

# What is the Theosophical Society? An Opinion in Regard to What it Ought to Be

by Anonymous

From The Path  
reprinted from "Theosophical Siftings" Volume - 1 -

The Theosophical Publishing Society, England

I am often asked by strangers who have heard some account of the doings of the Theosophists: — What is the Theosophical Society and what is its purpose ? Some believe it to be a sect, in which no opinion is suffered to exist unless it is first sanctioned by certain "headquarters" or "Boards of Control"; others believe it to be a school for Occultism and Witchcraft; others think that it is a new form of Buddhism, coming under some disguise to overthrow Christianity, while some of those who do not belong to the Christian Church suspect it of being an effort to spread Christian Doctrines among them by clothing them in some new and more acceptable form. Nearly every one of such enquirers sees in the T.S. only a bugbear, and there are all sorts of opinions, except the right one, prevailing about it.

To all such objections I can only answer by showing the printed "Rules of the Theosophical Society", where, under the head "Objects of the Society", it says: — "The Society represents no particular religious creed, interferes with no man's caste, is entirely unsectarian", and includes professors of all faiths". This sounds so beautiful that people who have been accustomed all their life to cling to creeds and dogmas and "recognised authorities" are unable to believe that it can be true. Moreover, the objectors have heard of "Boards of Control", of "Presidential Orders", of "Official Organs", etc., [Page 10] and all these things have such an air of sectarianism that they seem to be hardly compatible with the spirit of freedom so loudly proclaimed by the T.S. It is asked:— What has a " Board of Control" to control ? Who enforces obedience to the Presidential Orders ? Does the Official Organ promulgate the dogmas of the sect ? And, if not, what then is the use of these things ? It seems, therefore, time that we should once more consider what the T.S. is, or what it ought to be. It must be plain to every lover of the truth that, however great the progress may be which modern civilisation has made with regard to the material and temporal welfare of man, the world is still far from having attained physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual perfection. Disease and crime, suffering and death, poverty, tyranny and ignorance are still in existence, and although there are many organised bodies whose purpose it is to do good and to cure the ills of humanity, still the majority of such bodies are hampered to a certain extent by old beliefs, usages, creeds and superstitions, and their activity is not sufficiently free, because their opinions are not free; they may benefit a certain class of humanity, but not all mankind; they know perhaps a part of the truth, but not all of it; their charity extends over a small circle, but not over the whole world. The root of all evil is ignorance, with its children, superstition, fear, crime and disease; and the only remedy against ignorance is to spread the knowledge of truth.

There have been at all times men and societies willing to spread that which they believe to be the truth by all means which were at their command, whether fair or foul; there have been people ready to force

their opinions in regard to the truth upon others, by the power of the sword and fagot, the rack and the fire; but the truth cannot spread in this manner. Real knowledge of the good, the beautiful, and the true can only be attained by obtaining the knowledge of self, and the knowledge of self must grow to every individual in the course of his development. It can no more be implanted by others or be forced upon another than a tree can be made to grow by pulling its trunk. The object of the true Theosophist is, therefore, to attain self-knowledge, and to employ the knowledge which he possesses for the purpose of accomplishing the greatest good.

There is, perhaps, not a single country upon the face of the earth in which may not be found a number of persons who desire to obtain self-knowledge, to find the truth by means of a free and unrestricted investigation, and to employ their knowledge for the benefit of humanity. There are persons who desire to see true progress in place of stagnation, knowledge in the place of accepted but still dubious opinions, wisdom in the place of sophistry, universal love and benevolence in the place of selfishness. Such men and women may be found here and there, and each one acts in the way he considers best. Some work by means of the school, others by means of the pulpit; some teach science, others influence a sense of the beautiful and true by their works of art, others speak the powerful language of music; but the most advanced of these [Page 11] give an example to others by their own Christlike conduct in the affairs of everyday life.

The great majority of such persons, interested in the welfare of humanity, live isolated, though they may be residing in crowded cities: for they find few who share their mode of feeling and thought, and who have identical objects in view. They are often living in communities where little except selfishness, the greed for money-making, or perhaps bigotry and superstition, are found, they are isolated and without the support of those who sympathise with their ideas; for although one universal principle unites all those who have the same object in view, still their persons are unknown to each other, and they seldom find means for mutual intercourse and exchange of thought.

Now let us suppose that in each country a centre of communication were to be established, by means of which such persons could come into contact with each other, and that at each such centre a journal or newspaper were to be established, by means of which such persons could exchange their thoughts — not a centre from which supreme wisdom was to be dispensed, and from whence dogmas were to be doled out for the unthinking believers, but a centre through which the thought of the members of the society could freely flow — and we should then have an ideal "Theosophical Society". Such a centre would resemble a central telephone station, to which all the different wires extend, and it would require a trustworthy servant at the office to connect the wires and attend to the external business connected with the affairs of the offices; but if such a "telephonic operator" should attempt to interfere with the messages running over the wires, and to assume an authority to say what kinds of opinions should be wired and what messages should be suppressed: if he were to assume the *rôle* of a dictator, and permit only such messages to pass over the wires as would be in harmony with his own ideas, then the object of the centre of communication would come to nought, we should again have Papal dictates and Presidential orders in the place of liberty of thought and speech, and there would be an end of the object and purpose of the Society.

But, on the other hand, if every unripe mind were to be permitted to have its effusions printed at the expense of the Society, and to teach things which, perhaps a few months afterwards, having learned to know better, he would be sorry to think had ever seen the light, such a proceeding would throw discredit

upon the Society, and be, moreover, altogether impracticable.

Our "telephone operator" should, therefore, be a man possessed of the greatest circumspection and discrimination; and while he should never interfere with the expression of any opinion, no matter how much opposed to his own, he should, at the same time, be permitted to cut down the messages sent over his wires to certain limits, and to present them, if necessary, in a more suitable form. [Page 12]

As regards the liberty of speech, it would be an absurdity if such a Society were to attempt to prescribe to any of its members what kind of opinions or dogmas he should express, because, whatever opinions he may pronounce, they could never be regarded as the opinions of the Society as a whole; for the Society, as such, "represents no particular creed", and "is entirely unsectarian". If, in spite of this solemn assertion, anyone chooses to believe that the opinions publicly expressed by a member of the Society represent the creed of the Society, such an unfortunate circumstance can only be deplored, but will do no serious harm. On the other hand, if "a President" or "Board of Control" should attempt to preside over more important things than merely over the meetings of the members, and if a "Board of Control" should attempt to control the conscience and opinions of the members, instead of merely exercising its control over the external affairs of the Society; and if an "official organ" should attempt to postulate what ought and what ought not to be believed by members of the Society, such a proceeding would be in direct opposition to the spirit, the object, and the purpose of that Society, and in contradiction to the principles on which it was founded; and while it should be the object of every lover of truth to assist the growth of a true "Theosophical Society", and to maintain its purity of principle, it should also be his aim to suffocate in the germ, everything that is opposed to liberty and freedom of speech.