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A LIFETIME IN ERROR:
HELENA P. BLAVATSKY
AND THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

*Mother! whose virgin bosom was uncroft
With the least shade of thought to sin allied;
Woman! above all women glorified,
Our tainted nature's solitary boast.*

William Woodsworth, "The Virgin" (1822)

INTRODUCTION: FROM THE SPIRITUAL TO THE TECHNICAL

The Woman who is now referred to by pious believers as the Daughter of the Father, the Mother of the Son, and the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, has drawn an immense attention of the Fathers of the Church. In that early epoch of shaping the common tradition, Christian writers were very careful not to use any titles associated with female pagan deities. And thus, in the West, they called Her *immaculata*, *incorrupta*, *incontaminata*, and *inviolata*, while in the East She was praised as *áfthoros*, *adiáfthoros*, *ákakos*, *akératos*, *amíantos*, *amólyntos*, *panamólyntos*, *ámomos*, *panámomos*, *arrýpotos*, *áspilos*, *áchrantos*, *panáchrantos*, *pánagnos*, and *hyperagía*.¹ At the root of this vast and

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¹ The Fathers of the Church used threefold terminology: one part of it was derived from pre-Christian literature, another was originally created by them, and the third — used mostly in poetry — was based on biblical figures and images (those included the Tree of Life, Jacob's ladder, the burning bush, the Arc of the Covenant, the tabernacle, Mount Sion, etc.). Cf. Marek

creative effort were the Gospels, and most importantly—Saint Luke’s narrative of the Annunciation, where the Archangel addresses Mary with the title ‘*kecharitoméne*’ (Lk 1:28). Such reverence towards Mary as a sinless, perfect human being made its way quickly throughout the Christendom, with the faithful celebrating the feast of the Immaculate Conception as early as the fifth and sixth centuries in the East and the eighth century in the West. Still, however, more widespread was the *festivitas* of Mary’s Nativity (September 8), eagerly included in all liturgical calendars after the Council of Ephesus (AD 431). While the piety grew rather quickly, the theology of the Immaculate Conception was clarified very slowly, and, at times, was also fervently disputed (interestingly, Saint Thomas Aquinas was at odds with the whole idea).² The trend, however, remained clear: *lex orandi* was becoming *lex credendi*. By mid-17th century it was nothing unusual to dedicate a newly constructed church to the Immaculate Conception of Mary.³ In 1670, the first male religious order of the Immaculate Conception was approved (Marian Fathers in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). In 1708, the feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8) grew in significance, as from then on it became a *solemnitas* in the liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church. In 1816, another male religious order of the Immaculate Conception was approved (Oblate Fathers in France). Finally, in 1854, the Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, issued by Blessed Pius IX, elevated the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary to the rank of a Church dogma. The definition itself—

GILSKI, “Patrystyczne prodomy doktryny o Niepokalanym Poczęciu,” in *Niepokalana w wierze i teologii Kościoła*, ed. Szymon Drzyżdzyk (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Papieskiej Akademii Teologicznej, 2005), 8–10. All known writings on Mary of the first seven centuries were published in eight volumes of *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, ed. Sergio Álvarez Campos (Burgos: Ed. Aldecoa, 1970–85). It is worth adding that this priceless collection of all the source material of the Patristic Era contains *partes I, II, III, IV/1, IV/2, V, and VI*, plus one volume of indices, mistakenly numbered as “*pars VIII*.” Therefore, please do not look for “*pars VII*” in this edition.

² For a study that discusses at length Thomas Aquinas’s teaching on the Immaculate Conception see Thomas U. MULLANEY, “Mary Immaculate in the Writings of St. Thomas,” *The Thomist* 17, no. 4 (1954): 433–68. Notably, this paper was published on the 100th anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma. Medieval disputes between “maculists” and “immaculists” are discussed in Szymon DRZYŹDZYK, “Niepokalane Poczęcie jako problem teologiczny w okresie scholastyki,” *Teologia w Polsce* 3, no. 1 (2009): 63–87.

³ An example can be found in the village of Oporowo, Poland (Leszno County, Greater Poland Voivodeship). Cf. Anna DYSZKANT, ed., “Parish Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Oporowo,” accessed December 8, 2020, <https://zabytek.pl/en/obiekty/oporowo-kosciol-par-pw-niepokalanego-poczecia-nmp>.

preceded by a detailed explanation of the sources, reasons, premises, advice taken, and consultations conducted — was formulated as follows:

We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.⁴

In the same year, the very meaning of this rather clear (and remarkably well-received) development in the dogmatic teaching of the Church escaped the attention of one woman: Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891). This future world-famous figure—a medium, an occultist, a prolific author, and the true inspirator of the modern Theosophical movement—missed the point of this papal act so completely that, from then on, she embraced the idea that what was proclaimed as a dogma in 1854 was *not the conception of Mary by her parents* (traditionally known as “Saint Joachim” and “Saint Anne”), but rather *the conception of Jesus by the Most Holy Trinity and Mary*. Helena thought that the latter was “the Immaculate Conception,” about which she heard so much since December 8 that year: a fatherless conception, a virgin conception, a conception with no man involved and no sexual act accomplished — a “God and a girl” affair. But it was not so: the dogma referred to a regular, “husband and wife” routine. However, the child conceived in this particular, marital act—namely their daughter, Miriam—was for centuries believed (and finally proclaimed) to be a perfect human being, free from any proclivity to sin: *Immaculata*. This has escaped H. P. Blavatsky’s attention completely. In her mind, it was Mary who conceived, not *was* conceived. Hence the gravest part of her error: one of the oldest and most fundamental tenets of the Christian faith, *the Incarnation of God*—the very work of the

⁴ “Declaramus, pronuntiamus et definimus doctrinam quae tenet beatissimam Virginem Mariam in primo instanti suae conceptionis fuisse singulari Omnipotentis Dei gratia et privilegio, intuitu meritorum Christi Jesu Salvatoris humani generis, ab omni originalis culpae labe praeservatam immunem, esse a Deo revelatam, atque idcirco ab omnibus fidelibus firmiter constanterque credendam,” *Acta Pii IX*, Pars 1, Vol. 1 (Romae: Typog. Bon. Art., 1854), 616. For a comprehensive history of the dogma see Krzysztof KOWALIK, “Virgo Immaculata – historia dogmatu,” in *Niepokalana Matka Chrystusa*, ed. Krzysztof Kowalik and Kazimierz Pek (Częstochowa–Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Mariologiczne, 2004), 9–26. A more detailed analysis of the direct sources of the dogmatic formula can be found in Janusz KRÓLIKOWSKI, “Papież Aleksander VII i niepokalane poczęcie Maryi,” *Salvatoris Mater* 6, no. 2 (2004): 330–37.

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary and by Her consent — appeared to the young Helena as something that had never been really dogmatized, not until the mid-19th century.

Basically, Blavatsky mistook the Mother for the Son, not realizing whose conception all the talk was about in the winter of 1854/55 and the subsequent years. Moreover, she equated the “immaculateness” of that conception with the lack of sexual intercourse (quite contrary to the actual dogma, which necessarily implied a full, marital act of Mary’s parents). “To get pregnant, not having sex with a man” was Helena’s clear (and par excellence technical) idea of the Immaculate Conception. In her mind, it was a “conception,” but of a certain kind—the “immaculate” kind—which was such, because no man was involved. What she really meant was, of course, this particular aspect of the *Incarnatio Dei*: a child was conceived, but Mary’s husband, Joseph, took no part in the act and thus She remained a virgin (now a pregnant virgin, a “virgin mother”). Sadly, Blavatsky was ignorant of the fact that this had been a dogma (and one of the fundamental ones, at that) at least since the first ecumenical council of the Church: the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), and nobody had ever thought of calling this dogma “the Immaculate Conception.” Since the beginning, those were two different things.⁵

Helena’s error was clearly a result of her being not familiar with even the most basic teachings of the Church, the wording of the Creed, and Christian tradition in general. Frankly, it must have been a result of her not reading *any* of the catechisms of the day, whether Orthodox or Catholic, not to mention the Apostolic Constitution of 1854, which she had obviously heard of, but never seen. What is fascinating and worth consideration, however, is not the simplicity of Helena’s mistake, but how long and unflinchingly she held fast to her cognitive error. She remained in this error all her life and became the primary source of—and the main culprit behind—its dissemination in the ever more secularized and ignorant West of the decades and centuries to come.

Was this an obsession of hers? What factors were really at play? Could there have been a deliberate strategy involved? For example, a strategy of not

⁵ One look at any Church calendar would have hinted at a possible misunderstanding: the Christmas Day (*Nativitas Dei*) is set there (symbolically) on December 25. Nine months before this date, on March 25, there is the Annunciation Day (*Incarnatio Dei*). But the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception was always celebrated on December 8, which is nine months straight before Mary’s Nativity on September 8. This one observation alone could have prevented anyone from mistaking the Mother for the Son (and the Immaculate Conception of Mary for the Incarnation of God).

retracting anything she wrote about the Immaculate Conception (as she first understood it) in order not to lose authority among her followers? Such questions are but a few of those that come to mind once the scale, durability, and influence of H. P. Blavatsky's mistake is fully comprehended. Those are difficult questions and, more importantly, they also tend to be personal ones. This paper is therefore *not* aimed at finding definitive answers to all such questions. But then again, it is worthwhile to ask: Why all her life? Why so long? Was there a psychological issue of some kind behind it all? How was this even possible, given that Helena read and wrote so much in her lifetime? How come that nobody ever told her she got it all wrong? Some clues might be found in Blavatsky's biographies, especially with regard to her marital disasters, her general disdain for Christianity, and her particular hatred of all institutionalized Churches.⁶ Could it be that she abhorred contact with anything concerning Mary, and at the same time was always surrounded *only* by people unable, for some reason, to point out her obvious and embarrassing mistake? All this is a material for a carefully crafted book. This paper will only present H. P. Blavatsky's career and those fragments of her writings, which bear witness to her enduring—and never corrected—cognitive error regarding the 1854 finale of one of the longest theological discussions in the history of the *Sacrosancta Ecclesia Universalis*. We will go through the source-material that reveals Helena's life-long interest in the fundamental dogma of the Christian faith (*Incarnatio Dei*), about which she was somehow convinced that it had *never* been dogmatized (not until her time and age), and

⁶ Cf. Josephine RANSOM, *Blavatsky as Occultist* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1931); Mary NEFF, ed., *Memoirs of H.P. Blavatsky* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1937); John SYMONDS, *Madame Blavatsky* (London: Oldhams Press, 1959); Charles J. RYAN, *H.P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement* (San Diego: Point Loma Publications, 1975); William Quan JUDGE, *The Esoteric She: Articles on Madame Blavatsky's Life, Work and Teachings*, ed. Daniel H. Caldwell (San Diego: Point Loma Publications, 1991); Sylvia CRANSTON, *The Extraordinary Life & Influence of Helena Blavatsky: Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1993); Peter WASHINGTON, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: A History of the Mystics, Mediums, and Misfits Who Brought Spiritualism to America* (London: Seeker & Warburg, 1993); K. Paul JOHNSON, *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994); Daniel CALDWELL, ed., *The Esoteric World of Madame Blavatsky* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2001); Nicholas GOODRICK-CLARKE, *Helena Blavatsky* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004); Tim RUDBØG, "Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's Esoteric Tradition," in *Constructing Tradition: Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism*, ed. Andreas B. Kilcher (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 161–77.

which she so unfortunately associated with the term ‘immaculate conception’ (holding on to that error ever since).

One more important question must be asked in the context of this study: What could possibly be the reason that nobody, literally not a single student of her works, not a single scholar, not a single biographer, polemist, critic or follower, until this very day, made it known to the public that Blavatsky *did* make such a mistake and turned it into her *idée-fixe*? Has nobody really bothered to read what she wrote? That is impossible. And yet, this is the first study ever to point this grave mistake of hers out. So, there must be other reasons.

H. P. BLAVATSKY’S ESOTERIC CAREER

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (née von Hahn) was a daughter of a German aristocrat, serving in the rank of a Captain of Horse Artillery in the Russian imperial army. She was born on August 12, 1831 in Yekaterinoslav (today’s Dnipro in Central Ukraine). Her father was absent, as he was campaigning in the then partitioned Poland, brutally putting down the insurrection of 1830–1831, also known as the November Uprising. She was the “third Helena” in her family, after her mother, Helena (an accomplished and popular novelist, née Fadyeyev), and her grandmother, Princess Helena (née Dolgorukaya), married to Andrei Fadyeyev, a high-ranking imperial officer. When Helena was 11, her mother died, and her father decided to send all his children (Helena and her two siblings) to their grandparents. Thus, Helena grew up without her mother and father, in the surroundings of big palaces and castles, where her grandfather, Andrei Fadyeyev, resided. At first, she lived in the governor’s palace in Saratov, in Southwestern Russia. Then they moved to Tiflis (today’s Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia), to an even bigger castle of the Viceroy of Caucassus, Mikhail Vorontsov (1782–1856), to whom general Andrei Fadyeyev was appointed in the role of an Imperial Councillor (in other words, “to keep an eye on him”). Such social position and surroundings meant upbringing under the tutelage of a highly educated, multi-lingual woman (her grandmother) and contact with *at least* one huge library and *at least* one true “man of the world” of the day (but surely there were many more). In Saratov, it was the huge collection of Masonic and esoteric books and manuscripts of Prince Pavel Dolgoruky (her great-grandfather). In Tiflis, it was close and cordial contact with the friend of the family, Prince Alexander Golitsyn (1773–1844), a top-ranking imperial statesman and a freemason deeply inter-

ested in esotericism, just like Prince Dolgoruky. But in 1849, when the girl turned 18, her entire world turned upside-down. According to the customs of the day, her role was to marry a prominent party and start bearing children. And so, she was wed to Nikifor Vassilyevich Blavatsky (1809–?), the vice-governor of Yerevan (today’s capital of Armenia). Soon after the wedding, she ran.⁷

For the next nine years Helena travelled extensively. Then she returned to her family in Tiflis (1858–1862). Somewhere during that period she went through an undisclosed, but nearly-terminal illness, and in 1862 she even rejoined her husband. Shortly after that she ran again and travelled the world for another 10 years. Once again, she came back home in 1872, but this time it was a very brief stay and her departure was final. In 1873, travelling through Bucarest and Paris, she arrived in one of the French ports and embarked on a steamer heading for the United States of America. Having left everything behind, she tried a new marriage there, but ran from her new husband almost immediately (this time getting a divorce). Finally, in October 1874, she met and befriended Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), a renowned lawyer, specializing in insurance, customs, and revenue cases. He was 42, she was 43, and, to Helena’s delight, a friendship it was.⁸

During her travels she kept corresponding with her family, reassuring them of her own well-being. The family, on the other hand, made sure that Helena is accompanied either by her father’s or grandfather’s friends or acquaintances. As it could not always be the case, Helena developed a peculiar way of calming down fears about her safety by claiming that she was under the protection and guidance of some highly enlightened, spiritual Masters, whom she met in Tibet.⁹ This way, concealing personal details of sometimes com-

⁷ Cf. Maciej B. STĘPIEŃ, *Okultyzm. Studium ezoteryki zachodniej* (Lublin: Academicon, 2015), 444–45.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 445–46. Olcott was also a keen investigator of (and a believer in) the phenomena associated with the spiritualist movement. More on him in Sarah Belle DOUGHERTY, “Remembering H.S. Olcott,” accessed December 19, 2020, <https://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/theos/th-sbdo.htm>.

⁹ What is important, she never made it to Tibet in her whole life. She tried to get there in 1855–1856 but did not go any further than Kashmir. However, later Blavatsky insisted that her main training took place in Tibet, in Tashilunpo monastery, located in Shigatse (today’s China), between 1868 and 1870. None of the details of her account of the “school of adepts” there match any of the local, historical data, fully available in the 21st century. Tibet was chosen by Helena as the place of her training most likely because, in her times, it was impossible for any Westerner to get there to verify her stories. Importantly, Helena was not the only one who thought about Tibet in such terms and was determined to use Tibet in such a way. Cf. Harry OLDMEADOW, “The Western Quest for ‘Secret Tibet’,” *Esoterica* 3 (2001): 48–107.

plete strangers who were with her at the time, she maintained her reputation.¹⁰ Furthermore, this way she was able to convince her correspondents at home that her travels had a profound meaning, reaching far beyond mere grand-tourism (which was a part of education of nobility those days, and of which some made a life-long habit). To corroborate this story, from 1870 on, Helena's family and friends began to receive letters written "personally" by the Masters. The letters reassured Helena's dear ones that she was in good hands, she was a special student of the authors of the letters, and the missions she was entrusted with were *very* important. At first, they were "M.::" and "K.: H.:" ("Morya" and "Koot Hoomi" who signed their correspondence with initials only, demonstrating at the same time their fondness for Masonic punctuation). Others joined soon.¹¹

The story of how the Theosophical Society (TS) was established (October 20, 1875), and gained immense membership, is a story of just such letters. In America, the Masters took interest in the "Neophytos Olcott," guiding him to protect and help "Sister Helena." But this time they stopped using postal services. Instead, they began to *materialize* their letters (first one "came in" on March 9, 1875) and, what is more, they revealed the existence of the Mystical Brotherhood of Luxor, which they represented, wishing now to enroll new students from among the worthy. Olcott fell for it hook, line, and sinker. He became the Founding President of the new organization (which was then thought of as an earthly outpost of that Great White Lodge of the Masters), while Helena took the position of Corresponding Secretary. In 1879, they moved the headquarters of the TS to Adyar, India.¹²

From 1875 to 1885 all the new teachings of the TS (including a sudden shift towards Buddhism after 1880) were either "materialized" in the form of hundreds of letters¹³ or given in the form of direct instructions via H. P. Blavatsky, who claimed that one of the Masters was in constant, mental contact

¹⁰ A detailed study of this tactics, and how H.P. Blavatsky developed it over decades, can be found in Johnson, *The Masters Revealed*.

¹¹ Cf. STĘPIEŃ, *Okultyzm*, 446.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, 446–53.

¹³ The book by Alfred Percy SINNETT, *Esoteric Buddhism* (London: Tübner & Co., 1883) was a compilation of over 100 such letters he personally received. A. P. Sinnett (1840–1921) — a close friend of Olcott and Blavatsky — was the editor of the leading, English daily newspaper in India, *The Pioneer*.

with her. Such is the origin of her first Opus Magnum, *Isis Unveiled*.¹⁴ Helena declared that she was merely a scribe, and those two hefty volumes were actually dictated to her by the Masters (and she lost all revenue from this book because of that). But just as the TS spread its wings to become an influential, international organization, in 1885, the fresh science of graphology dealt a vicious blow to the project: the handwriting of the letters was examined.¹⁵ At first, Helena declared a serious illness, then resigned as Corresponding Secretary, packed her bags, and moved to Europe. Via Würzburg (1885–1886) and Ostende (1886–1887), she arrived in London, where she established her own theosophical organization: The Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society. There she finished her second Magnum Opus: *The Secret Doctrine*,¹⁶ edited her monthly magazine *Lucifer* (later known as *The Theosophical Review*),¹⁷ and began energetic preparations to take over the Theosophical movement in entire Europe. But on May 8, 1891 her life unexpectedly ended.

¹⁴ Helena P. BLAVATSKY, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: J. W. Bouton; London: Bernard Quaritch, 1877): vol 1, *Science*, and vol. 2, *Theology*. The first volume also contained anonymously written foreword, “Before the Veil,” the author of which was Professor Alexander Wilder (1823–1908), admired by H. P. Blavatsky for his work *New Platonism and Alchemy* (1869).

¹⁵ “Report of the Committee appointed to Investigate Phenomena Connected with the Theosophical Society,” *Society of Psychical Research: Proceedings* 3 (1885): 201–400. The first part of the report consisted of the “Statement and Conclusions of the Committee” (pp. 201–7). The other part was the basis for the conclusions, which was Richard Hodgson’s “Account of Personal Investigations in India, and Discussions of the Authorship of the ‘Koot Hoomi’ Letters” (pp. 207–400). The handwriting styles in the examined letters were those of H. P. Blavatsky and her Indian student, Damodar K. Mavalankar.

¹⁶ This time she claimed full authorship of the work and was able to profit from it: Helena P. BLAVATSKY, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vols. (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company; New York: William Q. Judge, Adyar, India: The Manager of the *Theosophist*: 1888); vol. 1, *Cosmogogenesis*, and vol. 2, *Anthropogenesis*. After Blavatsky’s death the third volume was added: Helena P. BLAVATSKY, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy*, vol. 3, *Occultism* (Chicago: Theosophical Book Concern, 1897). This volume contains her original, intended work (spanning the first 430 pages), coupled with additional materials (pp. 433–594), containing the teachings she gave in the inner, esoteric section of The Blavatsky Lodge from 1888 to 1891. More on the research and discussion regarding this particular volume in Daniel H. CALDWELL, “The Myth of the “Missing” Third Volume of the Secret Doctrine,” accessed December 19, 2020, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/sdiiipt1.htm>.

¹⁷ Accessible online in many archives, including “The Online Books Page: Serial archive listings for Lucifer,” ed. John Mark Ockerbloom, accessed December 19, 2020, <https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=lucifer1887>, and “Lucifer Magazine 1887–1897,” Theosophy World Resource Centre, accessed December 19, 2020, <https://www.theosophy.world/resource/publications/lucifer#lucifer1887>.

Serious influenza complications did not let her see her 60th birthday, which was just 96 days away.¹⁸

A great work was done after Helena's death to make sure *all* she had ever written was carefully collected and made available to the public: books, manuals, glossaries, articles, reviews, novels, letters, memoirs, even scrap-books. Today, many editions of her Collected Writings are accessible via Internet. The one we have at our disposal is 6775 pages long, without indices.¹⁹ The task of reading through it all is a real challenge, and, understandably, some of the critics of H. P. Blavatsky expressed their dislike at the sheer volume and intricate nature of her written legacy.²⁰ Nevertheless, having one thing only to search for in the entirety of these collected texts, let us see what we can find there about the Immaculate Conception.

A GRAVE ERROR

What H. P. Blavatsky understood by the “immaculate conception” was explained by her most broadly in 1884, in the context of her idea of “high occultists,” that is, “a race of ‘Buddhas and Christs’, born ‘without sin’.”²¹ Interestingly, in this context, “sin” was undoubtedly understood by her as the reproduction through sexual acts. *Coitus* was the “sin,” which would be gotten rid of, when such a race is called to life and given birth to. Whoever comes into existence in such a way is “conceived immaculately,” and this is a form of an arcane *art*, which can be taught, learned, and practiced:

The more and the sooner the animal sexual affinities are given up, the stronger and the sooner will be the manifestation of the higher occult powers which alone can produce the “immaculate conception.” And this art is practically taught to the occultists at a very high stage of initiation. The “Adept,” ... male

¹⁸ Cf. STĘPIEŃ, *Okultyzm*, 453–55. She died at 19, Avenue Road, London, in the newly established European headquarters of the Theosophical Society. She was cremated at Woking Crematorium, Surrey.

¹⁹ Helena P. BLAVATSKY, *Collected Writings*, 14+1 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966–85). Quoted here as “CW,” followed by a Roman number (volume) and Arabic numbers (page/pages).

²⁰ “Blavatsky’s endless books are cut-and-paste collages of Freemasonry, Hermeticism, potted ‘Eastern’ metaphysics, and her own science-fiction tales of telepathic Tibetan monks and Atlantean cataclysms” — Erik DAVIS, *Techgnosis* (New York: Harmony Books, 1998), 51.

²¹ CW VI:262 (article “The Future Occultist,” *The Theosophist* 5, no. 11 [1884]: 263–64).

or female, is then able to bring a new being into existence by the manipulation of cosmic forces. Anasūyâ, a female adept of the ancient times, is thus said to have conceived immaculately Durvasas, Dattatreya, and Chandra—the three distinct types of Adeptship. Thus it will be seen that the marriage of the occultist (who is, as already explained, neither male nor female) is a “holy union,” devoid of sin, in the same manner as Krishna’s union with thousands of Gopis.²²

Thus, the miracle of human procreation, accomplished through the utmost expression of conjugal love, was—in Helena’s mind—equaled with moral transgression (sin), and deemed reprehensibly animalistic. At the same time, giving it up (the sooner the better) was a clear path (for future occultists) towards learning the sublime art of calling their offspring into existence through acts involving “cosmic forces” and devoid of any sexual content. In her opinion, only such acts were “immaculate,” as they would be performed by the adepts (i.e., “occultists at a very high stage of initiation”) so advanced (i.e., so removed from the carnal and “sinful,” sexual sphere) that not only their “animal sexual affinities” but even their sex differentiation would, by then, be a thing of the past. Only such sexless union was, according to Helena, a “holy union,” capable of “conceiving immaculately” new life. This, however, will not occur on this Earth anytime soon:

The very fact, that this stage pertains to one of the very highest initiations, shows that the time—when ordinary humanity, during the course of cosmic evolution, will, in this manner, be able to produce a race of “Buddhas,” etc., born “without sin”—is yet very, very far off... But when once this possibility and the actuality of this fact is recognized, the course of living and education may be so moulded as to hasten the approach of that eventful day when on this earth will descend “the Kingdom of Heaven.”²³

This clearly demonstrates the substance of Blavatsky’s error. The source, however, is not expressly stated. Could it be that, in her esoteric philosophy, she referred to some independently developed thought on the Immaculate Conception, and not to the Christian teaching, from which she was obviously miles away? This is not likely, because during a series of meetings in the Blavatsky Lodge (from January to March 1889) she personally answered many questions regarding the stanzas of the first volume of *The Secret*

²² Ibid.

²³ CW VI:263.

Doctrine. One question, regarding Stanza II, was as follows: “How is it, that Horus and the other ‘Sun-Gods’ are said to be born ‘through an immaculate Mother’?” In her answer, H. P. Blavatsky went on to explain the “esoteric meaning” behind being born “from” and being born “through” an immaculate mother (‘from’ is in space and time, while ‘through’ is in eternity—that was her answer, in a nutshell).²⁴ But one part of her answer was this: “In the Christian doctrine of the Immaculate Conception—a materializing of the metaphysical and spiritual conception—the mother is first fecundated by the Holy Ghost and the Child [is] born from, and not through her.”²⁵ Nobody noticed anything inappropriate or doubtful about this statement. Not a single person stood up and said: “Excuse me, Madam, but this is certainly *not* how the Immaculate Conception is understood by Christians. What you are talking about is the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation of God. You are simply giving it a wrong name.” But the meeting of the lodge went on, duly recorded, as the Q&A session continued. Next questions followed, and the author of the first volume of *The Secret Doctrine* kept explaining her work, unchallenged.

The wrong name H. P. Blavatsky gave to the mystery of *Incaratio Dei* had additional consequences for her. Namely, she was bemused everytime another example of the use of the expressions “immaculate conception,”

²⁴ This part of *The Secret Doctrine* (1:59) contains a critique of the Church on the grounds that this “very archaic idea” has now been “finally crystallized into a dogma of the Christian Church, which carnalized this metaphysical idea beyond any common sense.” The irony of this criticism is that carnal ideas were associated with the term “immaculate conception” by H. P. Blavatsky herself, and nobody else.

²⁵ CW X:355 (reprinted from *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society*, Part II [London: Theosophical Publishing Society, New York: William Quan Judge, 1891]). This technical understanding of the Immaculate Conception (as the lack of the carnal element behind the fact of being conceived/becoming a mother) appears throughout Blavatsky’s writings in this collection. It is particularly emphasized whenever she criticizes Christian (mainly Catholic) devotion to the Virgin Mary, the birth and real existence of Jesus Christ (including Christmas celebrations), the Holy Mass, and the Holy Communion—on the grounds that similar things can be found in pre-Christian traditions and whoever put it all together as “Christian,” must have been a power-greedy fraud. Cf. CW II:164, III:187, III:461, IV:359, V:280, VIII:375–77 (here, the concept and the term is adopted by the Compiler of the volume, who argues with Blavatsky, although not about the concept itself. The argument is about whether ancient Egyptians really shared this concept or not. See the ending of a lengthy footnote on p. 377), IX:65, X:356, XI:65–66, 95–97, XIII:299–300, XIV:71, XIV:140, XIV:143, and XIV:292 (with the footnote). The same themes, in an even more aggressive tone, were presented by Blavatsky seven years before, in the second part of *Isis Unveiled* (vol. 2, *Theology*). Cf. pp. 5, 54, 94–95, 110, 172–73, 203, 208–10, 257, 324, 444, 491, 504–5, 536–39, and 609. Index to that volume does not point them out, except for pp. 5 and 110.

“immaculately conceived,” or “conceived without sin” came to her attention from within ecclesial circles. In her mind, it was an ancient, esoteric idea, present in the history of various cultures and religions, which existed eons before Christianity: the doctrine of “immaculation.”²⁶ This unusual term alone shows how profoundly technical her approach was and, of course, how profoundly she confused the term “immaculate conception” with the fact of the presence of so many sons of virgins throughout the history of known religions. Keeping in her mind that it was Jesus Christ who was recently proclaimed by the Church as “immaculately conceived,” Blavatsky experienced a true shock when the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary (or: Litany of Loreto) was enlarged with the additional verse “O Virgin Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us!”²⁷

It was a decisive moment, in which Helena stumbled upon an ideal opportunity to reconsider her knowledge of (1) who was actually proclaimed to be conceived “immaculately” or “without sin” in 1854, (2) what that “sin” really was, and (3) what the Immaculate Conception could have really meant in the context of the new verse of the Litany. But she did not seize that opportunity. Instead, she came to the conclusion that, after proclaiming the “immaculately conceived Son,” the Church quickly moved to speaking also of *His Mother* as another fatherless offspring (this time born of Mary’s mother, and Jesus’ grandmother, Saint Anne), constructing thus a whole dynasty of “immaculately conceived” beings. She also noticed that, more or less at the same time, the Church proclaimed yet another dogma, which defined its own infallibility in the matters of the Catholic faith and morals (1870). How convenient! But, then again, was it not always like this in that ignorant and power-thirsty institution? She wrote about it with deep contempt:

Ridiculous, perhaps licentious in some cases, as may appear ancient worship to the modern critic, it ought not to have so appeared to the Christians. During the mediaeval ages, and even later, they accepted pretty nearly the same without understanding the secret import of its rites, and quite satisfied with the obscure and rather fantastic interpretations of their clergy, who accepted the exterior form and distorted the inner meaning.... To eliminate what is plainly derived from the sex and nature worship of the ancient heathens, would be equivalent to pulling down the whole Roman Catholic image-worship—the *Madonna* element—and reforming the faith to Protestantism.

²⁶ *Isis Unveiled*, 2:110.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The enforcement of the late dogma of the Immaculation was prompted by this very secret reason. The science of symbology²⁸ was making too rapid progress. Blind faith in the Pope's infallibility and in the immaculate nature of the Virgin and of *her ancestral female lineage to a certain remove* could alone save the Church from the indiscreet revelations of science. It was a clever stroke of policy on the part of the viceregent of God... But even this new dogma, which, in company with the new claim to *infallibility*, has quasi-revolutionised the Christian world, is not original with the Church of Rome. It is but a return to a hardly-remembered heresy of the early Christian ages, that of the Collyridians, so called from their *sacrificing cakes* to the Virgin, whom they claimed to be *Virginborn*. The new sentence, "O, Virgin Mary, *conceived without sin*" is simply a tardy acceptance of that which was at first deemed a "*blasphemous heresie*" by the orthodox fathers.²⁹

In *The Secret Doctrine*, the phrases "to carry out something/to give birth/to be born/to be created in an immaculate way" became a sort of language apparatus, employed by H. P. Blavatsky many times in different

²⁸ Blavatsky refers to what she personally devised and alluded to many times: a study of symbols is a "science," and a very old one at that (cf., e.g., *The Secret Doctrine*, 1:305: "Without the help of symbology (with its seven departments, of which the moderns know nothing) no ancient Scripture can ever be correctly understood."). Later on, symbology (*la science des symboles, symbolique, symbolistique*) was indeed considered to be a new scientific discipline and promoted mainly in the French Masonic and occultist circles, with Oswald Wirth (1860–1943) in the role of the main proponent of this new science. Today, the term 'symbology' is understood as a set of symbols and their meanings in a given context (e.g., symbology of a map, symbology of a flag, symbology of an architectural design, etc.). Symbology as a scientific discipline is still referred to only in a few esoteric milieus and, famously, in the series of the best-selling books by Dan Brown, where the main protagonist is a tenured professor of Religious Symbology (a "symbologist") at Harvard University.

²⁹ *Isis Unveiled*, 2:109–10. The ending remark gives an exceptional insight into the dark place Helena was in, whenever she considered ecclesial matters related to the Incarnation of God, Virgin Mary, and the Immaculate Conception as seen through the lens of her idea that "immaculately conceived" meant "conceived without an intercourse with a man" or "virgin-born." How shameless would it be to introduce an old heresy (a semi-pagan cult of a virgin, born of another virgin) as a "new dogma"? And yet, it seemed to Helena that this was precisely what was happening in the Church before her very eyes. She even repeated her remarks once more, on p. 444 (with the footnote). Cf. also p. 505, where she spoke about "later revised fable of the immaculate conception." Another example can be found in CW XI:69, where Mary and her mother, Saint Anne, are ridiculed as "the immaculate daughters of the god of the Roman Catholic Church." Finally, in *The Secret Doctrine* (1:91) Blavatsky stated openly what *she thought* was the hideous truth: "Anna (the name of the Mother of the Virgin Mary) [is] now represented by the Roman Catholic church as having given birth to her daughter in an immaculate way ('Mary conceived without sin')." With regard to this subject Helena seems indefatigable, and the fact that all of her indignation went completely unchallenged for so many years is staggering.

contexts with certainty, characterizing a part of an established system that was well thought-through.³⁰ In this second and last of her Grand Works, Blavatsky went even little further, claiming that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception (as she understood it) was always part and parcel of the “mysteries” she elucidated. She deplored the “disfiguration” of this doctrine in the form of “now materialized dogma.”³¹ Again, and quite plainly, she spoke of the “dogma of two immaculate conceptions,” devised, according to her, by “Modern Poppery” mainly to span somehow the gap between the two symbolisms: that of the Kabbalah and the Old Testament on the one hand, and that of the New Testament on the other.³² This “modern, *Papal* conception,” however, was no match for “the immaculate virgin of the ancient Pagans,” who is

the ever-youthful mother nature, the antitype of her prototypes, the sun and moon, [and who] *generates* and *brings forth* her “mind-born” son, the Universe. The Sun and Moon, as male-female deities, fructify the earth, the microcosmical mother, and the latter conceives and brings forth, in her turn. With the Christians, “the first-born” (*primogenitus*) is indeed generated, i.e., begotten, “*genitum, non factum,*” and positively *conceived and brought forth* — “*Virgo pariet,*” explains the Latin Church. Thus, she [i.e., the Church] drags down the noble spiritual ideal of the Virgin Mary to the earth, and, making her “of the earth earthy,” degrades that ideal to the lowest of the anthropomorphic goddesses of the rabble.³³

Such was the last stage in the development of Blavatsky’s technical and procreative approach to the Immaculate Conception (an approach stemming directly from the most trivial fact that she simply *never realized* that the Incarnation of God and the Immaculate Conception of Mary were two different things). This approach finally grew into a lengthy criticism of the alleged “disfiguration” and carnalization of a noble and spiritual, ancient, pagan idea,

³⁰ Cf. *The Secret Doctrine*, 1:91, 1:207, 1:398, 2:84, and 2:173. *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) contained an entirely different set of teachings compared to what had been conveyed in *Isis Unveiled* 11 years earlier (so much so that even the definition of theosophy was radically changed) — except for Helena’s idea of the Immaculate Conception. This was *the* only thing she never changed. Ironically, this was probably *the* only thing she really should have corrected to keep her entire narrative from falling apart.

³¹ *The Secret Doctrine*, 1:xliv. Cf. *ibid.*, 88–89.

³² *Ibid.*, 382 (footnote).

³³ *Ibid.*, 399. “All the lunar goddesses had a dual aspect — one divine, the other infernal. All were the virgin mothers of an immaculately born Son — the SUN” (*ibid.*, 400).

presented by Blavatsky in terms of an overarching, cosmogonic myth. In doing so, she still referred to the dogma of 1854, which she vehemently opposed, never actually acquiring even a minimal amount of knowledge about what exactly had been dogmatized. For her, it was just a crude and clumsy attempt at implementing in the Church an archaic and complex idea that was *clearly* beyond the grasp of those who proclaimed the dogma. And still, not a single voice challenged her grave, cognitive error.

One more interesting detail transpires from the lecture of H. P. Blavatsky's writings: it is her evident overuse of the adjective "immaculate." She employed this term very often and, paradoxically, she used it in the same manner as the Church had been using it with regard to Mary throughout the ages, contemplating her integral humanity and superb moral condition.³⁴ But apparently, it never crossed Blavatsky's mind that this was exactly the true meaning of the word: a synonym of "pure," "unspoiled," "perfect," "flawless," and "free from any evil." This was the key to understanding what had been the real object of belief with regard to Mary as "Immaculate" since the very first centuries in the history of Christianity. And Helena indeed used that key. Unfortunately, she used it only while speaking figuratively.

And thus, for Blavatsky "immaculate" was the nature of truth,³⁵ but none of the works of the ancient philosophers were "immaculate," because they "passed through too many hands"³⁶ (or, in other version, because "none has escaped mutilation by Christian hands").³⁷ "Immaculate" were once the wings of the Fallen Angel³⁸ and such were also marble slabs that once covered the Pyramids of Egypt.³⁹ "Immaculate" was the homogeneity of an amoeba before its division.⁴⁰ "Immaculate" was the "whiteness" of the respectable society of Theosophists,⁴¹ and "immaculate" was also the white disk depicted in the extremely important, ancient manuscript she based her second Magnum Opus on.⁴² "Immaculate" was the Earth that nurtured life⁴³ and a sanctuary that

³⁴ One of the latest syntheses focused on this particular *locus theologicus* is Dariusz OKO, "Niepokalana – idea regulatywna ludzkiej wolności," in *Niepokalana w wierze*, 97–106.

³⁵ CW VIII:317.

³⁶ *Isis Unveiled*, 1:320.

³⁷ CW VIII:215–16.

³⁸ CW XII:50.

³⁹ CW XI:358.

⁴⁰ CW VIII:114.

⁴¹ CW VIII:31.

⁴² *The Secret Doctrine*, 1:1.

⁴³ CW XI:69.

might have been soiled by unworthy intruders.⁴⁴ The “immaculate body” of a mountain could have been desecrated by a narrow-gauge railway built across it,⁴⁵ (because when artificial replaces that which is natural, “not a sunny valley, not a shadowy grove is left immaculate on the bosom of mother nature”).⁴⁶ There was no merit in having been created an “immaculate Deva,”⁴⁷ but re-birth through initiation was an “immaculate origin;”⁴⁸ “immaculate” was even the editor of *The Freethinker*, attacked by “Christian agents.”⁴⁹

H. P. Blavatsky also used the term “immaculate” sarcastically, when she belittled opponents of the TS (some “immaculate adept” dared to criticize the TS,⁵⁰ and somebody else’s calumnious comments appeared on “immaculate pages” of *The Spiritualist*⁵¹). But she was also quite hostile to mediums who left the ranks of the Spiritualist movement. Disgusted by the conversion of the then famous “magician among the mediums,” Daniel Dunglas Home (1833–1886), she mocked his previous career, calling him “the immaculate champion”⁵² and “immaculate agent of the invisible Spirit-Land,”⁵³ who has now become a truly “immaculate medium—purified as he is now by the Catholic baptism.”⁵⁴

CONCLUSION

The circumstances in which Blavatsky grew up, witnessing the proclamation of the dogma in 1854, the aftermath thereof, the First Vatican Council in 1870 (and yet another dogma proclaimed there) all combined into a perfect storm of hints and clues, from which she inferred the worst scenario one could have possibly imagined. From then on, throughout her career in the occult milieus of 1870s and 1880s, everything she ever heard about the Immaculate Conception of Mary was filtered through her own network of preconceptions

⁴⁴ CW IX:255.

⁴⁵ CW XIII:190.

⁴⁶ CW XIII:189.

⁴⁷ CW XII:161.

⁴⁸ CW XIV:139.

⁴⁹ CW XI:424.

⁵⁰ CW III:290.

⁵¹ CW III:333.

⁵² CW I:196.

⁵³ CW I:232.

⁵⁴ CW I:233.

and interpretative signposts. As a result, H. P. Blavatsky was irreversibly entangled in a grave cognitive error. Notably, the doctrinal shift, which occurred between *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, did not affect, in any way, shape, or form her views on the Immaculate Conception. On the contrary, it was the only concept that was carried over from her first grand project to the other, and then further developed.

By virtue of the fact that Blavatsky's concept of the Immaculate Conception was deeply flawed at its very core, its persistent presence throughout her entire written legacy undermines the credibility of both her grand projects (and the said legacy in general) more than anything else. It is worthwhile to mention that some of the starkest examples of Helena's cognitive error were included in *Isis Unveiled*, which was, according to her own testimony, supposed to be dictated to her (mentally) by the ever-present and caring *Mahatmas* — "Masters" of the Great White Brotherhood, of which the TS was said to be but an earthly outpost. This clearly proves that those Masters' cognitive grasp of the ongoing matters of the world was just as limited as Helena's, to say the least.

The question why such a grave, cognitive error went unchallenged for so many years remains a mystery. One may risk the hypothesis that the impact of Blavatsky's other powerful ideas, as well as her immense written legacy, overshadowed this particular matter, helping at the same time to spread the substance of her error worldwide, mainly in Protestant circles. Until this day the phrase "immaculate conception of Jesus Christ"⁵⁵ is in common use, and the fatal mistake made by Helena over 150 year ago is still perpetuated, even among the 21st-century scholars. However unbelievable it may seem, this cognitive error found its way, of all places, into the famous DGWE: *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (2006)—a true and precious milestone in the academic study of people and ideas delineated as "gnostic" and "esoteric" in the Western culture (which includes H. P. Blavatsky). One of the authors of the article on Paracelsus, Urs Leo Gantenbein, put on paper the following sentence: "As an alchemist, Paracelsus was deeply impressed with

⁵⁵ There are many more, similar expressions in use. For example, among the fans of the most popular (until recently) movie franchise *Star Wars* it is common to talk about "the immaculate conception of Anakin Skywalker"—just because his mom declared in Part 1: "There was no father." Only a handful of people in the fandom have ever tried to correct this expression in public (one of whom was Kristian Harloff, the host of once very successful podcast, Collider Jedi Council). This situation is likely the result of the enduring, cultural impact of H. P. Blavatsky's cognitive error.

the mystery of the immaculate conception of Christ and its implications.”⁵⁶ Neither his co-author, Udo Benzenhöfer, nor any of the respected editors of the DGWE corrected this monstrosity. Therefore, it seems prudent to state publicly now, and state it all the more firmly, that “Paracelsus was deeply impressed with the mystery of the Incarnation of God and its implications.”

Not long before this deplorable incident occurred, on the esoteric side of studies on gnosis and esotericism (again: of all places), an opposite and optimistic sign was made publicly available. The online version of the *Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary* (1999) included the entry “Immaculate Conception.” It begins with the following sentence: “Immaculate Conception. A dogma of the Roman Catholic Church that Mary, mother of Jesus, was born immaculate, that is without original sin in the Christian sense.”⁵⁷ Thus, Blavatsky’s grave error, discussed in this article for the first time in 150 years, has been corrected in the very center of the movement she initiated. Moreover, it was done in an efficient and scholarly manner: through a lexicographic entry. It is unclear, however, to whom precisely the credit is due for this intellectual success. The editorial and contributing team of this much needed upgrade to H. P. Blavatsky’s *Theosophical Glossary* (1892) included Gottfried de Purucker (1874–1942), Geoffrey A. Barboroka (1897–1982), Grace F. Knoche (1909–2006), Sarah Belle Dougherty, Arthur Studley Hart, Elsa-Brita Titchenell (1915–2002), Henry T. Edge (1867–1946), Joseph H. Fussell (1836–1915), Grace Green Knoche, Lydia Ross, Charles J. Ryan, Judith Tyberg (1902–1980), and Gertrude W. Van Pelt (1856–1947). Someone from this group of the renowned Theosophists must have finally spotted the cognitive error of Helena P. Blavatsky, and endeavored to rectify it in the most straightforward, albeit discrete manner. Hopefully, this process will continue to pervade ever-wider areas of the Western culture.

⁵⁶ Udo BENZENHÖFER and Urs Leo GANTENBEIN, “Paracelsus,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 926.

⁵⁷ Gottfried de PURUCKER, ed., “Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary” [online version based on the 1999 print edition], accessed December 30, 2020, <https://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/etgloss/ia-iz.htm>.

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A LIFETIME IN ERROR:
HELENA P. BLAVATSKY AND THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

S u m m a r y

This article presents the cognitive error made by Helena P. Blavatsky concerning the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Blavatsky's error consisted in ascribing the term "Immaculate

Conception” to the content of one of the basic tenets of the Christian faith, which is the Incarnation of the Lord. An additional mistake in connection with this error was the observation that it was only in the middle of the 19th century that the Church elevated this truth to the rank of dogma. The confusion of the conception of the Mother with the Incarnation of the Son, and the association of the latter with the term “Immaculate Conception” gave rise to further difficulties, when the new verse of the Litany of Loretto pointed to Mary as “immaculately conceived.” The doubled cognitive problem that H. P. Blavatsky had to face because of this led her to announce further fantastic theories about the Immaculate Conception, which were not challenged by anyone for the next 150 years. Her grave cognitive error is now widespread and responsible for the functioning in contemporary Western culture of popular expressions such as the “Immaculate Conception of Christ,” where the “immaculateness” of the conception means the absence of sexual intercourse leading to the conception of a child. As a result of the widespread use of expressions of this type the authentic content of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary remains unknown to many people. In the article, this issue is presented based on the sources, which testify to the agency of H. P. Blavatsky as regards the spread of this cognitive error in the Western culture.

Keywords: Catholic theology; Marian devotion; Immaculate Conception; Western esotericism; occultism; Helena P. Blavatsky; modern theosophical movement; Theosophical Society.

CAŁE ŻYCIE W BŁĘDZIE:
HELENA P. BLAVATSKY I NIEPOKALANE POCZĘCIE

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W artykule przedstawiono błąd poznawczy Heleny P. Blavatsky, dotyczący treści dogmatu o Niepokalanym Poczęciu Maryi. Ten błąd polegał na skojarzeniu przez Helenę terminu “niepokalane poczęcie” z treścią jednej z głównych prawd wiary Kościoła, którą jest Wcielenie Pańskie. Dodatkową pomyłką w związku z tym błędem była obserwacja, iż dopiero w połowie XIX w. Kościół podniósł tę prawdę wiary do rangi dogmatu. Pomylenie poczęcia Matki z Wcieleniem Syna oraz skojarzenie tego ostatniego z terminem “niepokalane poczęcie” zrodziło kolejne trudności, gdy nowy werset Litanii Loretańskiej wskazał na Maryję jako “niepokalanie poczętą”. Zdwojony problem poznawczy, z którym w związku z tym musiała zmierzyć się H. P. Blavatsky, doprowadził ją do ogłoszenia dalszych, fantastycznych teorii na temat Niepokalanego Poczęcia, których jednak nikt nie wskazał jako błędnych przez następne 150 lat. Ten błąd poznawczy upowszechnił się głównie w świecie protestanckim i odpowiada za funkcjonowanie we współczesnej kulturze Zachodu pospolicie spotykanych wyrażen typu “niepokalane poczęcie Chrystusa”, gdzie “niepokalaność” poczęcia oznacza brak stosunku płciowego, prowadzącego do poczęcia dziecka. W wyniku powszechnego używania tego typu wyrażen autentyczna treść dogmatu o Niepokalanym Poczęciu NMP pozostaje dla wielu ludzi całkowicie nieznana. W artykule zagadnienie to zostało przedstawione od strony źródeł, które poświadczają sprawstwo H. P. Blavatsky, jeśli chodzi o rozpowszechnienie tego błędu poznawczego w kulturze Zachodu.

Słowa kluczowe: teologia katolicka; pobożność maryjna; Niepokalane Poczęcie; ezoteryka zachodnia; okultyzm; Helena P. Blavatsky; współczesny ruch teozoficzny; Towarzystwo Teozoficzne.