

Kingdoms of Earth, Chorus of Christ

It was the evening before the great Kosovo battle of the Serbs against the army of Ottoman Sultan Murad in the year 1389. The next day, in the "Field of Blackbirds," they would meet in decisive warfare, but tonight the Serb Prince Lazar would have a vision.

The Mother of God appeared to Lazar and offered him a choice: he could win the battle against the Turks and gain an earthly empire, or he and his army could suffer defeat and gain a heavenly empire instead. In the Serb epic commemorating the event, we hear how Prince Lazar weighs his options:

*Kind God, what shall I do, how shall I do it?
What is the empire of my choice?
Is it the empire of heaven?
Is it the empire of earth?
And if I shall choose the empire of the earth,
The empire of earth is fleeting,
Heaven is lasting and everlasting.
And the Emperor chose the empire of heaven
Above the empire of earth.*

The Serbs lost the battle on the Field of Blackbirds. Both Prince Lazar and the Sultan Murad were slain in the conflict. Sixty years later the Serb state was destroyed. Ever since then Serbs have been obsessed by the myth of Kosovo and the lost battle, the injustice and betrayal they feel they suffered on the Field of Blackbirds at the hands of their prince.

Exactly 600 years later, on June 28, 1989, Slobodan Milosevic stood before a crowd of half a million people gathered on the same Field of Blackbirds where Prince Lazar and Sultan Murad had fallen, and Milosevic promised them what Prince Lazar had denied them: "Nobody will beat you ever again." Milosevic tailored the myth of Kosovo into the banner of Serb nationalism, and rose to power under it, preaching the gospel of a Greater Serbia.

In many countries of the world we see the rising tide of fervent nationalism and ethnic warfare once again. The horrors in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia are only its most extreme forms, but it is evident also in the increased xenophobia that is appearing in many of the countries of western Europe. Nor is our astonishingly heterogenous America untouched by these divisive forces. What stands behind these signs that are so much a part of our times, and what balm can be brought to mitigate the ravages of "ethnic cleansing" and tribal hatreds?

In his new book *The Wrath of Nations*, the journalist and commentator William Pfaff states that nationalism "is the reality of our century and needs to be understood in a more complex way than is ordinarily the case. It is

a contemporary expression of social and moral realities at the core of human nature."⁴ If we hope to gain a deeper understanding than that given by external history, then we need to go beyond even what Pfaff has in mind, to combine history with the results of spiritual scientific investigation. This is the "more complex way" of understanding required, one that indeed does reach to those "social and moral realities at the core of human nature."

Lessons of World War I

In many lectures given during the years between the assassination of Austrian Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, and his own death in 1925, Rudolf Steiner discussed the spiritual background of nationalism, whose danger was so apparent to him already at the dawn of the 20th century. World War I shattered all of Europe, and the anguish of events deeply shook Rudolf Steiner. On September 1, 1914, he reminded his audience of his original hopes for the first Goethanum:

Dear friends, you know that the original intention had been for the building that is to be a watchtower for the life of the spirit in our present age to be completed by the month of August of this year. Karma decreed otherwise.

Out of the dark furor of Serbian nationalism and the blindness of Western military and economic arrogance rose the tragedy of war. By examining both those past events and more contemporary ones in the light of Steiner's treatment, we can learn something of the past and future basis for differences among peoples, and the possibility of these groups relating to one another like voices in a cosmic chorus.

Language and Kinship

Language has played and continues to play a decisive role in distinguishing one ethnic or national group from another, and yet nearly every contemporary nation-state harbors more than one language within its borders. Switzerland is the classic case of a single nation, with three major languages in active use. Rudolf Steiner emphasized how healthy it is that German is spoken in the separate nations of Austria and Switzerland as well as Germany. By contrast, Adolf Hitler sought from the outset to unify the German-speaking peoples into one great nation or *Reich*. Even with this obvious negative historical precedent, language is still seen as the foundation not only for ethnic identity, but also as providing the unifying glue for a nation-state.

In the former Yugoslavia, for example, the role of language has been important even where real linguistic and ethnic differences are minor. Already in 1967 under Tito, for example, Croat intellectuals published a "Declaration of the Croatian Language" demanding

constitutional recognition of four instead of three Yugoslav languages. Time and again pseudo-intellectuals on all sides have published massive (and largely bogus) treatises justifying the national aspirations of their particular group on linguistic and historical grounds.

Once we discover the changes that occurred with the onset of the Consciousness Soul epoch in the 15th century, we see how misguided these kinds of arguments are. In the ancient world, the spirits of light had worked to bring harmony into humanity by ordering it according to blood relationships and language. The forces of darkness by contrast labored against this, sowing seeds of chaos into the peaceful relationships within homogeneous groups of people. In that distant past the use of language, race and kinship was a natural basis for ethnic determination, and was a proper basis for forming a human community. The bonds of language and blood provided the social and physical basis for the first development of human affection, the beginnings of love. C.S. Lewis calls such affection (Greek: *storgē*) the "humblest and most widely diffused of loves." As such it is an essential stage in the evolution of love.

What was once a progressive force within humanity changed between the 15th and 19th centuries. Specifically, Rudolf Steiner indicates that in the 15th century language came under the sway of Ahriman not only with the advent of the printing press, but through a change in the very meaning of words. Thus does the modern soul encounter ahrimanic influences from two directions: in technical life but also through our new relationship to our native tongue. By 1879, when the spirits of darkness were cast down among men, the situation with regard to kinship and language had become completely reversed. Steiner states that ³

Everything based on dominance of the blood principle meant progress for as long as it was under the authority of the spirits of light; under the authority of the spirits of darkness it is a sign of decline. In the three ages of human evolution which now follow and will continue until the time of the great catastrophe, the spirits of darkness will make extreme efforts to preserve the old hereditary characteristics and inculcate human beings with the attitudes which result from such preservation.

Therefore, relationships based on blood or language are no longer what they once were, and by extension they cannot any longer play a healthy role in the formation of a modern nation-state. In his lectures of October 1917, we hear Rudolf Steiner warning again and again of the coming degeneration in human society if race and language become the defining bond of an ahrimanicly-inspired nationalism. Only six years later Rudolf Steiner would read the notice of Hitler's failed Munich putsch

of November 9, 1923, and say, "If this man rises to power, I can never again work in Germany."

Geography and Climate

If one rejects heredity and language as a basis for the grouping of peoples, because of its ahrimanic character, one quite easily slips into the opposite frame of mind that sees no distinctions, and becomes completely non-national. In this view there is one universal humankind, one (scientific) way of uncovering truth regardless of culture, race, time or place, and so on. The description of a single world, blind to all differences, drawn together by universal brotherhood, is a very attractive ideal. Yet it lacks reality. Rudolf Steiner calls this a "luciferic monism." Thus does he speak of a "twofold illusion," one a luciferic illusion of unity, the other an ahrimanic illusion of unbridgeable division. ⁵

If division within the social organism is not based on language or kinship, and if we decline a luciferic oneness, how are the peoples of the earth intended to group themselves? Rudolf Steiner responded, "The Spirits of Form did not intend for peoples to be divided according to their character of speech, but rather that it would be based only on characteristics given by nature, namely on variations of geography and climate. People should feel themselves as a nation through the relationship they sense to the powers affecting their lives from out of nature." That is, we can come to sense the etheric coherence of a region from the lay of the land, its mountains, valleys, streams and climate. This appears to me similar to the recent call for a bio-regional consciousness that is sensitive to ecosystems and watersheds, and which seeks ways of appropriately reflecting these geographical realities in local community economies.

As a meditative exercise we can extend ourselves out into our regional geography. I experience certain thresholds as I cross a major river or mountain range in my imagination. The communities of which I am a part also seem to reflect the landforms of my region in natural ways. These are subtle soul perceptions, but I think they can be made objective. The etheric as well as physical geography of this continent is formative of human communities. We could learn much about this by studying the distribution and character of the native peoples of North America. Thus, in place of abstract divisions under the Wilsonian banner of "self-determination of nations" along ethnic lines, we can put a nature-based differentiation. Yet here too there will arise the danger of isolation unless it is joined to another impulse that is truly cosmopolitan, and should become part and parcel of our contemporary life: ethical individualism.

the Balkans will find peace on earth only when all – Serb, Croat and Muslim – turn around and follow the example of their old prince, becoming citizens of that heavenly empire whose king is the Christ? And are we not like they, wherever we may live?

The Christ came to dispel both illusions: that of tribal division but also that of an easy union which proclaims us an all-one, cosmic-human family. We are, in fact, gathered into distinct karmic groups with whom different archangels connect themselves. When individuals strive rightly they assist these hierarchical beings in uniting around the Christ in what Rudolf Steiner called a "Chorus of Peace." Each group spirit has an inner nature called his "age," whose light can be revealed to us. In a verse given at the outbreak of the war, Rudolf Steiner describes a means by which we can help to place our own folk spirit into the Chorus of Peace. ¹¹

*Spirit of my place on earth,
Reveal the light of thine age
To the Christ-endowed soul,
That striving it may find you
In harmonious spheres of peace
Ringing with the praise and power
Of a humanity given up to Christ.*

I believe that Rudolf Steiner had hoped the Anthroposophical Society would be an earthly reflection of that Chorus of Peace. In the years immediately after his death, karma decreed otherwise. Nationalism can also take the form of spiritual separatism in which each faction maintains that only it carries the truth, only it bears the banner of the Christ. Here too division is sown by Ahriman, and easy union by Lucifer. Rather can the Anthroposophical Society become a beautifully-formed, living organism in which morally courageous individuals strive within communities gathered together on the basis of geography and climate, and who – for all their differences – still work together around the globe under the banner of Michael within the chorus of the Christ.
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Notes:

1. William Pfaff, *The Wrath of Nations* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1993), p.40.
2. See Karl Heyer, *Rudolf Steiner über den Nationalismus* (Basel: Perseus Verlag, 1993) p. 72ff.
3. Rudolf Steiner, *The Fall of the Spirits of Darkness*, lecture 12, Oct. 26, 1917.
4. C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), p. 53.
5. Heyer, pp. 72ff., Steiner, 28 December 1914.
6. Steiner, *Fall*, p.186.
7. Heyer, p. 82.
8. Heyer, p. 80; Steiner, July 18, 1915.
9. Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts, A Journey Through History* (NY: Vintage, 1994), p. 95.
10. Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (NY: Penguin, 1992), pp. 104ff.
11. Rudolf Steiner, *The Destinies of Individuals and Nations*, September 1, 1914; see also Heyer, p. 42, and Rudolf Steiner, September 13, 1914.

Goethe's Fairy Tale – A Picture of the Rosicrucian Path of Initiation

Rudolf Steiner was probably the first who called attention to the fact that, following a life-threatening illness in Leipzig, the young Goethe was introduced by a Rosicrucian to the secrets of Rosicrucianism in his hometown of Frankfurt. Furthermore, Rudolf Steiner pointed out that because of this serious illness, Goethe underwent an initiation of which he was not initially aware. It did arise in his mind – though still unclearly – in 1784, when he composed the poem "The Secrets." Thereafter, in 1795, this initiation appeared clearly in his consciousness, enabling him to create his "Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily" as his "secret revelation." Based on his own initiation, Rudolf Steiner further revealed that this fairy tale represents the alchemical initiation, inaugurated in this form by Christian Rosenkreuz, and that it contains, albeit in symbolic language, all the secrets of this initiation.¹

We shall now examine in what way the Rosicrucian path of initiation comes to expression symbolically in the fairy tale's inner sequence of images. In numerous lectures, Rudolf Steiner has described this path as one passing through the following seven stages:²

1. Study
2. Imaginative cognition
3. Inspired cognition or reading of the occult script
4. Preparation of the Philosopher's Stone
5. Recognition of man as a microcosm
6. Contemplation of the macrocosm
7. Godliness or blessedness

In what follows, these seven stages of the Rosicrucian path of initiation will be characterized in more detail in connection with the images of Goethe's fairy tale. We will have to bear in mind that these stages do not necessarily have to be undertaken one after the other. Depending on the individuality, age or profession of a particular student, a spiritual teacher in each case singles out the most suitable stages for said student. Variations in the sequence can thus occur.³

Beginning of the Path of Initiation

If we ask in what form the first stage, that of study, comes to pictorial expression in the fairy tale, we can recognize this stage in how the green snake consumes and digests the gold pieces. This snake sleeps in a rocky ravine and is aroused by the gold coins, which having been poured into the chasm by the old ferryman, come clattering down. She greedily swallows them and carefully seeks out those pieces that were scattered in the bushes and between chinks of the rock. Then she feels

The Moral Capital of Individuals

Michael, as the countenance of the Christ, leads individuals to the Christ, not groups. A horrifying counter-example is the infamous case of the Rumanian Corneliu Zelea Codreanu who in 1927 heard the voice of God calling to him from an icon of the Archangel Michael. He formed the Legion of the Archangel Michael with a military wing known as the Iron Guard. The Legion was a religious order organized around "nests" of thirteen members each. As Robert Kaplan describes it,⁹

To join a nest, an initiate had to suck the blood from self-imposed slashes in the arm of every other member of the nest, and then write an oath in his own blood, vowing to commit murder whenever ordered to do so. Before setting out to kill, each man had to let an ounce of his blood flow into a common goblet, out of which all would drink, thus uniting the entire nest in death. Members were also obliged to wear crosses and packets of Rumanian soil around their necks.

The horrific crimes committed by the Iron Guard of the Legion of the Archangel Michael are too gruesome to recount here. In the years ahead the names of Michael and Christ will be increasingly appropriated by groups with no relationship whatsoever to the spiritual impulses of these cosmic beings.

In his own day Rudolf Steiner drew attention to the assassination groups which swarmed through eastern Europe at the outset of the First World War, killing off anyone with the courage to speak as an ethical individual. All signs of individual moral conscience were brutally repressed. One had to belong to the "god-chosen" group or suffer the grisly consequences.

In the ethnic clashes of our own times we learn of similar fanatical groups and widespread assassinations. The case of Reichl-Kir must stand for many others.¹⁰ An intelligent 35 year-old of German and Slovene descent, Reichl-Kir considered himself a Croat. He was police chief of the regional capital Osijek, but was a tireless worker for peace. For weeks he traveled from village to village making deals to prevent extremists of either camp from taking control. And wherever he went, no matter what the danger, he never carried a firearm. As he was driving with a Serb leader and Croat adviser to negotiate an important peace agreement for the region, he stopped at one of his own Croatian police checkpoints. A former head of the Croat Democratic Union stepped up to the car and fired twenty-eight bullets killing Reichl-Kir and his companions. Although Croatian police were within a few yards of the action, the assassin escaped.

The strategy of extremism is to seek out the moral capital of the country, which is always possessed by

individuals, not organizations, and eradicate it. Where they succeed the country becomes morally bankrupt, and fragments into ethnic conflicts and blood feuds. Where someone like a Mandela or Ghandi can survive, individual moral force ignites the moral courage of others and impossible things occur.

To me, this points us to the contribution we can make out of Anthroposophy. Everything hinges on the strengthening of individuals of deep moral conviction. Often these individuals suffer every degradation, they are imprisoned and brutalized, but where they can persist without falling back into the mentality of group hatred, they carry the moral force of the future into our present world. They begin with nothing, no wealth, no army, no external power, and yet they become the axis around which a nation revolves – the forces for "a velvet revolution."

In earlier times it was often the task of the Church to cultivate the moral stature of a people. But now, with the changing of times, we must find non-religious and non-sectarian means for the spiritual development of true courage and moral judgement. I see this as a central responsibility of Anthroposophy. Outer forces will promote either social anarchy or reactionary fundamentalism. The path between draws its light from neither, but from the quiet lantern of the heart. Moreover, this is a universal path that brings coherence to our entire world not through a single planetary parliamentary body, but through the inner fellowship that arises between individuals who strive to act in freedom and out of love.

It is right that Michael appears in our times as a warrior with a stern countenance. But behind and within that Being glows the infinite love of the Christ who enjoins us saying: "Love your enemies... and pray for those who persecute you.... For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others?" (Matthew 5:44-47).

At the being and end of his own ministry, Christ confronted the question of His kingdom, of who His brethren were. The first time it appeared in the form of a temptation when the devil offered Him "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them." Christ replied, "Begone, Satan!" At the end of His life Jesus again had to respond to questions concerning His kingship, this time from Pilate. His response was, "My kingdom is not of this world." Pilate washed his hands and gave Jesus up to death. There followed centuries of persecution of the early Christians, but for all their suffering His followers did not repudiate Him even then.

Prince Lazar was likewise confronted with a difficult choice. He too chose the kingdom of heaven over that of the earth, and his people suffered. Is it not possible that