

and more middle class than in its early days; these were people by no means as radical in their overall social views, including those concerning the established religion, as their predecessors. Often Anglican in background, at least in the English-speaking world, they carried over something of that communion's relative toleration of theological diversity and its ritual sense, and some were as much interested in reconciling all that with Theosophy as in renewed theology/theosophy battles. Out of this new realm of the spirit came the Theosophical Christianity of persons like Annie Besant, Charles W. LEADBEATER, James Ingall WEDGWOOD, Geoffrey HODSON, and the LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH. These writers certainly continued in the tradition of affirming that the Gnostics represented the best and truest version of Christianity, and that the religion was to be understood in a mystical, mythological, "Christian mysteries" kind of way. But in their books the earlier trenchant anticlericalism, the diatribes against Jesuits, missionaries, and the church fathers, is noticeably missing. The tone is almost entirely positive, and one can imagine these works being well-received — as some of them were — by Christians in the pews of any reasonably liberal or "mainstream" twentieth century church.

The first in the new series, though drawing from Caithness, Kingsford, and Maitland, was Annie Besant's *Esoteric Christianity* of 1898. Its basic message is that all religions contain a "hidden side," a "mystic and esoteric teaching," and that Christianity is no exception though lamentably that side is not widely known. The particulars of that teaching are not new, nor are they meant to be: it is that the Christian "mythos" of the life of Christ is an allegory of the descent of the Logos into matter and the initiatory transformation of matter through the "Christian Mysteries," the "Mysteries of the Kingdom." The "solar myth" concept is still much employed. What is new about the book is, first, the emphasis on drawing material not only from heretical Gnostics, but from "orthodox" fathers like Clement of Alexandria, and even from readings of the normatively orthodox Nicene and Athanasian creeds; and third, the positive interpretation even of the central act of Christian worship in the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions, the Eucharistic sacrifice and holy communion, in light of their esoteric meaning.

The same animated regard for normative Catholic-type doctrine and worship understood esoterically and theosophically, was carried forward by the