

Preface

This thesis has been the culmination of thirty years of study and reflection on issues pertaining to the field of Religious Studies. After acquiring BA (Hon) and MA degrees from Concordia University of Montreal, Canada in The History and Philosophy of Religion during the decade of the nineteen seventies, a career path was taken in private business and in pursuing creative endeavours. However, interest in familiar academic areas of study has always remained exceedingly high. Particularly, issues dealing with the sociologies of religion and knowledge, the various forms of esotericism, Hellenistic thought, and broader cultural and philosophical topics.

Interest in theosophical subject matter dates back to my first few years as an undergraduate student, although primarily as a private activity rather than as an academic topic. In the process of seeking out supplementary literature while working on a research project, I was informed about a library belonging to the Montreal lodge of the Theosophical Society. After a cordial initial visit and generous access to their library, curiosity and a desire to explore and debate new ideas led to an ongoing informal relationship as a guest and observer. For about three years I periodically attended official meetings, participated in study groups, discussions, and lectures. During this period, a thorough familiarity with the field of theosophical history and literature was obtained, as well as much anecdotal information acquired by way of conversation and verbal commentary. As an outside observer, it was possible to objectively note the organisational procedures and understand much of the rationale that inspired commitment and continued belief. Although this relationship was entirely informal without any ulterior motives or objectives, serious reflection and spirited discussion helped solidify my impressions and memories. Despite subsequent exploration of many similar topics and themes during my student years, this personal familiarity and background with theosophy was never utilised for academic purposes. Thus, one of the appeals in now choosing this topic was to revisit a field of interest once explored in some depth, but examined from a more mature and disciplined perspective.

Although many years have past since my first foray into the discipline of Religious Studies, the enduring influence of past professors from Concordia University

must be acknowledged. These include Fred Bird, Charles Davis, John Rossner, Michel Despland, Sheila McDonough, and David Miller. And finally, without the encouragement and patience of my wife Christine, this undertaking would never have reached fruition.