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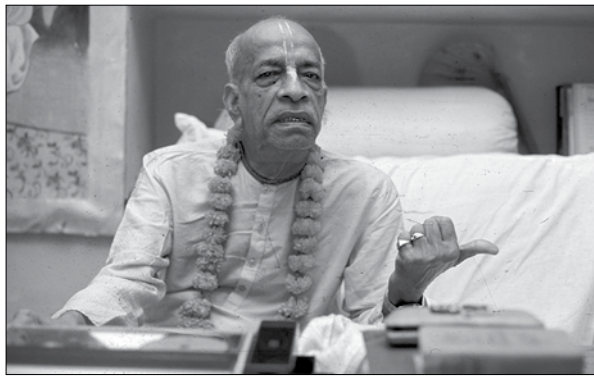
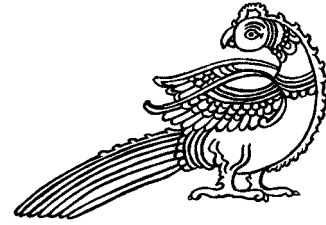
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YOUR VALUABLE LOVING SENTIMENTS

His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

I am so pleased for your valuable loving sentiments upon me and this will keep you advanced in Krishna Consciousness, rest assured. ☪

— Letter to Gargamuni. 31 May 1968.

THE AQUARIAN GOSPEL AND JESUS IN JAGANNATH PURI

Many devotees are fond of citing the *Aquarian Gospel* of Christ and the fascinating account therein of how he spent his eighteen “lost years” in India. It describes how he meditated in the Himalayas, stayed in the Jagannath Mandir in Puri, and even attended the *Ratha-yātrā* festival there. It was Tamal Krishna Das (before he took *sannyāsa*) who in early 1969 came across this book and brought a copy to Srila Prabhupada.

Srila Prabhupada seemed to appreciate some of the points in the book, and we find that in early 1969 he cited it in his preaching a number of times.

However, I, for one, am reluctant to quote this book to scholars, or even devotees, as Srila Prabhupada later on seemed to change his opinion of the book. The history of *The Aquarian Gospel* as well as the chronology of Srila Prabhupada’s comments about it is interesting.

First of all, a few examples from 1969 of Srila Prabhupada quoting it:

There is a book called *Aquarian Gospel* in which it is stated that Lord Jesus Christ lived in the temple of Jagannath. Without being his devotee, how could he live there and how the authorities could allow a non-devotee to live there? From that book it appears that Lord Jesus Christ lived in intimate relations with the priest order. (Letter to Hayagriva. 31 July 1969.)

Actually our Krishna Consciousness movement is genuine Christian movement. Christ means Krishna, love of Godhead, who has his face anointed with *tilaka*. There is a word *kristos* in the Greek dictionary, and this word is supposed to be borrowed from the Sanskrit word “Krishna”. And “Christ” is derived from *kristos*. I find these things in a book known as *Aquarian Gospel of Lord Jesus the Christ*. (Letter to Syamasundara. 31 August 1969.)

Not Authoritative

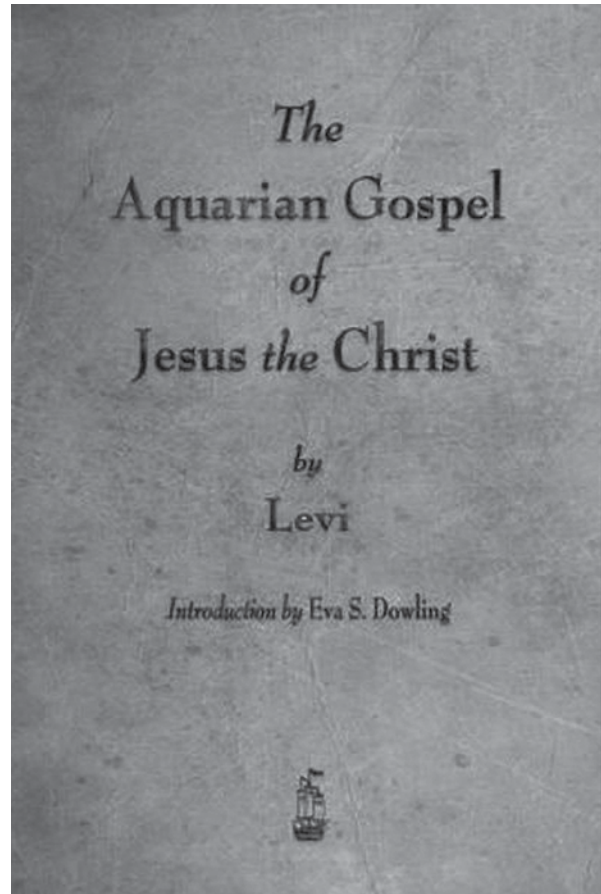
However, shortly thereafter Srila Prabhupada further clarified the matter:

Regarding *Aquarian Gospel of Lord Jesus the Christ*, I have taken some stray extracts just to support our views, but we don’t give any importance to that book. The best thing is that we accept Lord Jesus Christ as a great devotee of

the Lord and the son of God. It is better not to discuss in any detail about the Christian religion or any other religion. (Letter to Tamal Krishna. 14 September 1969.)

Regarding books like *Aquarian Gospel* or even the Testaments, we cannot accept them as authorities because sometimes it is learnt that the words are not actually spoken by Christ, but they are so set up by the devotees. For example, in the Ten Commandments it is clearly stated “Thou shalt not kill,” but some bishop in Boston has changed it to “Thou shalt do no murder.” This means the bishop wants to keep hold for animal slaughter. So don’t bother about all these literatures. We have all respect for these great preachers, but we do not require to study books save and except for some reference. We must push on our philosophy how to love God. Our process is simple. We have got volumes of books also, so it is better for us to mind our own business than to divert our attention in the studies of other books. This was definitely forbidden by Lord Chaitanya.

After all, Krishna Consciousness philosophy is as old as 120 million years at the least. So nothing can be compared with our philosophy, either in the matter of antiquity, philosophy, ethics, science, morality, etc., all in correct vision and approved by great stalwart *ācāryas*. So far others are concerned, they cannot be compared even. For example, if Lord Jesus Christ said “Thou shalt not kill,” or “Thou shalt do no murder,” to the people, it does not reflect very good social structure of the audience. Our philosophy is above all these things. Just like we prescribe to our students no illicit sex-life, no meat-eating, no intoxication, no gambling, but they are not ends in themselves. The real end is how to serve Krishna and sacrifice everything for him. And to learn this transcendental art we have got so many volumes of books. So the summary is that instead of diverting our attention to read such unauthorized books, better pay our attention to more authorized *vaiṣṇava* literature. These scriptures of the Buddhists and the Christians may be the words of God, but still they are not always applicable to us. It is just like a king may give some rules and regulations for some criminals in prison, but for the good citizens out of the prison these rules are not necessarily applicable. So these Christian and Buddhist scriptures were delivered for a different class of men, and we needn’t spend our time in studying their doctrines. You should read our own books over



and over again and as far as possible do not try to enter into controversy. We do not concern ourselves with any other religion. Our religion is to become the servant of the servant of the servant of Krishna.” (Letter to Hamsaduta. 2 November 1969.)

Although he generally discouraged his disciples from quoting the book, Srila Prabhupada continued to cite it sometimes during public preaching programs. But after his letter in late August to Syamasundara quoted above we don’t find any example of him citing the book to devotees.

Introduction of the Book in ISKCON

In chapter 6 of his book, *Servant of the Servant*, Tamal Krishna Goswami describes more about the *Aquarian Gospel*, how he brought a copy of the book to Srila Prabhupada, who initially appreciated it but later dismissed it:

“Previously I had come across a book entitled *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ*, which described the activities of Jesus between his twelfth and thirtieth years, an important portion of his life noticeably omitted from the New Testament. Because the book described how Jesus had received the major part of his religious

training in India, I thought it worthwhile to bring it to Srila Prabhupada's attention, and out of curiosity Srila Prabhupada had me purchase a copy. For a number of afternoons during his last visit to Los Angeles he would hear with interest as I read the narration of how Jesus learned the art of hearing from the *yogīs* in Benares, traveled to various holy places, and even participated in the *Ratha-yātrā* festival in Jagannath Puri. The author, however, stated that Jesus did not approve of deity worship, considering Lord Jagannath to be an idol. Though much of the book seemed to substantiate our Krishna consciousness tradition, this point made Prabhupada skeptical. What was the author's *paramparā*? Prabhupada challenged. I explained that the author supposedly obtained his information from the "akashic records." Prabhupada was not satisfied. He also questioned why so much attention was given to Jesus' healing the physical illnesses of the people. A pure devotee is not very much concerned to treat bodily diseases, but teaches his followers how to transcend the bodily condition altogether by practicing devotional service. Although a pure devotee is empowered by Krishna, and as such is the most powerful of *yogīs*, he does not take advantage of this by performing miracles, but prefers to convince his disciples through instructions and by his personal example of devotional service. In the final analysis, Prabhupada's conclusion was that since the book's authenticity could not be established, it therefore was not very important. Nevertheless, while giving his inauguration address at the *Ratha-yātrā* festival in San Francisco, he described how two thousand years earlier Lord Jesus Christ had also participated in a similar festival."

Origin of the Aquarian Gospel

The author of *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* (to use the full name of the book), was an American named Levi H. Dowling. Dowling was a preacher and something of a mystic. His father was an enthusiastic early minister of the Church of Christ, a movement meant to reestablish the original ancient Christian Church before it was broken into various sects.

Levi Dowling claimed to have realized the *Aquarian Gospel* during a series of meditative experiences. He says that he recorded it from a non-physical plane of existence that he referred to as the akashic records. His wife Eva wrote an introduction to the book in which she describes her husband as a prophet who

had received divine knowledge and was the premier evangelist for the newly arrived Age of Aquarius.

Objectionable Philosophy

If one gives even a cursory read through the *Aquarian Gospel* they will find many things which differ both with the Bible and our *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* philosophy. A few examples of the latter: In chapter twenty-two, text thirty-one, Christ supposedly instructed one of the priests in Puri, "Man is saved when he has reached deific life; when he and God are one." Of course, this idea of God and the devotee being one is intolerable for the followers of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Chapter twenty-six of the book describes how Christ saw a Jagannath *Ratha-yātrā* procession:

One day a car of Jagannath was hauled along by scores of frenzied men, and Jesus said, "Behold, a form without a spirit passes by; a body with no soul; a temple with no altar fires. This car of Krishna is an empty thing, for Krishna is not there. This car is but an idol of a people drunk on wine of carnal things." (Texts 2-5)

In text twenty-one of the same chapter, Christ purportedly said, "Tear down your idols; they can hear you not; turn all your sacrificial altars into fuel for the flames."

Text six of this chapter claims that Christ not only criticized the worship of the deity but he also found fault with chanting of the Holy Names: "God lives not in the noise of tongues; there is no way to him from any idol shrine."

In the *Aquarian Gospel*, Mr. Dowling claims that in response to Christ's above instructions, in text six the people inquired:

"To whom shall we bring gifts? Where shall we offer sacrifice?" (Text 26.16)



Jagannath on his cart in Puri

And Jesus said, “Our Father-God asks not for needless waste of plant, of grain, of dove, of lamb. That which you burn on any shrine you throw away. No blessings can attend the one who takes the food from hungry mouths to be destroyed by fire. When you would offer sacrifice unto our God, just take your gift of grain, or meat and lay it on the table of the poor.” (Texts 26.17-19)

He does exactly what Srila Prabhupada criticized the book for — propagating mundane welfare work as being service to God. In short, the book is highly questionable at best. As one Christian blogger described, “The *Aquarian Gospel* is a contradictory mixture of Christian Science, New Age and occult beliefs.”

In Jagannath Puri

On a side note, there is a local tradition here in Odisha that speaks about Christ’s visit to Puri. It says that he was staying at Shweta Ganga, which is a couple of kilometers south of the Jagannath Mandir towards the ocean. Shweta Ganga is one of the five principal sacred tanks in Puri that pilgrims traditionally visit.

This account seems to be based on an edition of a history book of the Jagannath Mandir in Puri called the *Mādaḷā Pāñji* (“drum chronicle”), so named due to the drum-like shape in which its palm leaves are joined together. It is actually a broad corpus of works with many editions and with many broadly diverging histories presented. In general, scholars and learned



Sweta Ganga in Jagannath Puri where some say that Christ stayed

sadhus are dubious of the authenticity of at least some of the accounts in it.

In January of 2016 I had the good fortune to meet Archbishop John, the leading Catholic in charge of millions of Christians in Odisha. He is highly educated and a very gentle and friendly man. He even attended some of our *kīrtanas* and classes during one of our retreats in Puri.

I asked him if he had heard about Christ’s alleged visit to Puri and if so what did he think about it. He smiled and said that indeed he had heard that many times. He said, “But we don’t hold any credence to it. There is no proper evidence to support it, nor do any recognized scholars, religious or secular, accept the idea.” He also said that there are no accepted theologians or respected secular scholars who accept the *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*.

In closing, while the events suggested by Mr. Dowling in the *Aquarian Gospel* are very interesting (and they could even be true), with the lack of substantial evidence supporting them, and after seeing Srila Prabhupada’s comments on the book, I, for one, have no interest in propagating it. — MD

SRI KRISHNA KATHAMRITA BINDU

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c/o Sri Krishna Balarama Mandir
National Highway No. 5,
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Email: katha@gopaljiu.org
Website: www.gopaljiu.org
Subscriptions: minimag@gopaljiu.org

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