The Lord of the World: What’s Really Behind the Legend of the Mysterious Kingdom of Agarttha?

BY RICHARD SMOLEY

FacebookTwitterEmailRedditPinterestWhatsAppShare

From New Dawn 151 (Jul-Aug 2015)

A current theory holds that the secret rulers of humanity are an alien, reptilian race. The best-known version of this view comes from British author David Icke. (See Donald Tyson’s “Reptilians ’R Us” in New Dawn Special Issue Vol. 9 No. 2).

It is all too easy to believe that the current leaders of humanity are operating from the reptilian part of the brain, which is devoid of any capacity for love, compassion, or justice. But an alien race? What makes reptiles aliens? They have been on this planet for over 300 million years.

We then face the disturbing possibility that there is nothing less alien than this reptilian impulse. In fact, it is most likely the product of the earth and of earthly evolution. We may then turn around and ask whether it’s actually the higher, more selfless types of motivation that are implants from an alien world.

The visionary author Philip K. Dick believed something like this. For him the “Immortal One” or the “plasmate,” as he called it, is an impulse that comes from outside our world but can bond with the human entity to create a homoplasmate, in which the mortal human is annexed permanently to the immortal. The Divine Invasion, the title of one of Dick’s novels, alludes to this possibility.

This consideration leads us to look at a powerful idea that comes out of the world of esotericism: that, just as there are visible hierarchies bent on perpetuating their own power, there are other, unseen hierarchies that are moving (or attempting to move) the human race toward higher and purer states.

One of the most intriguing versions of this teaching is the idea of the Lord of the World, the head of an unseen but benevolent hierarchy that governs humanity. Governs, that is, in a certain sense only, because any hierarchy that was completely in control of present-day humanity could not possibly be benevolent. So the idea of the Lord of the World encompasses another facet: this sacred hierarchy is, for reasons that are not terribly clear, blocked off and hidden from the majority of the human race. As of course would be his domain – if it exists in earthly terms at all.

This idea seems to have long existed in Asia, but it only came to the attention of the educated West in the nineteenth century, first from a French jurist named Louis Jacolliot, who had been a magistrate in southern India and had collected local lore when he was there. In his 1873 book Les fils du Dieu (“The Sons of God”), he mentions a legend of “Asgartha, city of the sun, the capital of the Brahmatma, seat of brahminical power, ancestor of Thebes, Babylon, and Nineveh, the Rome of antediluvian times,” destroyed by a revolt of the Kshatriyas (the warrior caste) around 5000 BCE.

The Subterranean Agarttha

It was the French occultist Alexandre Saint-Yves d’Alveydre who brought the idea of this mysterious kingdom to the attention of mystics and esotericists. In his book Mission de l’Inde (“Mission of India”), he spoke of the city of Agarttha (whose name in Sanskrit, according to Saint-Yves, meant “inaccessible to violence”) and which continues to exist in some unspecified location of Central Asia, both “on the surface and in the bowels of the earth.”

For Saint-Yves, Agarttha was a real and palpable city, hidden but in theory discoverable. Indeed, part of the motive of writing his book, he implied, was that “certain powers, in their competition with each other across the whole of Asia” were bound to discover it and try to invade it. He was alluding to Great Britain and Russia, which were then engaged in the “Great Game” for control of Central Asia. By divulging its existence, Saint-Yves believed, he was warning the colonial powers to leave Agarttha alone – for their own good.

Saint-Yves’ book was published in 1886, but abortively. For obscure reasons, he had almost the entire edition pulled and burned. Only a stray copy or two survived, which made the full publication of the book possible in 1910, a year after his death.

Mission de l’Inde – published in English under the title The Kingdom of Agarttha – is a short but grandiose work, propounding the idea of “the Sovereign Pontiff” of Agarttha – the Brahmatma. After it was published, it attracted much attention in French occultist circles.

In 1924, another book appeared: a memoir called Beasts, Men, and Gods by Ferdinand Ossendowski. Ossendowski had been a White officer in the Russian Civil War. After the Whites lost, he had to make his escape across Siberia and Mongolia. Much of the book is a description of these adventures, but the last chapters are dedicated to some of the legends that Ossendowski said he had heard along the way. One was of a subterranean land called “Agarthi.” According to Ossendowski, one lama told him:

More than sixty thousand years ago a Holyman [sic] disappeared with a whole tribe of people under the ground and never appeared again on the surface of the earth. Many people, however, have since visited this kingdom, Sakkia Mouni [the historical Buddha], Undur Gheghen, Paspa, Khan Baber and others. No one knows where this place is. One says Afghanistan, others India. All the people there are protected against Evil and crimes do not exist within its bournes. Science has there developed calmly and nothing is threatened with destruction. The subterranean people have reached the highest knowledge. Now it is a large kingdom, millions of men with the King of the World as their ruler. He knows all the forces of the world and reads all the souls of humankind and the great book of their destiny. Invisibly he rules eight hundred million men on the surface of the earth and they will accomplish his every order.

Ossendowski also reported a prophecy allegedly made by the King of the World in the winter of 1890. He forecast fifty years of bloodshed.

Then I shall send a people, now unknown, which shall tear out the weeds of madness and vice with a strong hand and will lead those who still remain faithful to the spirit of man in the fight against Evil. They will found a new life on the earth purified by the death of nations. In the fiftieth year only three great kingdoms will appear, which will exist happily seventy-one years. Afterwards there will be eighteen years of war and destruction. Then the peoples of Agharti will come up from their subterranean caverns to the surface of the earth.

It is tempting, though of course completely speculative, to connect the “fifty years of bloodshed” with the two World Wars, followed by a period of comparative peace under three great nations (the United States, Russia, and China?) that would last seventy-one years. If you start this seventy-one years at the end of World War II in 1945, that brings us to 2016. By this reckoning, the people of Agharti will emerge in 2034. Ever since 2012 came and went, we have had no new dates for the imminent End of Time, so those in need of such a thing may want to consider this as a possibility.

Ossendowski’s book became a best-seller and drew further attention to the idea of Agarttha and the Lord of the World. There has been much debate about whether Ossendowski borrowed his legends from Saint-Yves. Those who say he did point to the similarities even in superficial detail between the two. Those who deny the connection included Ossendowski himself, who said he had never heard of Saint-Yves or his theories before his own book was published.

René Guénon

One figure who came out in support of Ossendowski was the famous French esotericist René Guénon. In a short book published in 1927 and entitled Le roi du monde (“The King of the World”; the English title is The Lord of the World), Guénon wrote, “Even if a certain amount of plagiarism were to be admitted, the fact remains that Ossendowski puts forward various original ideas which definitely are not to be found in Mission de l’Inde and which he would certainly not have been able to invent in their entirety,” if only because Ossendowski was “so ignorant of anything which touched upon the esoteric, that he was manifestly incapable of seizing their true import.”

Guénon’s book is surprising. Ordinarily he had nothing but contempt for the material that came out of French occultist circles like Saint-Yves’. Hence his support for this idea of a hidden kingdom of initiates may seem strange. But in fact it fits in well with Guénon’s worldview.

One of the mainsprings of Guénon’s thought is the idea that the society of the modern West is not a triumph of evolution (an idea he despised) but rather a reflection of an extremely degenerate age that he equated with the Hindu Kali Yuga, or Age of Darkness. One corollary of this idea is the belief that humanity did have a connection with a sacred centre and hierarchy – in prehistoric times – but this connection has been obscured and to all practical purposes lost.

Thus it was natural for Guénon to hold to an idea of a hidden sacred kingdom. “This ‘Holy Land,’ which is defended by guardians who keep it hidden from profane view while ensuring a certain exterior communication, is to all intents and purposes inaccessible and invisible to all except those possessing the necessary qualifications for entry,” he wrote.

Does this holy land exist physically, or does it exist in a symbolic sense only? Guénon replied: “The simple answer is that both geographical and historical facts possess a symbolic validity that in no way detracts from their being facts, but that actually, beyond this reality, gives them a higher significance.”

The Lord of the World is a short book but a somewhat disjointed one, including chapters on subjects as diverse as the Grail, the mysterious biblical figure of Melchizedek, and the angel Metatron of Kabbalistic legend. Its views can be sketched as follows:

There is a secret Lord of the World, known as the Brahmatma, possibly to be identified with both Metatron and Melchizedek. Under this potentate, also known as the Brahmatma, are two figures, the Mahatma and the Mahanga, who represent the priestly and royal functions respectively. The abode from which the Brahmatma reigns was called Paradesa before the coming of the Kali Yuga around 3000 BCE (the name was, Guénon says, the source of our word “paradise”) and is now called Agarttha. This “Supreme Centre” is represented in various geographical locales by sacred cities including Jerusalem and Rome, but none of these are the “centre” itself.

“Agarttha,” Guénon writes, “did not always exist underground and will not always remain so.” Hence the prophecy that the people of Agarttha will, at some point in the (possibly near) future, return to the surface. For Guénon, this symbolises the end of the Kali Yuga, the dark phase of the cycle in which we now live. For the time being, though, Agarttha is hidden and occluded.

Some who are familiar with Eastern traditions will see a similarity between Agarttha and the kingdom of Shambhala, known from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Shambhala, too, is hidden, inaccessible; it is described sometimes as an actual place, sometimes almost as a state of mind. One difference, however, is that Shambhala is seen as a city (possibly) on earth rather than a subterranean one. (See accompanying article on page 66 for an account of Shambhala.)

This fact led an Italian writer named Marco Baistrocchi to publish several articles in a journal called Politica Romana from 1995 to 1997. Baistrocchi claimed that the truth about Agarttha was quite different: that Saint-Yves and Jacolliot had borrowed the idea from a novel by the British author Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Entitled The Coming Race and published in 1871, it spoke of a subterranean race that had mastered an occult life force known as Vril.

According to Baistrocchi, Guénon picked up on this idea of a subterranean race for rather convoluted reasons. Mainly he wanted to discourage Western seekers from making contact with authentic sources of Asian spirituality. He wanted instead to channel them toward Western forms – first a kind of initiatic Catholicism reconstituted on medieval lines, and, after that clearly was not going to happen, toward Islam. (Guénon converted to Islam around 1912 and moved to Cairo in 1930; he lived there for the rest of his life.) Guénon thus followed Saint-Yves in trying to prevent “Europeans from restoring contact with the true and authentic Asiatic world, and above all with the doctrine of the Kalachakra from which the myth of Shambhala derives,” writes Baistrocchi. “With the help of his disciples who continued to promote his works, Saint-Yves succeeded in turning aside the curiosity and interest in the Indo-Tibetan world that [H.P.] Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society, for all their limitations, had fostered.”

The argument, with its plots and counterplots like those in Umberto Eco’s clumsy novel Foucault’s Pendulum, can be hard to follow. Certainly Guénon’s attitude toward the world religions is complex. He regards Christianity as degenerate, believing that its links to the esoteric traditional centre were broken in late medieval times. In the West, only very small and obscure initiatic lineages preserve some semblance of this tradition in Christianity. The religion he prizes above all is Hinduism. Most of his metaphysical theory is derived from Hindu thought in one way or another. Guénon writes fairly little about Islam.

On the other hand, it is true that Guénon’s influence turned many of his followers into Muslims – with disastrous results, according to Baistrocchi: “By draining the spiritual energies from Europe, the crisis [of the modern world] has been indirectly accelerated and regeneration has been hindered. At the same time, Islam has been reinforced, in which there grows from day to day an ever more rigid, anti-spiritual, and counter-traditional fundamentalism.”

This claim may be extreme, but it does seem Guénon’s influence has been stronger in the Muslim world and may have fed fundamentalist trends in Islam. Mark Sedgwick’s book Against the Modern World discusses this question in some detail. From a nonacademic point of view, a strange book by Jean-Marc Allemand, René Guénon et les sept tours du diable (“René Guénon and the Seven Towers of the Devil”), explores the “counterinitiatic,” i.e., diabolical elements of our time and locates their centres in such places as Syria, Sudan, and Iraq. (This book has not been translated into English and is out of print in French. For a map of these centres, visit a French blog called “Les chroniques de Rorschach.”)

Get the issue this article appears in

C.W. Leadbeater, Alice Bailey & the Christ

To return to the main thread of our story, travellers who made contact with Tibet in the early twentieth century (when it was still a rarity) were struck by the resemblances between Agarttha, which they knew from the occultist literature, and the decidedly nonsubterranean kingdom of Shambhala, about which they heard in their travels. But they found no stories about a subterranean kingdom. The French explorer Alexandra David-Neel said she asked the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (the predecessor of the one now in office) about this legend. He replied, “Do you take us for moles?” Another high Tibetan authority, the Panchen Lama, told her, “You know that beyond making machines and things like that, Westerners aren’t very intelligent, but I never thought they could have been stupid enough to imagine such things.”

Agarttha may in a distorted fashion reflect the very real Tibetan legend of Shambhala. If Guénon’s aim had been to steer Westerners away from it – which I very much doubt – he failed miserably, largely because the real legend of Shambhala, central to Tibetan Buddhism, has become so well-known in the West.

As a result of this direct infusion of Tibetan knowledge, the legend of Agarttha has faded into the background. But the theme of the Lord of the World persists. Along different lines it was propounded by the British Theosophist C.W. Leadbeater. Leadbeater wrote in 1925:

Our world is governed by a spiritual King – one of the Lords of the Flame who came long ago from Venus. He is called by the Hindus Sanat Kumara, the last word being a title, meaning Prince or Ruler. Other names given to him are the One Initiator, the One without a Second, the Eternal Youth of sixteen summers; and often we speak of him as the Lord of the World. He is the Supreme Ruler; in his hand and within his actual aura lies the whole of this planet….

In his mind he holds the whole plan of evolution at some high level of which we know nothing; he is the Force which drives the whole world-machine, the embodiment of the Divine Will on this planet…. His consciousness is of so extended a nature that it comprehends at once all the life on our globe.

The Lord of the World, Leadbeater added, is the head of the Brotherhood, the collection of individuals who have awakened at least to some degree and are working to promote the collective evolution of humanity. The Hierarchy of adepts described by Leadbeater is extremely complex. But, for example, Sanat Kumara, the Lord of the World, is the head of a trinity of rulers of the human race, along with “the Lord Buddha” and “the Maha Chohan.”

The idea of the Lord of the World was developed further by the British esotericist Alice Bailey, who started as a Theosophist but broke with the Theosophical Society in 1920 because the society’s leaders disapproved of materials she allegedly channelled from the Tibetan master Djwhal Khul (pronounced “jwal kool”).

Bailey foretells the reappearance of the Christ. Originally Theosophy, the source of all these teachings, did not place much emphasis on the concept of Christ, preferring to see the “Christos” as “the spiritual Ego” or higher Self in each individual. However, both Leadbeater, an Anglican priest, and Bailey, an active proselytizer for evangelical Christianity in her youth, tended to see Christian themes in a more positive way – and put them at the centre of their myth.

For Bailey the Christ is a high member of the Hierarchy. He is an “avatar,” a divine messenger who is due to return to earth, but not in the way conceived by mainstream Christianity. “No one knows in what nation He will come; He may appear as an Englishman, a Russian, a Negro, a Latin, a Turk, a Hindu, or any other nationality,” Bailey wrote. But it was the preparation for this reappearance of the Christ that was the main work of the Hierarchy in her day.

To this end “preparation is being made for the emergence of the Hierarchy in the world of men,” Bailey added. “The Hierarchy is orienting itself to a much closer rapport with humanity,” and the members of the Hierarchy “are already – one by one entering into outer activity on the physical plane.”

This “externalisation of the Hierarchy,” as Bailey called it, the reappearance of the Christ, and the new world religion that will emerge from these events, are all to foster the “Plan.” This Plan, she wrote, “will make available to every man all past achievements and knowledges, it will reveal to man the true significance of his mind and brain, and make him the master of that equipment, and will make him therefore omnipresent and eventually open the door to omniscience. This next development of the Plan will produce in man an understanding – intelligent and co-operative – of the divine purpose.”

Bailey’s ideas in turn were taken up by the Scottish visionary Benjamin Creme, who, accepting Leadbeater’s identification of the Christ with Maitreya, the coming Buddha of Buddhism, announced in 1975 that Maitreya had already taken incarnation. In the years since, Creme has continued to assert that Maitreya, the “World Teacher is here – and needed.” Creme has even claimed that Maitreya appeared on American television, though when and in what identity is not specified.

The Dark Forces

If we are governed from the inner planes by a supernaturally wise and benign spiritual hierarchy, why does the world so often seem to be ruled by evil? One might conclude that anyone who was Lord of the World as we know it would be someone to stay away from.

In response, Bailey said there are also “dark forces… which are working against the living principle of love (as embodied in the Hierarchy).”

Like many occult writers, Bailey paints an ambiguous picture of these dark forces. At times they seem to be an essential part of the cosmic order. “The dark forces work with the form side of expression,” she writes, but then adds, “and with the founding of a centre of control which will be theirs entirely.” One has the impression that in some way these dark forces are necessary (in that the “form side of expression” is necessary), but in some other way they represent a kind of corruption and imbalance.

In any event, if there is a Lord of the World with an attendant Hierarchy, there must also be a corresponding hierarchy of evil, employing, in Bailey’s words, “chaos, disruption, lack of established security, and consequent fear.” This would go toward explaining why, despite the efforts of high beings on the inner planes, the world seems so often to go awry.

Is it plausible to believe in such things as the Hierarchy or a benevolent Lord of the World living in the etheric realm?

Certainly it seems unrealistic to search for anything that would prove the existence of such beings and societies in any way that would be satisfying, say, to a journalist. But the fact that these legends persist, and have cropped up so many times in so many different forms, leads one to believe that we as humans recognise that other, larger forces govern our lives. Nor is it satisfying to assume these are simply the forces of nature or of the political and economic powers that be. There is an intuition, however dim, that there are powers behind the scenes of physical reality shaping this reality. Whether you find this possibility inspiring or troubling may, in the end, simply be a matter of your character, taste, and aspiration.

This article was published in New Dawn 151.

If you appreciate this article, please consider a contribution to help maintain this website.

Sources

Jean-Marc Allemand, René Guénon et les sept tours du diable, Maisnie Tredaniel, 1990

Alice A. Bailey, Ponder on This, Lucis, 1971

Alice A. Bailey, The Reappearance of the Christ, Lucis, 1948

Marco Baistrocchi, ‘Agarttha: A Guénonian Manipulation?’, Translated by Joscelyn Godwin, Theosophical History: Occasional Papers, vol. 12 (2010)

“Les chroniques de Rorschach” Web site: leschroniquesderorschach.blogspot.com/2014/10/rene-guenon-et-les-sept-tours-du-diable.html; accessed 20 May 2015

Philip K. Dick, “Exegesis: Excerpts,” Tekgnostics Web site: [www.tekgnostics.com/PDK.HTM](http://www.tekgnostics.com/PDK.HTM); accessed 6 May 2015

Joscelyn Godwin, Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival, Adventures Unlimited, 1996

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ed., Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism, 2 vols, Brill, 2005

Philip J. Harris, ed., Theosophical Encyclopedia, Theosophical Publishing House, 2006

Louis Jacolliot, Les fils de Dieu, Albert Lacroix, 1875

“Kalachakra Initiations by the Dalai Lama.” The Fourteenth Dalai Lama’s Web site: [www.dalailama.com/teachings/kalachakra-initiations](http://www.dalailama.com/teachings/kalachakra-initiations); accessed 15 May 2015

C.W. Leadbeater, The Masters and the Path, 4th ed., Theosophical Publishing House, 1983

Ferdinand Ossendowski, Beasts, Men, and Gods, Translated by Lewis Stanton Palen, [www.gutenberg.org/files/2067/2067-h/2067-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2067/2067-h/2067-h.htm); accessed 15 May 2015

Alexandre Saint-Yves d’Alveydre, The Kingdom of Agarttha: A Journey into the Hollow Earth, Translated by Jon E. Graham, Inner Traditions, 2008

Mark Sedgwick, Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century, Oxford University Press, 2009