact for general information. As your President is currently visiting International Headquarters in Adyar, his usual introductory "ramblings" will not appear.

As the year 2009 draws to a close it is time to reflect on the events of the year that was. At the personal level we might ask ourselves a few pertinent questions; for example, did I understand and believe that all the changes which occurred in my life throughout the year had potential to aid my future spiritual progress? Have I accepted responsibility for everything I did over the year? Have I taken on-board any lessons that should have been obvious as a result? Am I ready now to clear the decks for a wonderful new start?

Such personal questions no doubt led to the advent of that quaint custom, the New Years' Resolution, no doubt invented as a reminder to us to, on the last day of the year, review our immediate past and make repairs as necessary. Possibly you have given up making Resolutions because though you have always made them, you have often felt guilty when they have not been kept. No matter, perhaps its time to start again.

Let's look now to the happenings at our Lodge during the past year. First I would like to observe that as we have a relatively small band of volunteers available at any given time it is disturbing when one is asked why we do not have more events, more groups, social occasions and the like. Basically, just as in one's personal life, it gets down to priorities and the first of those is that we keep the doors open so that we can provide a balanced programme of study, meditation and service so that members and visitors have the opportunity to supplement their Theosophical understanding and way of life. And that is accomplished by the provision of frequent lectures, regular study groups, a comprehensive and well-stocked library and comfortable centrally-located facilities open for as many hours as there are volunteers available.

Administering all of that plus attending to the maintenance of our premises here on Wickham terrace is quite a task for a relatively time-strapped, nevertheless dedicated group of people who deserve great thanks for their efforts. Of course we would welcome the addition of more speakers, group leaders and administrators to our ranks, but that does pre-suppose greater interest from members, doesn't it? Expressions of interest appreciated.

Visitors from Interstate and Overseas this year included our newly elected National President, Dara Tatray, who took time to speak to us. Ravi Ravindra who conducted the School of Theosophy at Springbrook and lectured here on the Friday evening prior. Murray Stenterford, the New Zealand Vice-President also spoke at the public Friday night meeting, and though not from quite so far away we are nevertheless indebted to the Queensland Representative on the National Executive Committee, Paul Robb and also his wife Anna; Toowoomba TS Group Leader, Barry Bowden, North Coast President, Betty McAllister and a number of others from the various Northern groups who also spoke. These wonderful people contributed immeasurably to the depth and variety of our public lectures and we are most appreciative and look forward to their return visits. Of course this does not take away from the great work done on Friday nights by our own members who took time to prepare and present talks to us, such effort should be applauded as it is no easy task – however we do look forward to their repeat efforts in 2010.

Your President also tried not to be too idle and prepared and gave talks at a variety of venues including Brisbane Lodge, North Coast Lodge, Toowoomba Certified Group and at each of the seven TS Groups situated from Byron Bay, N.S.W., up to Noosa in Queensland. Additionally he conducted Meditation sessions at the Perth TS Convention, the Springbrook and Bribie Island Weekend Retreats and facilitated regular Meditation meetings at both Caboolture and Redcliffe; and also instituted a Study Group at the Redcliffe Group during the past year. Overall there is indeed a great deal of Theosophical activity generated regularly from the Brisbane Lodge, we trust for the benefit of all.

Grateful thanks also goes out to those who conducted the weekly Study Groups, the fortnightly Krishnamurti and Isis Unveiled Groups, the monthly Science Group and the weekly Meditation Group and other informal meetings which occur from time to time. A big and genuine thank you also to those who attended the two Working Bees during the year and did so much good work - as the need is always there you may anticipate further such events in 2010.

To those who generously worked in the Library over the year and ensured that it remained open and well-stocked to promote the substance of Theosophy, we also say thank you. And to those who regularly washed the dishes and tackled the ordinary everyday jobs and to those who provided sustenance for the masses, your efforts have also been invaluable, thank you.

If perchance you wonder why I have not named each individual who has contributed so much during the year, it is only because I am quite well aware that their contribution has not been for the sake of any external reward. Their efforts are simply a wonderful reflection of their Theosophical beliefs. My next heart-felt thank-you goes out to a particularly conscientious and hard-working group, the Brisbane Lodge Executive Committee, who have not only made the President's job so much easier but have, in their individual ways, contributed so much to the management and administration of our Lodge. In particular may I pay tribute to our Office Manager and our Treasurer who have worked so diligently and so willingly to maintain the overall equilibrium.

And one more thing...the most important contribution of all has been by that regular group of attendees to the many talks and groups without whom all this effort may well have been simply, Maya.

I now wish you, your family and friends, a very Happy Festive Season. May the true Spirit of this time of year bring Blessings to you. I do look forward to meeting you all again in the New Year and may we then be renewed, refreshed and ready to continue the good work.

Thank you so much for your company during 2009.

- Noel Bertelle

2010 Brisbane Lodge Committee

PRESIDENT: Noel Bertelle
VICE-PRESIDENTS: Geoffrey Harrod,
Denis Armstrong
TREASURER: Phillipa Rooke
SECRETARY: Angela Read
COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
Elina Juusola- Halonen,
Marion Smith,
Phoebe Williams

See the Queensland website - <http://www.theosophyqld.org.au> - for details of all Theosophical Lodges and Groups in Queensland and just over the NSW border – Atherton, Cairns, Brisbane, Byron Bay, Caboolture, Gold Coast (Southport and Palm Beach), Maleny, Redcliffe, Sunshine Coast (Buderim-Maloolaba & Noosa-Tewantin) and Toowoomba-Warwick.

SPRINGBROOK RETREAT CENTRE

Dates to note -

- 12-14 FEB Sunshine Coast Lodge weekend - Contact Sunshine Coast Lodge
- 12-14 MARCH Brisbane Lodge Meditation weekend - Contact: Aru 07 3262 3846
- 19-26 MARCH School of Theosophy (members only) - Contact HQ Sydney.
See T-in-A magazine.
- 27-28 MARCH TOS Working Bee - Sign-on at Brisbane Library

THE JESUS SUTRAS and lost Taoist Christianity

Book by Martin Palmer

A talk given by **Judith Jeffries** at Brisbane Theosophical Society

As you know, *Sutra* is an eastern word or sacred text, or teachings given to the public. But to see the words "Jesus" and "Sutra" together is most unexpected.

This subject is like a jigsaw puzzle with three main pieces, which are

1. A large stone slab with inscriptions, kept in a Confucian temple, which records a Taoist/Christian movement, called the Religion of Light. But where did this stone come from? Nobody seemed to know until recently.
2. The second piece of the jigsaw, is the finding of ancient manuscripts in caves along the Silk Road, which validated the information inscribed on the stone slab. Modern scholars poured over these manuscripts, and called them the Jesus Sutras
3. The third piece is the rediscovering of an ancient temple in Western China (a feat which the author of this book undertook almost single-handedly) - and then learning that this was where the inscribed stones came from.

As I go through this talk, these pieces of the jigsaw will fall together.

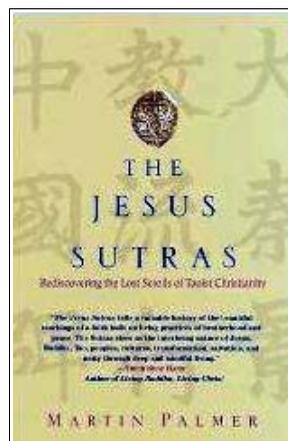
Where do we start? Let's begin with the Stone Stelae. What is a stela? It is an ancient upright stone slab, bearing markings - in this case the story of Taoist Christianity. The stela I shall describe is housed in the Museum of Stone Inscriptions (literally a stone library) in an ancient Confucian temple complex, in the city Chang-an, once called Xian.

Xian, in the far north west corner of China, was on the Silk Road and was the ancient capital of China.

This particular stela (on next page), part of the Forest of Stone Stelae, is about six feet high and stands on a tortoise - symbol of stability, security and longevity. It records the history of the Church of the East in China. You might ask - What is the Church of the East?

I had never heard of it - not being a scholar of early Church history. Hence I was surprised to learn that it was an amazing world-wide Christian movement that stretched from Egypt to Persia, then flowed via the Old Silk Road to Tibet and China. (Yes Tibet of all places!) The movement originated in Asia Minor and Syria. It came out of the banning of the teachings of Nestorius around 451 AD. He was condemned at various church councils, (just like the Council of Nicea banning the teaching of reincarnation). Nestorians stressed the humanity of Jesus. Thus in 424 AD, the Church of the East in Persia, formally proclaimed its full independence of Christian churches elsewhere.

Unfortunately (for us) this movement was wiped out or died out due to the power of the Church of the West (that we know) - and then due to the far-reaching influence of the Prophet Mohammed. No doubt, Mohammed intended that his movement would include (not exclude)



the teachings of Jesus, as he taught acceptance of people like those in the Church of the East - a point later completely lost on Islamic fundamentalists.

There are two remnants of the multi-cultural Church of the East for wherever they went they adopted local cultural ideas and customs (e.g. Taoism was incorporated into their faith in China). The first remnant is the Assyrian or Nestorian Church with about 170,000 members, living in Syria, and Iraq / Iran, formerly the Persian Empire. Of the churches in Arabia, Tibet and the steppes, virtually nothing survives. However, a very important remnant is the Church of St. Thomas in India.

If you visit India, perhaps you could check them out. You could witness what the original forms of Christianity were like. They include in their celebrations some of the Jewish holy days, like the Passover (as it would have been with the first Hebrew Christians) Their service is in Syriac.

Jesus spoke the wonderful language of Aramaic, a version of Syriac. I say wonderful, because Aramaic is full of metaphors, with multi-layers of meaning. Hence his parables could have been understood in several different ways, depending upon the insight of the listener. And this how the people of the Church of the East in China (some of whom learned Syriac) would have benefited from understanding the teachings of Jesus - in a way denied to us. Syriac was regarded as a sacred language, just like Sanskrit. And it could be heard from Egypt to China.



The church of St. Thomas was established by St. Thomas's mission to India in the first century. And here is an important point (connected with other talks I have given) No other World Teacher has honoured the feminine as much as Jesus. The Church of the East in China (linked with Taoism) also held that equality between men and women was one of their founding principles. Thus it is a tragedy for Western civilisation and the development of Christianity, that the relationship between, e.g. Jesus and Mary Magdalene (the most beloved) and his other women disciples, was edited out of our texts. The restoration of this central issue must at some point in history reform and revitalize Christian thought.

In 1877, Madame Blavatsky mentioned the Gospel of St. Thomas in her first major work, "Isis Unveiled" (in Volume II on 539). She states that it was his work and that it was the foundation text for the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke & John. Those four gospels were written later in Greek, the translators including archetypal themes of other Sun Gods, the mystery schools, initiations, etc. Many scholars now agree with HPB that this was so. (It only took over a hundred years for this to be acknowledged, just as the Great Sages who inspired Madame Blavatsky said it would - and even longer for other ideas.)

Now that you have some background knowledge of this movement, we can go back to the stone stela, which was erected in 781 AD in the Da Qin Taoist temple complex, where they

also built a Christian pagoda nearby. This stela recounts the history of the Church from 635 AD (when a Persian mission arrived in China) as well as a short summary of their teachings. It had been buried in the earth for a long time and was unearthed near Xian, in 1625. But in our time, nobody was sure where it came from. Most importantly, the engravings on this stela confirm the validity of recently unearthed manuscripts, called the Jesus Sutras, found in the 19th Century, in caves along the Silk Road. That is why the archaeologists knew the manuscripts (from the caves) were valid.. The inscription on the stone describes the Luminous Religion (as Christianity was called in China).

The words are steeped in Taoist and Buddhist imagery and have echoes of the Taoist classic the *Tao te Ching*, by the great sage Lao Tsu. (For those who don't already know, the essence of Taoism is harmony with Nature.) At this point I have to emphasize that the Church of the East was nothing like the Church of the West. We were brought up to believe that Jesus was the only way - a unique part of God - believe this and go to heaven - ignore it and go to hell! (Literally). Whereas the Church of the East (no wonder it didn't last) adapted to local cultures and religions and was holistic and inclusive. That is why the Jesus Sutras have very little in common with the Christianity we know. Jesus is seen in a Taoist and Buddhist context in these old manuscripts.

But there is also another reason for their format. They had to toe the party line of the Confucian power structures of government and bureaucracies, This was a serious challenge, as later on, Buddhist and Christian temples were looted and destroyed - being seen as foreign invading religions. Sadly many of these Christians were killed during feuds by warring factions.

At the top of the stela, there are crosses and dragons (west and east) and also the Chinese characters for - "Da Qin Religion of Light - a record of its transmission throughout China". The words Da Qin (mean Western) hence Western religion of light, The Chinese character for light can also be translated as Illumination.

The first inscription is similar to the biblical writings of the Apostle John, Chapter 1 which states.-

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.... That was the true light, which lights every man that comes into the world"

But on this stela it reads -

"In the beginning was the natural constant (which means never-ending) the true stillness of the Origin, the primordial void of the Most High (or God or the Great Tao)- Then the spirit of the void emerged as the Most High, moving in mysterious ways to enlighten the Holy ones." it continues "He was a True Lord (Jesus) who embodied the three subtle and wondrous bodies (the Trinity) and who was condemned to the cross, so that the people of the four directions can be saved."

The stone then talks about Original Nature (rather than original sin) in this way:

"Their minds were empty (the first people) they were content; and their hearts were simple and innocent. (like in the Neolithic Era). Originally they had no desire,"

This has echoes of the 4th century Taoist Chuang Tsu, who wrote; "Pursue the path of Heaven within. Whether bent or true, see all in the light of Heaven. Learn to face all four directions and



flow with the tides of the season-" (In both these texts, simplicity and innocence are emphasized)

(All of this can be found in the book the Jesus Sutras, in Chapter 8, called the Way of Light.)

The inscription continues: "Under the influence of Satan (pride, greed, etc.) they (the first people) abandoned their pure and simple goodness for glitter and gold."

As outlined in the Jesus Sutras (found separately from this stone stela), Satan was not regarded by this Church as the demonic all-powerful creature of Western mythology, but rather a false sense of what is important - or an illusion that distorts the original goodness of humanity.

The inscription goes on: "He (God) gave to them the original nature of goodness and appointed them as the guardians of all creation." This is markedly different to the text from Genesis in the Bible which states: "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the seas, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth."

In contrast, the stela emphasizes protecting and guarding the rest of creation (in harmony with Taoism). In the Jesus Sutras the Ten Commandments stated therein prohibits the wanton killing of any living being in all creation (not just murder of human beings as it is translated in the West). The followers of this religion in China were vegetarians and did not own slaves (like the followers of other religions in China).

The next part of the stone talks of the confusion that results from following the base way of greed and personal ego. It states that we spin a web of cause and effect (i.e. karma) that traps us in a world of negative consequence doomed to wander from life to life - until we rid ourselves of this retribution. It talks about being caught in a wheel of fire, a wheel of suffering, which prevents us from returning to our state of original goodness and thus union with the Godhead or the Great Tao.

Jesus is seen with his hand in a mudra position, like a Bodhisattva, This drawing was found in the caves at Dunhuang and is in the British Museum.

It then states in a pure Taoist way, "Heaven decreed the new religion of the Three in One Purity, that cannot be spoken of and should not be proclaimed." (for as the Tao te Ching reads: The Tao that can be named is not the eternal Tao.)"

Then comes an obscure phrase, "Reveal the gates of the three constants, lead us to life and destroy death" Perhaps this is like the Hindu prayer. "Lead us from the Unreal to the Real, from Darkness into Life, from Death to Immortality." The author of the book *The Jesus Sutras*, Martin Palmer, an expert in Chinese translation, thinks that the three constants are Yin/Yang and Chi energy (Fundamental, eternal elements of each person's existence).

The next part sees Ye Tsu (Jesus) described a "Raft of salvation and compassion that ferries souls across the great divide of sorrowful existence towards the light". This is seeing Jesus as a Bodhisattva, as the Buddhist would say, i.e. edifying the soul away from falsehood, greed, negative karma and sorrowful rebirth, to the Pure Land, or an Enlightened State of Being. (This



concept also appears in one of the Jesus Sutras called *The Sutra of Returning to your Original Nature*)

The stone continues that Ye Tsu ascended to immortality in broad daylight. (The Taoist term *immortal* is a metaphor for the Great Sage, Adept or master.) The usual ascension to immortality in Taoist mythology, is that immortals ascend, secretly or privately. But on the stelae, the ascension of Jesus is emphasized as being more public. It also states "The Religion of Light teaching is a like a resplendent sun, as it has the power to dissolve darkness and destroy evil."

The inscription then describes: "Eastern-facing rites" the direction or prayer in western religions. (All worship in Chinese temples is either to the North or to the South.). It describes travelling monks associated with the Church as 'those who choose to grow beards, shave their heads, travel on open roads, renounce desire, have neither male nor female slaves, see all people as equal and do not hoard material goods.'" It states that "every seven days (as on a Sunday in the West), we have an audience with Heaven. We purify our hearts and return to the simple, natural way of the truth."

A seven day week was not normally followed in China, as they had a monthly calendar based on the phases of the moon. An interesting aside is that the British Museum possesses one of the earliest printed books in the world, a copy of the Almanac Calendar for the year 877 A.D. (It came from the same cave as the manuscripts called *the Jesus Sutras*.) On the printed days of this Chinese calendar, the equivalent of the Sundays were marked by hand in red.

I would like to continue with the historical section of the stone inscription - It describes how the Persian traveller Aluoben arrived (in 635 AD) on azure clouds (an auspicious Chinese symbol for heavenly blessings), He arrived after a long and arduous journey - but from where? Aluoben was Persian. But it is now thought (by lack of historical records of this major event in Persia) that Aluoben could have come from Samarkand in Uzbekistan, or Herat in Afghanistan, or Mery (also known as Mary) in Turkmenistan, where the Church of East was established.

Along these trade routes, world cultures converged.. Indians, Tibetans, Indo-Greeks, central Asian steppe peoples and Persians, all mixed and exchanged ideas. In this melting pot, such books as the *Jesus Sutras* could have easily emerged. The *Sutras* themselves state that they are a translation by Aluoben, with references to other ancient sacred texts and cultures - in order to explain the beliefs and practices of the Church of the East.

Aluoben would have spoken (among other languages) Syriac, the sacred language of this Church - still used in the services of the Church of St. Thomas in India. He headed a well-planned mission and they were expected - probably protected part of the journey, by the military of the Tang Dynasty on the route, (The Tang Empire went all the way into central Asia.) He and his associates brought a collection of manuscripts, (later translated by him and called *the Jesus Sutras*). They would have also brought sacred objects, chalices, robes, etc. He was welcomed by the Emperor of the Tang Dynasty, The Emperor Daizong declared: " Aluoben is a man of great virtue from the Da Qin Empire (or Western Empire). He came from a Far land to present the teachings and images of his religion (the stelae says). His message is mysterious, wonderful, lucid and clear. The teachings will benefit all and they shall be practiced throughout the land, Proclaim the teachings everywhere for the salvation of the people." (This Emperor was a Taoist and obviously a very open-minded person.) The fact that this is true can also be verified by official Tang Dynasty records. (By the way this same Emperor ordered that all the classics, including the oracle the *I Ching*, be inscribed on stone - for posterity - what a clever man!)

The Stelae then describes how a monastery was built for 21 monks. An engraved Imperial decree was set over the main door. It read "Reveal the splendour and brightness of Heaven. Glorify the sages of the Religion of Light and let the benevolent teachings illuminate this realm

of existence," The stone then records that monasteries were built in hundreds of cities and many people were blessed. Funds were also made available for Aluoben to translate his books (or Sutras) into Chinese.

After this, the Emperor Dao-Zong in approx 742 AD ordered his general to attend the consecration of a major church/temple site and he also sent lavish gifts. It was also recorded that another monk who was an astrologer and astronomer from Persia, came to assist the building of this new church.

On another occasion the Emperor honoured the Church by sending incense to be offered and writing a plaque to be hung over the doorway. The plaque implied Jesus as a divine manifestation like this: 'Due to your wonderful and meritorious works, many people have found salvation. Because the sacred (Jesus) took on human form, the poisons (evils) of this world can be stopped'

Now comes the most beautiful part of the Stelae, for the Religion of Light was inscribed thus: 'To penetrate the mysteries - to bless with a good conscience - to be great and yet empty - to return to stillness and be forgiving - to be compassionate and to deliver all people - to do good deeds and help people to reach the other shore - these are the great benefits of our path of cultivation. To calm people in stormy times, to help them understand the nature of things - to maintain purity to nourish all things - to respect all life - and to answer the needs of those whose beliefs come from the heart - these are services the Religion of Light can offer.'

The author Martin Palmer described how he felt when he was standing in front of this stelae reading these words. The effect on him was so profound, one could only say that he must have had a soul- connection to another personality, who lived in those times and was part of this movement. From his writings, he had such beliefs. He said his heart was pounding so loudly, he thought it would stop.

The Stelae continues: "The True Lord of the Primordial Void (God or the Great Tao), in absolute stillness and constant natural-ness, crafted and nourished all things. He raised the earth and established the sky. He took on human form and His compassion was limitless. The sun rises, darkness is banished and we are witnesses to a true wonder. This doctrine is great and its working powerful and mysterious. If forced to describe it, I would call them the work of the Three-in-one Lord. All this humble servant (the inscriber) has done is to record what has happened, on this monument and to glorify the Primordial Lord."

It then concludes that the stelae was erected in 781 AD in our terminology (or in the Second year of the rule of the Emperor Jian-zhong, accompanied by proper ceremonial music and rites. (This stone was obviously intended to impress everyone with the degree of support of various Emperors.)

Sadly for this church, over the next hundred years, things started to go wrong. The Confucian bureaucracy (the mother of all bureaucracies) and the Taoist power structures at court, began to resent the foreign religions, mostly Buddhism. This was because of a massive power struggle at the Imperial Court, between the supporters of Buddhism and supporters of traditional Faiths.

Other Faiths then got caught up in this backlash. From 841 AD, Buddhists were defrocked, and their lands, treasures (and slaves, of all things) were confiscated. Manicheans (a group with ideas similar to The Theosophical Society) were also banned, because of their links with Central Asia. 3000 Religion of Light (Christian) and Zoroastrian monks were also ordered to return to lay life, so as not to adulterate the customs of China. The Buddhists later regained influence, but never returned to their once powerful position. However, for the Christians it was the end of an era.

During this period the Da Qin Christian site was destroyed, leaving little more than one pagoda standing (which the author Martin Palmer rediscovered). By 845 AD this unique blending of cultures and ideas was almost over. The collapse of the Tang dynasty in China in 906 is regarded by some as the primary cause. The links with Persia were also cut, mostly due to the rising influence of Islam. However, the Religion of Light still flourished, both underground in China (for they had their books) and for long time, along the Silk Road. It was on this ancient route that a remarkable merging of Buddhism and Christianity took place in the figure of Kwan Yin. Kwan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy and Compassion, was a melding of the symbols of Mary, mother of Jesus and a Buddhist figure that was formerly male. The androgynous looking Kwan Yin, is depicted either like Mary holding a child, or like the former Buddhist male figure, holding a lotus. Kwan Yin is still greatly revered in China and Japan today. Thus it is interesting that the archetype of Mary maintained a very strong foothold in the East, when other symbols faded from use.



Paradoxically, there was a brief revival of the Church of the East, indirectly due to (of all people) the Mongol Genghis Khan. Under the influence of his daughter in law (a Christian of the East) and Kublai Khan, China settled down once again and experienced a time of peace. When Marco Polo came to China in the 13th century, he reported on the Church of the East or the Nestorians. (He said they had a lot of strange ideas - like karma and reincarnation, etc.) The Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan ordered freedom of religion and held a census, which revealed 700,000 Christians, i.e. five centuries after the church faded from public view. But then with the collapse of the Mongol dynasties, this revived Church of the East also declined. When the Jesuit order arrived in China in the 16th and 17th centuries, they knew nothing of the former influence of the Church of the East,

COMMENTS

I shall now make a short reference to how the Da Qin temple was recently rediscovered. In 1998 Martin Palmer, (along with other scholars) travelled to the far western region of China, to the area in the mountains called the Pass to the West (Remember that the West to them was anything west of this barrier.) This was where (in 600 BC) the great sage Lao Tsu was purported to have left for his journey to immortality, or Adept ship as we might say.

What led Palmer to this region, was a book by a Japanese Professor, that contained a mysterious map, (now thought to be made by a Japanese military spy). This map marked the site of the early Christian Da Chin temple, but not much other information. Then, the author noticed a tiny notation on the map, with the words *Lou Guan Tai*. Suddenly he realized where this temple was, because Lou Guan Tai was the most famous Taoist centre in China fourteen hundred years ago. Palmer had actually been there before, making a programme for the BBC. This Centre was personally supported by the very same Taoist Emperor of the Tang Dynasty mentioned before. It is now almost in ruins. While standing at this Taoist centre, Palmer looked across the countryside and saw a single temple, seven stories high - leaning over at a precarious angle

He went over to the temple and spoke to an old woman. She told Palmer that long ago, it was owned by monks who came from the west. He couldn't believe his ears. So they explored the

old cracked, walled-up temple and saw it was of Tang design. It was once standing on a stone platform that ran east to west (whereas every temple in China runs North to South). So he raced down the hill to a village, in a state of excitement, declaring to the local farmers that he had discovered an ancient Christian temple - and they all replied, "We know that!"

They then told him that this was where the stone stela was unearthed in 1625, but strangely this fact was not known elsewhere. They also said that a stone cross had also been dug up, but it was stolen by the Japanese during the war. Hence Palmer rediscovered the temple that was lost or ignored and only remembered by the local people. This temple is being straightened and rebuilt.. On the fourth floor they discovered an inscription in crude Syriac letters .and the ruins of a Nativity scene inside. The Chinese government (in conjunction with Heritage Foundations) are now building a 'Museum of the West in Ancient China", where these teachings will be once again revealed to the world.

We now come to the finding of *the Jesus Sutras* in the caves of Dunhuang. Dun-Huang is at the far-western limit of Chinese settlement along the Silk Road in Central Asia_ It was once a great centre of Buddhism from the 4th to the 13th century. The Buddhists founded the first of Tun-huang's caves-- known as the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas. (It is now a World Heritage site) In one of the cave-temples, a rich collection of about 60,000 paper manuscripts, printed documents, and fragments, dating from the 5th, to the 11th century was walled up in the year 1015, only to be rediscovered in 1900. This collection included not only Buddhist but also Taoist, Zoroastrian, and Nestorian (Church of the East) scriptures.

The storing of the manuscripts occurred because of invasions by Tibetan tribes. This area was part of China - then the Tibetans took over - then they were expelled - and later they held raids. The tribes of Tibet were a wild lot. This was literally just decades before Buddhism became widespread in Tibet. These manuscripts, when discovered, sadly, were then bandied around many antique dealers the world over and almost destroyed. Some of them are now mere fragments of books.

I shall briefly outline the names of these Church of the East Sutras found in the caves, The first one is called "The Teachings of the World Honoured One". It was based on extracts of a book in Syriac, called *The Teachings of the Apostles*", used throughout the East. It focussed on the Sermon on the Mount. The original book (now lost to the world) is different to how it was translated, since as stated before, the translators drew on local religious traditions to illustrate their points.

The second Sutra is called "The sutra of Cause and Effect and Salvation" but the Chinese called it *The Treatise on the Oneness of Heaven*. It has a strikingly similar format to a Buddhist treatise from the first century. It is thought it may have originated from present day eastern Afghanistan/northern Pakistan. Again this is an amazing historical find, for it could have been used by Christians of the Church of the East in Afghanistan, in the 2nd to the 6th centuries. They drew on classical Greek philosophy and Buddhist texts for their inspiration.

The third Sutra has been called *The Sutra of Origins*" - which includes Taoist terminology. The fourth Sutra ,"*The Sutra of Jesus Christ*", was first translated in 645 AD, a decade after the mission to China. It uses ideas from *The Church of the East* in Tibet, as well as Hinduism All of this illustrates the incredible, multi-faith approach of this Church - and to think it was lost to the world.

One of the Sutras contains a Liturgy in praise of the Three Sacred Powers, which would have been chanted or sung. I would now like you to read this final example, which is part of the ritual of the Religion of Light. Sit comfortably, close your eyes - there are about eight short verses. First there is praise for the Father (or God or the Great Tao). Then there is praise for the Messiah or Son, Ye Tsu or Jesus. Then there is praise for the Pure Wind, or Chi or Holy Spirit. It has Taoist (and Buddhist) overtones.

The highest skies are in love with you (God or the Great Tao)
The great Earth opens its palms in peace,
Our truest being is anchored in your Purity,
You are Allaha: Compassionate Father of the Three.

Everything praises you, sounding its true note
All the Enlightened too, chant your praise.
Every being takes refuge in you.
And the Light or your holy Compassion frees us all.

Beyond knowing, beyond words,
You are the Truth, steadfast for all time.
You live perpetually in Light,
The Light which enters every sphere,

Yet you have never been seen,
No eye can see your form,
or your unclouded Nature.
Among all, you alone are unchanging,
Making all that is good, beyond reckoning.
The root and essence - the Thing itself.

Today I reflect on your Compassion and Grace,
I delight in your Delight, which covers our land.
Messiah, Great holy Son of the Honoured One,
Countless of the suffering are saved.
Compassionate joyous Lamb, loving all who suffer,
Fearless, as you strive for us.

Free us from the karma of our lives,
Bring us back to our original nature,
delivered from all danger

Great Messiah hear our prayers
Send Your raft of salvation
to save us from the burning streams.
Shower us with Your healing rain.

Help us to overcome -
and to give life to that which has withered.
Water the roots of kindness in us.
Great Holy World-Honoured One.
Messiah, love us as we love Our Father
who is a boundless Sea of Compassion
and the clean Pure Wind,
whose clarity cleanses through the Great Law,
reaching all beyond grace.

Martin Palmer hopes that these Sutras will once again sing out throughout the world, alter a thousand years of silence. Here is a free offering on the history of the Religion of Light in the Far East, "By Foot to China" , by John Young - <http://www.aina.org/books/bftc/bftc.htm>



Theosophical Society World Congress, Rome, 10 to 15 July 2010

Invitation to travel in a group with an option for a sightseeing tour of Italy

We at the Sunshine Coast Lodge are in the process of arranging for a group of Australian Theosophical Society Members to attend the World Congress in Rome from 10-15 Jul, 2010. At the moment we are forwarding information on the proposed travel and requesting Expressions of Interest in the event that we may be able to avail ourselves of a cheaper group air fare.

In addition to attending the congress we are planning a tour of the major tourist attractions of Italy. The tour has been planned at a leisurely pace, and represents value for money – see separate itinerary for details. If you are interested in joining kindly contact Jean Carroll our coordinator (see below for contacts)

This is not an activity organized by the Theosophical Society in Australia; however, the National President has given her permission to distribute this information to your TS centre.

The World Congress will take place from 10 to 15 July in Rome, at the Summit Hotel and Convention Centre, Aurelia. The costs are €88 for a shared room, €70 for a triple room and €110 for a single room. They include accommodation and three meals. In addition to that there is a registration fee of €50 per person.

Group Travel: If we are able to get 10 passengers or more to travel together we may be able to arrange a group airfare. Air fares are common rated from Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. i.e. providing we depart the east coast on the same day with the same airline we would qualify for group air fare. Conversely you may purchase the air fare through your travel agent and join us for the *Splendours of Italy* tour at the end of the convention. Competitive group air fares have not yet been released and normally become available early March.

Further enquiries, expressions of interest , please contact by 30 Jan 2010 -

Jean Carroll, Theosophical Society of the Sunshine Coast

(Jean worked in the travel industry for almost 20 years, specializing in group travel and worked specifically as a tour operator until her recent retirement)

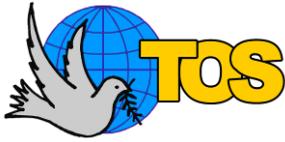
Tel. (07) 5443-4733 Mobile: 0402 805127. Email: oneness@tpg.com.au

Splendours of Italy tour option

9 days, 8 nights 15 – 23 July. Cost per person for twin share, Aus\$2460

Day 1: Rome – Pompei – Sorrento. **2:** Sorrento – Capri – Sorrento. **3:** Sorrento – Positano – Sorrento. **4:** Sorrento – Vatican – Florence. **5:** Florence – Sienna – Assisi – Perugia – Florence. **6:** Florence. **7:** Florence – Padua – Venice. **8:** Venice. **9:** Venice.

Ask for flyer or see more details on our website – www.theosophyqld.org.au



T.O.S. news

Brisbane Theosophical Order of Service, 355 Wickham Terrace,
Brisbane 4000 Phone: (07) 3839 1453 FAX: (07) 3831 3692
Email: lynnettermuller@yahoo.com.au
President: Lynette Muller Vice-President: Tina Fielder

Annual General Meeting Report

The Annual General Meeting was held on Saturday 5 December, 2008. The office bearers for 2010 are: President: Lynette Muller, Vice-President: Tina Fielder, Secretary: Carolyn Harrod, Treasurer: Karen Cipressi. Geoffrey Harrod is the TOS Representative on the Brisbane Theosophical Society Committee.

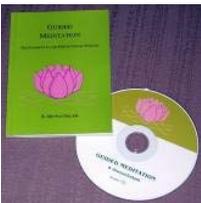
TOS members work in a number of areas, choosing ones of particular interest to them. The areas of service are: community service and education, healing, animal welfare, environment, and peace. For information, talk to one of the committee or visit www.theosophyqld.org.au

Many thanks to all who donated at the AGM appeal for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Centre at West End, and thanks to the Brisbane TS which matched the donation. We will be able to send the Centre a donation of \$335.

Meetings in 2010

Planning meetings will be held from 10.00 to 11:30 am in the T.S. rooms. All interested people are invited to attend. Meeting dates in 2010 are: Saturday 6 February, Saturday 1 May, Saturday 7 August and Saturday 4 December (AGM).

Guided Meditation book and CD



A book and CD on Guided Meditation have recently been written and published by Dr. K Arunachalam.

Aru has taught meditation at the Brisbane TS for many

years. He has generously donated this work to the Brisbane TOS and all profit from sales will go to TOS Projects. The set of book and CD costs \$12. You can purchase a set from the TOS by contacting any committee member.

Working bee at Springbrook Theosophical Retreat Centre

We are holding a working bee from 10.00am Saturday 27 March to 3.00pm Sunday 28 March 2010.

What's on: Gardening, painting & building maintenance PLUS fun and fellowship, time for bushwalks, meditation, etc. Accommodation with electric blankets and food catered by the TOS are free.

What to bring: Work clothes, gardening implements, single sheets and pillow case, towel, personal toiletries.

We would welcome your help. Please add your name to the form in the library or phone Carolyn Harrod on 3378 8534.

Support for homeless women

We are continuing our support for women at the New Farm refuge who are moving into long-term housing. If you would like to donate non-perishable groceries and personal care items, please leave them in the basket in the main TS meeting room.



Lynette Muller, Robyn Rizzo (project coordinator) and Tina Fiedler pack bags.

Winner of the handpainted doll

We are delighted to announce that Emilia Cipressi won the doll, generously donated by Rosemary Di Ruggiero. Proceeds from the raffle will be donated to the SEE Vision program conducted by the Chennai TOS.

The Theosophical Society

A worldwide body whose primary object is to promote Universal Brotherhood. The Society imposes no belief upon its members, who are united by a common search for truth. Its constitution declares three objects:

1. To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
2. To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science.
3. To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in the human being.

The Theosophical Society has no official doctrine. All philosophies, religions and methods of spiritual practice are within its scope of interest but not endorsed. Material published in this journal therefore does not carry any endorsement or represent any official viewpoint of the organisation.

The Motto of the Society is ***There is no religion higher than Truth.***

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