

## FOCUS: Anthroposophy Past, Present, and Future

*The following section did not come together by design, but rather arose out of a fortunate confluence of events. Rudolf Steiner's work has affected the world in many different ways: through the knowledge he brought, the*

*effect it has had on individual lives, and the direction it gives for the future. In the following, anthroposophy is presented from these points of view.*

### *The Christ Event and the Dawn of Anthroposophy*

BY ARTHUR ZAJONC

*I can only say to you, if the Master had not convinced me otherwise, then despite the necessity of Theosophy for our age, I would have written only philosophical books after 1901 also, and have spoken only on literary and philosophical themes.*

—From a letter by Rudolf Steiner to Marie von Sivers (1905)<sup>1</sup>

In 1901 Rudolf Steiner turned 40. According to long tradition, it is only at this time of life that spiritual teachers can appropriately begin their public life. For example, Pythagoras is said to have journeyed to the great mystery centers of his age until 40, after which time he began teaching and eventually established his school in Croton. The years from 1900 to 1902 in Berlin were years of change for Rudolf Steiner: He made the transition from being a philosopher and literary figure to standing in the world as a spiritual teacher. He did this under the guidance of his own spiritual teacher, who is not known to us. Now, one hundred years later, we can appreciate anew what he accomplished then, and we can also detect the central motives of what would become his decisive contributions to human society.

We are familiar with the thorough scientific and philosophical schooling Rudolf Steiner received as a young man studying in Vienna and Weimar. These strands of his biography are, of course, central to all his later contributions. However, these elements were compounded with another important one that completely transformed his personal relationship with the spiritual world. I am speaking of Rudolf Steiner's relationship to the Christ. We must recall that Rudolf Steiner's childhood was remarkably free of the conventional religious practices and instruction that were so common in his time. As

he stated, "Mine was a purely scientific path of education."<sup>2</sup> He comments on this gap in his education as a source of difficulties for him when trying to bring the results of his spiritual research concerning Christ down to earthly expression. But his lack in this arena was also an aid to his unprejudiced approach to the Christ.

During the years between Rudolf Steiner's departure from Weimar and his appearance as a spiritual teacher in Berlin, his relationship to the living reality of the Christ and Christ's sacrifice for humanity became a pivotal struggle for him. In his autobiography we read:

*The true substance of Christianity began germinally to unfold within me as an inner phenomenon of knowledge. About the turn of the century, the germ unfolded more and more.... What occurred at that time in my mind in viewing Christianity was a severe test for me. Such tests are the opposition provided by destiny (karma) which must be surmounted by one's spiritual development.<sup>3</sup>*

The significance of these tests for Rudolf Steiner was enormous because he was battling against the Ahrimanic powers who were ceaselessly endeavoring to influence him to base his thinking solely on scientific materialism. He struggled against their influence by cultivating a heightened state of "discriminating consciousness." But, as he says, "In this time of testing I succeeded in progressing further only when in spiritual vision I brought before my mind the evolution of Christianity." The Christ thus became the antidote to a thinking dominated by the demons of Ahriman.

In this struggle we can witness the forging of two strands active in world evolution into a new and essentially modern union: science and Christianity, or, we could also say, knowledge and love. It is also the union of the Cross and the Roses that is the proper emblem of Rosicrucian Christianity.<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Steiner's most

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significant contribution to the course of human spiritual evolution can be glimpsed through these modest remarks in his autobiography, and we also perceive therein his profound alignment with the mission of Christian Rosenkreutz, the hidden initiate of our age.

In these years Rudolf Steiner received a special task from the spiritual world. In a 1904 letter to a pupil of the early Esoteric School he put it this way, "I have the charge to cultivate the Christian element."<sup>5</sup> This short remark illuminates the focus of his early anthroposophical lecturing and writing in Berlin. Almost immediately in 1901, when Rudolf Steiner begins his public spiritual life, he starts to speak about the Christ and the Mystery of Golgotha. First, in his lectures *From Buddha to Christ* he showed "what a mighty advance the Mystery of Golgotha signifies in comparison with the Buddha event, and how the evolution of humanity, as it strives toward the Christ event, approaches its culmination."<sup>6</sup> Then, in the winter months of 1901, the landmark series of lectures took place, which would be published the following year under the title *Christianity as Mystical Fact*. In these lectures the spiritual scientific methods born out of his studies in science and philosophy are applied to the ancient Mysteries and the Mystery of Golgotha itself. One could say that in these lectures and the subsequent book based on them Rudolf Steiner incarnated a new form of spiritual inquiry that was at once completely modern—even scientific—and at the same time permeated by the Logos-principle that has animated all true schools of initiation knowledge.

Rudolf Steiner's struggles and achievements a century ago challenge us to awaken a similar "discriminating consciousness" in ourselves, and to travel as far as we can along the path to the Christ. The path Rudolf Steiner walked was one free of traditional denominational forms, but it led nonetheless to a true encounter with the Christ event. The development of his soul rested, as he described it, upon the fact that "I had stood spiritually before the Mystery of Golgotha in a deep and solemn celebration of knowledge."<sup>7</sup> In other words, the foundation for his life's work and his personal development was the Christ being. The same is ultimately true for all of us. The spiritual forces that heal us are also those that transform our supersensible members during self-development. These are none other than the forces of the Christ. We can meditate, but our own human forces are insufficient to enact alone the transformations of soul we long for. The being of the Christ graces our efforts, joining his high nature to our striving Self, and so uplifts and reshapes us for spiritual insights and actions.

In ancient times the two paths to spiritual knowledge

stood under the "sign of Jonah" and under the "sign of Solomon."<sup>8</sup> Jonah's descent into the belly of the whale symbolized the three and one-half day, deathlike sleep in which the pupil, after long preparation, came to experience the spiritual world directly. The second path was that of Solomon who did nothing outwardly to gain spiritual vision. It came to him from without, like Balkis, Queen of Sheba, who journeyed to him from the South. To these two is added a new path, one particularly suited to the post-Christian era, which takes into account the development of a new factor in human evolution, namely Ego-consciousness. But we should not imagine this consciousness as the principle of self that accomplishes so much in an independent and personal way. No, this personal aspect, as important as it is for daily life, is permeated by Luciferic forces. "Whatever consciousness he has developed hitherto is permeated by the Luciferic forces. With what derives merely from the intellect" Christ cannot link himself. But there exists a second aspect to our being, one that has remained pure, childlike, and "virginal." It is the selfless Self to which the Christ can connect, which he can invigorate, and then through it he can fructify the other corrupted part of our nature. How can we work with the pure aspect of our nature, how can we walk the path to the Christ so that we too may one day stand before the Mystery of Golgotha in a deep and solemn celebration of knowledge?

Rudolf Steiner speaks in several places of the paths to the Christ. The path of feeling is already known to us through the "stations of the cross" or the way of the Passion that so many Christian mystics followed in imitation of Christ.<sup>9</sup> We need only think of St. Francis's long meditations and fervent prayers at Mount Alverna in which he begged to suffer as Christ had suffered. His heartfelt prayers were answered and the marks of the crucifixion "grew" into his hands, feet, and side. His union in soul with the sufferings of the Christ purified his astral nature so that his etheric body could take up the eternal image of the Golgotha event that works still in our Earth environment. His physical body then obeyed the potent forces alive in his transfigured etheric. Yet few today can walk the path walked by Francis. Our times are other. Still, the ways to the Christ are open to us, and as described by Rudolf Steiner are available to all.<sup>10</sup> I would like to focus on two paths that he describes in a lecture from February, 1919. He calls them the paths of thinking and of will that can lead to the Christ.<sup>11</sup>

This lecture is given shortly after World War I. The brutal forces of nationalism had left their horrible traces over all of Europe. Over and against this Steiner set the Christ impulse, which was and is for all mankind.

One of the greatest barriers to the Christ is egoism, be it the egoism of the individual or that of the tribe or nation. Rudolf Steiner goes so far as to state:

*Since the Mystery of Golgotha everything concerned with human fellowship belongs to the Christ impulse. That is the essential thing—the Christ impulse belongs not to single human beings but to the fellowship of human beings.... It is a great mistake to suppose that the solitary individual can establish a direct relation with Christ.<sup>12</sup>*

This is a dramatic statement, but we can be reminded of Christ's own utterance, "Wherever two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I also." Christ cannot link to the solitary "I" that has been captured by pride or fear, but rather it can live in the selfless Self that awakens through right human relationships, for in them the "not I" emerges of which Paul spoke when he said, "Not I but Christ in me."

The path of thinking to the Christ is exactly the path from my thoughts and opinions to the thoughts and opinions of the other. Instead of inert hearing, I practice listening deeply and selflessly, fully entertaining the thoughts of the other as if they were my own. Rudolf Steiner did this again and again throughout his life, for example with the philosophies of Nietzsche, Haeckel, and Darwin, and he succeeded so thoroughly in making them his own that many thought he was a follower of these controversial figures. "The one and only way is this: instead of taking an interest merely in my own way of thinking and in what I consider right, I must develop a selfless interest in every opinion I encounter, however strongly I may hold it to be mistaken." Exactly by bringing the thinking of another human being into myself, by cultivating this form of social interest, one brings the Christ into our feelings.

The second path is that of will, which Rudolf Steiner characterizes as that given by "mature idealism." Youth may possess a naïve idealism that they do not have to work for but that they are granted as a boon of their age. However, the ability to find throughout one's life that same youthful idealism is to nurture in us a way that opens to the Christ. This is no longer a path of thinking but one of untiring idealistic action born not of self-interest but of a consciousness of the needs of others.

Along either path we come to a sense of heightened responsibility for our thoughts and actions that goes beyond the demands of the outer world. This feeling can become so clear and strong that we come to sense a Being present with us, an invisible accompanying spirit who reminds us of our responsibility to spiritual worlds for all we think and do. This Being is an aid and

guardian who accompanies us along our journey, directing us on the path to the Christ.

In this year of the centenary of Rudolf Steiner's first public teachings concerning anthroposophy, we can—like him—strive to build our future not on egoism but on selflessness; not on knowledge alone, but on knowledge joined to love; not on the egoism of the lone individual or insular sect, but on true fellowship. In doing so we will walk the path of modern initiation under the wise gaze of our guiding Being so that one day we can stand inwardly at the foot of the Cross in a festival moment of spiritual renewal and insight.

#### Notes

1. Rudolf Steiner/Marie Steiner-von Sivers: *Briefwechsel und Dokumente, 1901–1925*, p. 48. (GA 262)
2. *The Fifth Gospel*, Rudolf Steiner Press, 1985, lecture of October 2, 1913.
3. *The Course of My Life*, Anthroposophic Press, 1986, chapter 26.
4. *The Secret Stream*, Anthroposophic Press, 2000. See especially Christopher Bamford's introduction.
5. *Zur Geschichte und aus den Inhalten der ersten Abteilung der Esoterischen Schule 1904–1914*, p. 83, Rudolf Steiner to Günther Wagner, September 14, 1904, "Ich habe die Weisung, das christliche Element zu pflegen." (GA 264)
6. *The Course of My Life*, chapter 30.
7. *The Course of My Life*, chapter 26.
8. *The Gospel of St. Luke*, September 26, 1909.
9. *Theosophy of the Rosicrucians*, June 6, 1907.
10. Lectures in which Steiner describes the paths to Christ are, for example, "Three Paths of the Soul to the Christ," April 16–17, 1912; "How Do I Find the Christ?" October 16, 1918; "Christian Initiation," from *The Gospel of St. John* (Hamburg), May 1908; "Cognition of the Christ through Anthroposophy," April 15, 1922; "The Birth of Christ in the Human Soul," December 22, 1918.
11. "The Inner Aspects of the Social Question," February 2, 1919.
12. *Ibid.*

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