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An Exploratory Study of Anthroposophy

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ANTHROPOSOPHY

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Philosophy
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June 1955

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¹ Although requested to do so, the author does not wish to appear as having no figure on the side of the anthroposophy.

² A partial publication list from the Anthroposophical Society in New York City lists over 200 titles.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A movement making a marked impact on the German mind today is Anthroposophy. In fact, from its headquarters near Basle, Switzerland, the Anthroposophic Society is issuing an intellectual, esthetic, and "religious" appeal that seems to be gaining a following in many countries of Europe. And here in America the movement is not without its adherents.¹ The Anthroposophic Society in America has at its New York headquarters (211 Madison Avenue, New York 16) meeting rooms, an extensive library, and The Anthroposophic Press, Inc. Meetings are held regularly in New York, in Chicago and in other cities of the United States. An increasing number of books on Anthroposophy are being translated into English.²

What is Anthroposophy? According to the Anthroposophists themselves:

Anthroposophy is a way of thought rather than a body of dogma, springing from the work and teaching

¹Although requested to do so, the Anthroposophic Society in America supplied no figures on the size of its membership.

²A partial publication list from the Anthroposophic Press in New York City lists over 200 titles.

of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). He spoke of it as "a path of knowledge, to guide the spiritual in the human being to the spiritual in the universe."³

Of their purpose Anthroposophists say, "Our movement exists to facilitate the investigation of occult truths, and its researches. . . . endeavor to find the best means of developing the hidden qualities latent in every human being."⁴

As a way of attaining knowledge and of developing man's latent powers, Anthroposophy has some direct bearing on the Christian message. A Bachelor of Divinity thesis on the movement seems quite relevant, therefore. This thesis examines the life and teaching of Rudolf Steiner and the Anthroposophic movement which he started. It is an attempt to get a broad overview of Anthroposophy rather than concentrating on any one of its phases. It is an exploratory study of a preliminary nature, and in no measure does it try to be definitive on any part of the movement.

The paper is divided as follows. Chapter II covers the life of Rudolf Steiner and the development of his thought. Chapter III treats the path to "supersensible" knowledge and the awakening of the latent forces in every man. This concept is central in Anthroposophy, and therefore this chapter is of prime importance in the paper.

³This information was taken from promotional material printed by the Anthroposophic Press, Inc., New York 16, N.Y.

⁴A Student of Rudolf Steiner, The New Impulse and the New Era (London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 17.

The evolution of the processes of attaining spiritual knowledge is the subject of Chapter IV. Included under this discussion are the mystery religions of the past, the Christian Mystery of the present, and the "New Impulse" of the future. The next two chapters cover the relation of Anthroposophy to major areas of human life. Chapter V examines the relation of Anthroposophy to religion and Chapter VI shows Anthroposophy's use in other spheres of activity. Chapter VII gives tentative concluding observations.

The limitations of the writer to treat the subject under consideration are numerous. He had done no previous research on the occult sciences. Nor has he seen Anthroposophy in practice. Apart from information obtained in a few conversations with those who are Anthroposophists, the bulk of the material for this paper was acquired from a select number of Rudolf Steiner's books.

Anthroposophists would claim that the greatest limitation of this study is that it is conducted by someone who is not himself on the path to supersensible knowledge.⁵ It is hoped, however, that this look "from the outside" will be at least a start toward the understanding of Anthroposophy.

⁵"The life of the Spirit can be understood only when we do not presume to criticize it with the lower mind, but rather when we develop it reverently within ourselves," Rudolf Steiner, The Way of Initiation, translated by Max Gysi (Third Americanized Edition; New York: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, 1923), p. 48.

CHAPTER II

RUDOLF STEINER AND ANTHROPOSOPHY

Anthroposophy is a movement that was initiated and guided to a great extent by one man, Dr. Rudolf Steiner. As will be shown in this paper, it is in his personality, and work that the movement finds its center. This chapter will concern itself with the life of Dr. Steiner. Steiner seems to have been a man of great personal attractiveness. Those who met him were greatly impressed with the depths of his insights. Many of his associates would have agreed with the judgment of a poet who said of Steiner after seeing his portrait, "Behold a master of himself and of life."¹

Rudolf Steiner was born in Lower Austria in 1861. He was the son of a railway station-master. His followers credit him with marvelous intuition even in his youth. For instance, Schure speaks of the time when Steiner was employed in a Roman Catholic Church as a choir boy. Although greatly impressed with the worship, he was troubled by the secret unbelief of the priests, which he could see because

¹Quoted by Edouard Schure, "The Personality of Rudolf Steiner and His Development," an introductory chapter printed in Rudolf Steiner, The Way of Initiation, translated by Max Gysi (Third Americanized Edition; New York: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, 1923), p. 32.

"he possessed the innate gift of seeing souls."² He was from his early years concerned with matters of the spirit. The conviction that the divine soul dwells in all men started to form within him, Schure writes, "Vaguely as yet did this idea stir within him that the divine soul is present in all men, but in a latent state. It is a sleeping captive that has to be awakened from enchantment."³ At the age of 15 Steiner met a herbalist who spent his life investigating the "unconscious and fluid soul of herbs and flowers."⁴ This contact was one of the steps in Steiner's realization that the forces from the invisible and eternal world filter through the visible.

Steiner was a serious and capable scholar. He studied the philosophies of Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, and absorbed many of their emphases. He also studied the sciences of observation. These were of extreme importance for him, for although he later deplored the scientist's emphasis on the world of sense experience, he used "scientific" methods in his study of spiritual worlds. This will be demonstrated in Chapter III in discussing his steps to supersensible knowledge. In addition to these scientific

²Ibid., p. 12.

³Ibid., p. 13.

⁴Ibid., p. 14.

studies he showed a marked interest in art and poetry. This interest was to be later reflected in his voluminous writings.

Throughout the period of his late teens Steiner was looking for the key to life and to the world. He needed someone to show him the way. At the age of 19 Steiner met his spiritual guide--the Master--who was to lead him to the initiation into higher truth.⁵ Of this encounter Schure says:

It is an undoubted fact, admitted by occult tradition and confirmed by experience, that those who seek the higher truth from an impersonal motive find a master to initiate them at the right moment: that is to say, when they are ripe for its reception.⁶

It was this master who led the eager pupil through the stages of inner discipline to a knowledge of higher worlds. Schure claims that even at this early age Steiner knew that his mission must be, "To re-unite Science and Religion. To bring back God into Science, and Nature into Religion. Thus to re-fertilize both Art and Life."⁷ Steiner spent the next ten years (1881-1891) in Vienna. This was for him a period of study and preparation. After "a brilliant career"⁸

⁵Ibid, p. 18.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 20.

⁸A Student of Rudolf Steiner, The New Impulse and the New Era (London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 3.

at the University of Vienna, he took his degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Rostock.

The next decade of Steiner's life was spent at Weimar. This has been characterized as a period of "struggle and combat."⁹ He was called to the state library at Weimar, in order to edit the scientific works of Goethe, on whose works he was considered an expert.¹⁰ It was early in this period of his life that Steiner published a work entitled, Die Philosophie der Freiheit, which has been translated into English as The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity. One of the prime factors that made his stay at Weimar one of struggle and combat was his contact with Ernst Haeckel, whose materialism was radically opposed to Steiner's views. Steiner found much of merit in Haeckel's system, but for his materialistic conclusions he had only scorn. He sensed that this man was his enemy. Schure says, "Yes, Haeckel was the adversary. It was materialism in arms, the dragon with all his scales, his claws, and his teeth."¹¹ Rudolf Steiner was ready for the intellectual battle he felt compelled to make. He needed only a field of combat. This he was to find in the Theosophical Society.

⁹ Schure, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁰ A Student of Rudolf Steiner, op. cit., p. 4.

¹¹ Schure, op. cit., p. 25.

In 1897 Steiner went to Berlin to conduct a literary magazine and give lectures. Five years later he decided to join The Theosophical Society in Berlin. He felt that its Eastern traditions could be blended with his western esotericism.¹² Not long after his entry into the Society he was appointed general secretary of its German Section. During this period Steiner did quite a lot of writing and in addition spent much time lecturing. He travelled to Leipzig, Cassel, Munich, Stuttgart, Vienna, Budapest, and other places, spreading his message of the search for higher knowledge. Schure gives his personal impression of the force of Steiner's presentations:

The characteristic of his eloquence is a singular force, always gentle in expression, resulting undoubtedly from perfect serenity of soul combined with wonderful clearness of mind. Added to this at times is an inner and mysterious vibration which makes itself felt by the listener from the very first words.¹³

It seems that Steiner never felt completely at home in the Theosophical Society. Perhaps the petty wangling that plagued the German group¹⁴ were partly to blame. Perhaps his emphasis on the western esotericism was a more basic

¹²Ibid., p. 29.

¹³Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 28.

cause of the difficulties. At any rate, he came into conflict with Annie Besant, the leader of the society, and a break was inevitable. Steiner describes the break in the following manner:

The necessity felt by the lecturer to maintain a Christ-conception resulted in a ban pronounced by the Theosophical Society under Annie Besant's rule against those members who, convinced by the lecturer's argumentation, rejected the Besantian creed of confusion Eventually, this affair led to the formation of the Anthroposophic Society, which took in all those expelled by the Theosophists.¹⁵

Thus the Anthroposophic Society came into existence.

The name Anthroposophy has been variously explained. Ernest Boldt calls it "the free access to spiritual experience; self-wrought training in Wisdom."¹⁶ It has also been defined as "Knowledge produced by the higher self in man."¹⁷ The name itself was by no means new. In 1640 Thomas Vaughan entitled one of his books Anthroposophia Thaumaturgica.¹⁸ But the name was brought into prominence by Steiner, and it was in the society bearing this name that his purposes have

¹⁵Rudolf Steiner, The Gospel of St. Mark, translated by Erna McArthur, (New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc., c.1950), pp. xxv, f.

¹⁶Ernst Boldt, From Luther to Steiner, translated by Agnes Blake (London: Methuen and Company, 1923), p. xviii.

¹⁷A Student of Rudolf Steiner, op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 17.

been carried out--by himself and now by those who are engaged in spreading his message.

Steiner's years as the head of the Anthroposophic Society were devoted to lecturing and writing. He delivered over 1000 lectures, many of which are available in print. The subjects about which he wrote his books include philosophy, art, architecture, drama, dramatic declamation, eurythmic dancing, education, agriculture, medicine. As is easily shown by the fields about which he wrote, Steiner's primary concern was that his method of finding spiritual knowledge might find application in all fields of human endeavor. Few areas of life were left untouched by this man of tremendous energy and activity. He wrote mystery plays. He invented the Art of Eurythmy--"an interpretation of sound and speech by movement."¹⁹ He originated a unique style of architecture, which he employed in the construction of the Goetheanum, a building dedicated to the memory of Goethe. This structure stands at Dornach in Switzerland, near Basle, and it is at present the center of activity of the Anthroposophic Society.

One of Steiner's contributions to the field of education was the founding of the Waldorf School at Stuttgart.²⁰ Nor did he neglect the field of medicine, "for he himself

¹⁹Ibid., p. 6.

²⁰Ibid., p. 7.

treated successfully many cases of illness, and formed a school of medicine that has its principal seat near Basle."²¹ His areas of activity could be greatly multiplied, but the application of his system to these areas will be treated in a little more detail in Chapter VI.

Rudolf Steiner died in 1925, leaving behind a society devoted to spreading his message. At the present time Anthroposophy's strongest appeal is found in Germany, the nation that gave it birth. The reason for this is not entirely geographical. Steiner and other Anthroposophists put a great stress on the outstanding characteristics of the "German spirit."²² But the deeply racial character of the movement seems to be receiving less emphasis and it could spread quite extensively in America and in other nations of the world.

²¹ Ibid., p. 8.

²² Typical of this sentiment is a remark by Ernest Boldt, "Every age known to history has been distinguished spiritually by the supremacy of one particular people, and the epoch now dawning will be sustained in its civilizing impulse by the German spirit," Boldt, op. cit., p. xiv.

CHAPTER III

THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIGHER WORLDS AND ITS ATTAINMENT

We shall in this and the following chapter present two of the emphases of Anthroposophy, the way of attaining supersensible knowledge and the spiritual evolution that is leading to the New Age.

We have said that Anthroposophy is "a path of knowledge, to guide the spiritual in the human being to the spiritual in the universe."¹ Dr. F. E. Mayer states that Anthroposophy's purpose is to "satisfy the intellectual's search for 'the deeper wisdom' by initiating him into the occult wisdom of the Gnostics and theosophists and by promising that he will find the key to release his inner dormant divine powers."² In other words, Anthroposophy is the method by which knowledge of higher powers is to be realized. Dr. Steiner and his followers have carefully outlined the method of attaining this knowledge. It is the purpose of this chapter to sketch that method, for this is clearly central to the importance of the whole structure of Anthroposophy.

Anyone who desires to search for divine truth and the

¹Supra: p. 2.

²F. E. Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1954), p. 545.

knowledge of higher worlds through Anthroposophy must be prepared for his search. He must approach it with an open mind, and yet a mind eager to learn the correct path to knowledge. He must, first of all, grant the existence of a spiritual world, and secondly he must grant, "that man is made of spirit, soul and body, the two former vehicles being occult or hidden."³ With these pre-suppositions the searcher is ready for the difficult path that lies ahead.

Steiner writes that:

There are, according to esoteric teachers, three steps by which the goal of spiritual illumination may be attained: 1. Probation. This develops the spiritual senses. 2. Enlightenment. This kindles the spiritual light. 3. Initiation. This establishes intercourse with the higher spiritual beings.⁴

It should be noted that the path to spiritual knowledge can be very precisely outlined. There is a certain mathematical or scientific precision to it. Steiner proposes to apply the scientific method, which he calls a demand of this age.⁵ He presents many exercises to exercises to those who would

³A Student of Rudolf Steiner, The New Impulse and the New Era (London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 26.

⁴Rudolf Steiner, The Way of Initiation, translated by Max Gysi (Third Americanized Edition; New York: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, 1923), p. 79.

⁵Rudolf Steiner, Supersensible Knowledge: Anthroposophy As a Demand of the Age, translated by Olin Wannamaker (New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc., c.1943), p. 8.

follow him. These are, in effect, precise methods of self-imposed thought control. They are an attempt to develop through meditation a certain state of mind. These precise "helpful hints" remind one a little of the practical suggestions for every occasion that are offered by someone like Norman Vincent Peale. The exercises which form the basis of the periods of contemplation, consist of symbols and sentences framed in harmony with cosmic or universal laws by those expert in the matter."⁶

In a work entitled, Supersensible Knowledge: Anthroposophy As a Demand of the Age, Steiner outlines the steps to supersensible knowledge. The seeker must introduce into his thinking the whole inner activity of his soul. That is, he must activate that part of himself through which he can have contact with the non-physical. Steiner urges first of all that you take into your mind day by day some particular thought. While withdrawing your inner nature from its contact with the external world (getting away from thinking about the physical), you are to concentrate all the powers of your soul on this thought. This develops the muscles of the soul in much the same way that physical exercise develops the arm and leg muscles.⁷ This exercise of concentrating on a specific thought will probably have to be repeated for a

⁶A Student of Rudolf Steiner, op. cit., p. 26.

⁷Steiner, Supersensible Knowledge: Anthroposophy As a Demand of the Age, p. 9.

long period of time. This process dare not be hurried or approached with short cuts in mind. After a period of concentration practices, a significant inner experience occurs, according to Steiner. We begin to live what we concentrate upon--our thinking is filled with inner power. The soul is stretching out a feeler into the spiritual world.⁸

The next step is to render the consciousness void of the thought content upon which we have been concentrating (the resulting empty consciousness being somewhat comparable to what we experience in sleep). Then something comes to fill this void. The whole inner life of a person appears before him in a tableau (as has been reported in the case of drowning men). There is a significant difference between this tableau and what a drowning man sees, however. Not only do we behold the events of our past, but we "see" the factors and forces that caused these events. This stage of cognition, which looks at the inner forces that have been molding our life, Steiner terms "imaginative knowledge or imagination."⁹

As we previously put the single thought from our minds, now we void our minds of the memory tableau. "In doing this, we blot out nothing less than the inner being of our own soul life."¹⁰ Steiner is quick to impress upon the seeker,

⁸Ibid., p. 11.

⁹Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 16.

after divine knowledge that blotting out the inner being of one's soul life is no child's play. In another work he describes the precarious nature of this process:

We ourselves had felt as if all solid matter and things of sense had dissolved into water, and as if the ground were cut away from under our feet. Everything which we had previously felt to be alive had been killed. The spirit had passed through the life of the senses like a sword piercing a warm body; we had seen the blood of sensuality flow.¹¹

But if this critical period is successfully passed through, there begins to enter the experience of a real spiritual world. This experience of the real spiritual world he terms inspiration. "And the first thing, in turn, that we behold in this spiritual world is our own pre-earthly existence."¹² Here we come into direct contact with Dr. Steiner's view of reincarnation. This will be discussed in another connection in Chapter V, but we must touch on one pertinent point here. Human life is involved in an on-going process of reincarnation. This is not the first time we have been on earth, nor will it be the last. And between these earthly existences there are a series of spiritual existences for each of us. He says, "Human life is a succession of lives on earth, between which there always intervene purely spiritual lives,

¹¹Rudolf Steiner, Christianity As Mystical Fact, translated by Henry Monges (New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc., c. 1947), pp. 17f.

¹²Steiner, Supersensible Knowledge: Anthroposophy As a Demand of the Age, p. 19.

coming between a death and the next birth."¹³ That which we behold in this stage of inspiration is this spiritual life, our pre-earthly existence.

To inspiration and imagination we must now add the final step, intuition. This involves an exercise of the will, for this step calls for the reversal of the natural order of things. Instead of picturing past events in the order in which they happened, this exercise calls for a willful concentration on things in reverse order. We think first of things closest to us and then work backwards, going back until we can see even beyond our spiritual pre-earthly existence. This makes it possible for us to look back upon our former earth lives.¹⁴ We can then see what we were like in our former incarnations. Now we recognize ourselves to be part of the universe, and we begin to realize our place within it.

This look at what we are really like, this look that goes beyond the mere appearances of our present life, is very important for Steiner. For he holds Socrates' injunction to "Know thyself" to be of great importance.¹⁵ The writer of The New Impulse and the New Era states, "that we

¹³Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 21-23.

¹⁵Cf. Rudolf Steiner, Four Mystery Plays, translated by H. Collison et al. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, c. 1920), I, iii.

should learn to know ourselves first, . . . this is the object of the occult and spiritual exercises."¹⁶ To be of value, this look into the past must not be an enterprise of idle curiosity. And this look at ourselves must be a sober and humbling look. There can be no selfishness involved in the use of this path to knowledge of higher worlds. "If the occult exercises do not produce the right feeling of humility in ourselves, and self-sacrifice and sympathy for others, then we have failed and must try again until we succeed."¹⁷

Through the series of exercises presented above, which may take several years to complete, man acquires spiritual knowledge. He learns what life is about and he comes into contact with its eternal element. The seeker has found He is a new man.

The application of this new-found spiritual knowledge to every phase of a person's life is an important element in Anthroposophy. In the fifth and sixth chapters of this thesis we shall examine this application. First, however, it is necessary to put into its proper developmental setting this method of attaining supersensible knowledge. For, according to Steiner, knowledge of spiritual worlds was not always attained in this manner, and in the future a new age will come which shall again change the picture. It is this

¹⁶A Student of Rudolf Steiner, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁷Ibid.

spiritual evolution toward the new age that we shall consider in the next chapter.

SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

Anthropology, according to its adherents, is slowly, but surely, shaking the earth of human existence. As more and more people come under the sway of its teaching, men will come more fully into the free and noble way of life that results from contact with the highest spiritual truths. This is the new impulse for the new age that lies ahead, when all men will be guided by the powers of the spirit instead of by the senses. The spiritual development or evolution of which we speak can be summed up in the following manner:

Man is now striving to develop a new state of consciousness. A former consciousness was instinctive, that of the animal. His consciousness now is based on logic and intellect. And in future he will acquire the quality of living in external objects, as he is now with them.

Central to this process is "the Christ," whose death and resurrection (second coming in the spirit) will be the new impulse for the new age.¹ The past ages could find this

¹ A student of Rudolf Steiner, The New Religion and the New Age (London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing Company, 1911), p. 11.

CHAPTER IV

SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION

Anthroposophy, according to its adherents is slowly, but surely, changing the path of human existence. As more and more people come under the sway of its teaching, man will come more fully into the free and noble way of life that results from contact with the highest spiritual truth. This is the New Impulse for the New Era that lies ahead, when all life will be guided by the powers of the spirit at work in the universe. The spiritual development or evolution of which we speak can be summed up in the following manner:

Man is now striving to develop a new state of consciousness. A former consciousness was instinctive like that of the animals. His consciousness now is bound up with the intellect. And in future he will acquire the faculty of living in external objects, so as to create with them.¹

Central to this process is "the Christ," whose fresh manifestation (second coming in the spirit) will be the New Impulse for the New Era.² But past ages could find this

¹A Student of Rudolf Steiner, The New Impulse and the New Era (London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 11.

²Ibid., p. 12.

Christ also. In former times it was the initiates of the Mystery schools to whom he was revealed. Anthroposophy draws very heavily upon the wisdom of the Mystery schools of the past, and these must be examined to see the present path to super-sensible knowledge in its proper context.

The seeker after higher wisdom in older civilizations looked for something that was carefully guarded by the priest-sages of the day. "If he is found by the sages to be sufficiently prepared, he is led up by them, step by step, to higher knowledge in a way that is hidden from the eyes of the profane," says Steiner. It was the very nature of this method of gaining truth that it should be reserved for the few--those who were prepared to receive it.⁴ Its methods were "mysteries" to those to whom the initiated did not care to reveal them. The prepared one was led by the process of initiation to release the spiritual powers which he possessed within himself. Steiner describes the teachings given to the candidate for initiation:

God is hidden from the senses and from that intellect of yours which explains sense perception. God lies hidden, spellbound in the world, and you need his own

³Rudolf Steiner, Christianity As Mystical Fact, translated by Henry Manges (New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc., c.1947), p. 11.

⁴"A special mode of life had to precede initiation, tending to give the spirit mastery over sensuality. Fasting, solitude, mortifications and certain exercises for the soul were the means employed. The things to which man clings in ordinary life were to lose all their value for him," Ibid., p. 13.

power to find him. That power you must awaken in yourself.⁵

That power which was in the mystic and which had to be developed, Steiner called a man's true spirit, his daimon. Through daimon he would attain union with the spiritual impulses of the universe. As is true in the case of Steiner's own anthroposophic approach to spiritual knowledge, there was a definite path to follow. Ancient mystics had to reach the spiritual heights "by passing through the different hallowed spots; by working upward, from one rung of knowledge to the next, to spiritual vision."⁶ Dr. Steiner elaborates on this definite method more fully:

Anyone initiated into the Mysteries of the various peoples underwent approximately the same experiences. He was made to suffer; to endure a "seeming"--as it might be called--death that lasted three days, during which his spirit dwelled outside was brought back to his body, so that the spirit within the body could remember what it had experienced in the spiritual world, and thus serve as a messenger proclaiming the mysteries of the spiritual world.⁷

Through these steps the teacher of the Ancient Mysteries showed the initiate how he could arrive at a spiritual vision, a contact with the divine. It might be noted in passing that, just as is the case with Anthroposophists, the initiates of the Mysteries were to use these spiritual forces in every

⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

⁶ Rudolf Steiner, The Gospel of St. Mark, translated by Erna McArthur (New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc., c.1950) p. 25.

⁷ Ibid., p. 121.

day life, for the ⁹food of men. For instance, "when such a physician in ancient times laid his hands on a sick person, not his forces streamed out, but forces from the supersensible world."⁸ Thus the Mysteries served their age as the path to spiritual knowledge and power.

But the Mysteries were just preparation for something else. This something else was the coming of Christ, the Logos made flesh. The incidents of the Mysteries were preparations for this most important event. The importance Steiner put upon this event in the evolutionary process can be stated thus: "One fact seems to stand out above all others throughout his teaching, namely, the central point in evolution occupied by the Divine Christ-Being who was incarnated as man."⁹

The coming of the Logos to earth and particularly "the death died in the Mystery of Golgotha"¹⁰ changed the course of man's relation to the things of the spirit. The ancient mystic had gone through a type of spiritual death and rising in initiation. This the Logos made flesh did as a valid fact for all of humanity, according to Steiner.¹¹ It seems somewhat difficult to determine how literally he views the

⁸Ibid., p. 54.

⁹A Student of Rudolf Steiner, op. cit., p. 16.

¹⁰Steiner, The Gospel of St. Mark, p. xiii.

¹¹Steiner, Christianity as Mystical Fact, p. 182.

death and resurrection of Christ.

At any rate, what was accessible to only a few before, through Christ became available to all. Before Christ, the Logos was sought in and by various spiritual individuals specially prepared. In Christ the Logos was personified and became accessible to all. Christianity was the universalizer of spiritual power.¹² The Logos made flesh became central in man's search for higher truth and for God. Steiner says that God cannot be reached by means of ordinary cognition. But He brought forth the Logos, "the basis of the universe, filled with wisdom, and even the small powers of man can reach Him."¹³ This Logos was accessible to the few in the past ages of the Mysteries. But when the Logos became flesh, the way to spiritual knowledge was broadened. It was the end of the old age. The appearance of Christ after his resurrection revealed to the world that the way of the mysteries was a way of the past. Steiner says:

Thus the Christ, even after the event of Gogotha, could walk on earth and become visible. And thereby initiation, heretofore taking place in the depths of the Mysteries and hidden before the outer eye, had been set forth as a historic event; had been set forth, for all of mankind, as a unique event. Hence, in a certain sense, initiation had been lifted out of

¹²Ibid., p. 165.

¹³Ibid., p. 170.

the mysteries; had been performed, by the one Christ, before the eyes of all. And this deed marks the conclusion of the old world--marks the beginning of the new world.¹⁴

Christianity was, for Steiner, a Mystery to end all Mysteries. He felt that the Mystery cults of the past had done their job. They had given knowledge to the chosen few. Now under Christianity the Way was to be available to all. Insight into the higher world could be attained by those unfamiliar with the way of initiation. In other words, those who "had not seen" the secrets of the higher worlds through initiation "could yet believe."¹⁵ The place of Christ and Christianity in the process of spiritual evolution is well summarized in the following quotation from Steiner's "Christianity as Mystical Fact":

This is the purpose of Christianity: a new kind of initiation The one primary Mystery, the Christian Mystery, was to replace the many Mysteries of antiquity. Jesus, in whom the Logos has been made flesh, was to become the initiator of the whole of humanity, and humanity was to be His own community of initiation Not this person or that is to be introduced into the Mystery-temples, but the word is to be spoken to all: and to one it will then appeal more strongly than to another. It will be left to the daimon, the angel within each human breast, to decide how far the initiation can go.¹⁶

¹⁴Steiner, The Gospel of St. Mark, p. 122.

¹⁵Steiner, Christianity As Mystical Fact, p. 142.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 156 f.

So far this chapter has dealt with things as they were in the past--in the selective era of the Mysteries, and with how they are now--in age of the Logos made flesh. Brief mention can be given to the future, to the new and glorious age that Steiner sees ahead. What is needed for the new age is a new impulse, characterized by unselfishness and humility. Through love people are to "seek the Christ in everyone and in everything around and in themselves."¹⁷ This is the new impulse for the new era. The centrality of Christ is evident in the new era as well as the present one. For in the new era, says Dr. Steiner, "we may expect the second Coming of Christ, seeing Him with occult vision as and where He is--in the clouds (i.e. in spiritual spheres)."¹⁸ The Anthroposophist's task while waiting for the new era is to develop his attitudes and affections by the occult exercises. Through them he reaches into the spiritual spheres "where He is."¹⁹

The essence of this new era will be love or sympathy for all things. For after learning to know oneself by spiritual power we learn our place in the universe and our relation to all other creatures. Rather than reasoning

¹⁷A Student of Rudolf Steiner, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

about an object externally, as we do now, we will have an inner sympathy for it. We shall be able to know how the sparrow and the eagle feel. Man will, in understanding the world around him, be able to live for the good of all.

It is a matter of relationship between Anthroposophy and religion, and more specifically, between Anthroposophy and Christianity. Chapter III deals with the core of Anthroposophy in the search of truth for the spiritual in the universe. The search of truth is by its very nature a "religious" search, and it is to be so. For it is dealing with the highest and most spiritual truth. Chapter IV shows the central role of the human mind, and of the "I" in the "I" system, in the anthroposophic system.

According to Anthroposophy themselves, Anthroposophy is not a religion, but a path towards the growth of a new religious conviction, a conviction consistent with the best in all the many religious confessions in the world. Although Anthroposophy is not in its nature a religion, itself neither a religion nor a new religion, it is in its nature a religious path, and it is during this path that a new religious conviction is born.

Chapter III.

A fragment of Rudolf Steiner, The New Religion and the New Man (London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing Company, 1911), p. 11.

CHAPTER V

ANTHROPOSOLOGY'S RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

It is clear from the two previous chapters that there is a marked relationship between Anthroposophy and religion, and more specifically, between Anthroposophy and Christianity. Chapter III points out that the core of Anthroposophy is the occult search for the spiritual in the universe.¹ Any search of this type is by its very nature a "religious" search, whether it claims to be or not. For it is dealing with concepts of God and spiritual truth. Chapter IV shows the centrality the Logos made flesh, and of the "Mystery of Golgotha" to the Anthroposophic system.

According to Anthroposophists themselves, Anthroposophy "is not a religion, but a help towards the growth of a true religious sentiment, a sentiment consistent with the best in all the many religious confessions in the world."² Although Anthroposophy claims to be in no sense a religion, Rudolf Steiner was anxious to make its truths applicable to the religious realm. At one time during his later life a

¹Supra: p.11.

²A Student of Rudolf Steiner, The New Impulse and the New Era (London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 17.

group of clergymen and students of theology came to Steiner and asked what application of his ideas he could make for them. The result is a church called the Christian Community. It is not directly connected with the Anthroposophic Society, but its members are Anthroposophists and those with similar leanings. The church is international in scope, though relative small in numbers.³ The following information is taken from a card distributed by the Christian Community in New York:

The Christian Community is a Church born in our time among people who long for a living faith and understanding of Christianity. It celebrates the Seven Christian Sacraments in their RENEWED form, that the souls and destinies of men shall find healing.⁴

Steiner's relation to and divergence from Christianity can be seen in his views of the person of Christ and in the method of Biblical interpretation he employs.

According to the writer of The New Impulse and the New Era, "Dr. Steiner always maintains the doctrine of the

³The information on the Christian Community was obtained in an interview with Miss Eleanor Minne, employed at the New York headquarters of the Anthroposophic Society in America, 211 Madison Avenue, New York 16.

⁴The Christian Community in New York is located at 209 West 74th Street. In addition to a Ritual Service and a Children's Ritual Service held on Sundays, they present weekly lectures on "renewed Christianity."

absolute divinity of the Christ who once, and once only, became man, and that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth."⁵ That Dr. Steiner does maintain this seems clear. What he means by it is more difficult to ascertain. His views of Jesus Christ do not seem to be confined to what the historic position of Christian Church on the person of its Lord.

For instance, Steiner's view of reincarnation plays a part in his teaching about the person of Christ. In his book on The Gospel of Mark, Steiner makes some observations as to the origin of the person of Christ. He says:

The entire grandiose figure of Christ Jesus has grown out of the union of two souls: the souls of two Jesus boys. The soul of one was none other than that of Zarathustra, the founder of Zarathustraism. . . . By the Jesus boy described in the Gospel of St. Mark is primarily meant the reincarnated Zarathustra.⁶

The significance of this transition of Zarathustra's soul into Jesus is some sort of fusing of the Persian culture with that of the Hebrews. Also, because Jesus was a reincarnated being of lofty spirituality, he "became able to receive the Christ into his own soul, the Logos who was made flesh in that soul."⁷

⁵ A Student of Rudolf Steiner, op. cit., pp. 41 f.

⁶ Rudolf Steiner, The Gospel of St. Mark, translated by Erna McArthur (New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc., c.1950), p. 23.

⁷ Rudolf Steiner, Christianity As Mystical Fact, translated by Henry Monges (New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc., c.1947), p. 163.

It seems that, for Steiner, Jesus Christ is not God and man. Jesus Christ is not "the Word made flesh" for him. Rather, the man Jesus is the vessel or bearer of the Logos or Christ, which is a separate entity, a "cosmic entity, dwelling in the body of Jesus of Nazareth."⁸ It was at the time of his baptism by John that "the event of the Ego of Jesus becoming the Christ,"⁹ took place. It appears also that Steiner believes that this "cosmic impulse" left Jesus at his capture in Gethsemane and reappears after the resurrection.¹⁰ The view that Steiner has of Jesus Christ would thus appear to be much more closely related to the view of the Gnostics than to the traditional view of the Church.

How does Steiner treat the Scriptures? What is his method of interpretation? According to his pupil, "He explains the Bible, and does not ruin it, nor treat it in an irreverent manner."¹¹ But from his own words we can see now see how he actually regards the Scriptures? The Gospels

⁸Steiner, The Gospel of St. Mark, p. 188.

⁹Steiner, Christianity As Mystical Fact, p. 163.

¹⁰Cf. Steiner, The Gospel of St. Mark, pp. 167 f., where he says that the young man who fled naked at Christ's capture is "the cosmic impulse," which reappears as the young man clothed in white sitting at the empty tomb (St. Mark 16, 5).

¹¹A Student of Rudolf Steiner, op. cit., p. 41.

(the part of Scripture about which he seems most concerned) do not, according to Dr. Steiner, give strictly historical accounts of events as they happened. He says:

The four gospels do not profess to give a historical biography. What they intended to give had always existed as a prototype in the traditions of the Mysteries, as the typical life of a Son of God. . . . And in the narratives of the first three Evangelists resemble each other, it proves nothing more than that they drew from similar Mystery traditions.¹²

As an example of Steiner's approach to the historicity of the Gospel narratives may be seen in his view of Jesus' cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11). Steiner related this to the parable of the vine dresser (Luke 13) who had a fig tree cut down. What one Gospel writer related as history another relates as a metaphor, and this shows that Mark could not have had a strictly historical event in mind. Steiner says:

That which is meant metaphorically, St. Mark relates as a fact appearing to be historical. We may therefore assume that no facts related in the Gospels are to be taken as historical, as if they were only to hold good in the physical world, but as mystical facts, as experiences for the recognition of which spiritual vision is necessary, and, which arise from various Mystery traditions.¹³

Perhaps one more example will suffice to show how Steiner interprets the events narrated in the Scriptures. This event is the raising of Lazarus, recorded in the eleventh chapter of St. John's Gospel. In his book Christianity as Mystical

¹² Steiner, Christianity As Mystical Fact, pp. 120 f.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 122 f.

Mystical Fact Steiner devotes an entire chapter to the Lazarus event, feeling it to be of great importance. He says that Jesus saw in Lazarus a man of great promise spiritually. When the Lord was looking for someone to be the first initiate into His new, universal Mystery, he decided that his friend Lazarus was the logical choice. Of the event recorded in St. John 11 Steiner says the following:

The Eternal Word entered into Lazarus. In the language of the Mysteries, he became an initiate, and the event narrated to us must be the process of initiation.¹⁴

Thus Lazarus did not literally die and rise again. He underwent the "death and rising" experienced by the ancient Mystics in the process of their initiation.

One other consideration seems pertinent to a discussion of Anthroposophy and religion. That is Rudolf Steiner's view of reincarnation, of which mention has already been made in connection with the path to supersensible knowledge. The doctrine of reincarnation pervades his whole system. It can be seen in his view of persons and events in Scripture. For instance, the Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament were "reincarnations of initiates who had already been initiated among other peoples."¹⁵ Elijah "is

¹⁴Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁵Steiner, The Gospel of St. Mark, p. 26.

reincarnated in John the Baptist."¹⁶ (He suggests elsewhere that the soul of "Elijah-John" reappears in the painter Raphael.)¹⁷ The souls of the twelve apostles were reincarnations of souls that had appeared in the seven Maccabean sons and Mattathias' five sons, the brothers of Judas.¹⁸

As we noted earlier,¹⁹ Steiner regards existence as a series of incarnations or lives on earth. Between these there always intervene purely spiritual lives which come between a death and the next birth. The author of The New Impulse writes:

His earlier view seems to be the same as that of Madame Blavatsky, that the souls reincarnated at regular intervals of some thousand years or so--an interval depending on solar or stellar calculations, and alternately male and female.²⁰

But he goes on to observe that Steiner modified this view and made it more elastic and free, allowing for the breaking of these hard and fast rules.²¹

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁹ Supra: p. 31, note 13.

²⁰ A Student of Rudolf Steiner, op. cit., p. 50.

²¹ Ibid.

It is possible for the person schooled in occultism to know his real identity and to discover his pre-existences. But rather than be like certain theosophists who expose themselves to ridicule by publishing their distinguished pre-existences, "Dr. Steiner uses every means for hiding his personality, and no knows who he really is."²² It is by the proper application of the occult experiences that a person becomes aware of his pre-earthly existences and past incarnations. And by becoming aware of who he "really is," he finds spiritual truth and his place in the spiritual realms.

²²Ibid., p. 51.

CHAPTER VI

ANTHROPOSOLOGY APPLIED

To an Anthroposophist the title of this chapter might seem redundant, for he would say that there could be no such thing as Anthroposophy unapplied. Taking their cue from Steiner's emphasis, Anthroposophists are concerned that their occult contact with the spiritual forces of the universe should affect every phase of their lives. Steiner says that short periods of daily meditation on the "Higher Life" lead to a calm that will affect every phase of work and life.¹ The inner calm removes fears and anxieties and permits us to work at our appointed task with renewed energies. These exercises do this for us, says the Anthroposophists, because they "lead to adequate knowledge of what is real and what it is that matters in the world."² To seek knowledge of higher worlds for its own sake is wrong and selfish. It must be used to advance the good of humanity.

¹Rudolf Steiner, The Way of Initiation, translated by Max Gysi (Third Americanized Edition; New York: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, 1923), p. 70.

²A Student of Rudolf Steiner, The New Impulse and the New Era (London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 24.

All occult teachers must show that, "all knowledge which you seek for working in the service of humanity and for the uplifting of the world brings you a step forward."³

As we have already stated Steiner was active in almost every major field of human endeavor. His writings are extremely wide in scope. Already available in English (through the Anthroposophic Press in New York) are several of his works on medicine, sociology, education, philosophy, the arts, and other subjects. Boldt observes that Steiner "seeks to apply the direct results of his own spiritual experience to both the economic as well as to the political conditions of our social life."⁴ Steiner's book The Three-fold Commonwealth is an attempt to show how spiritual ideas can be brought to bear in society, specifically on the socio-economic problems of the day.

Of course, every member of the Anthroposophic Society is not expected to apply the knowledge of higher worlds to all or even most fields of human endeavor. Various groups of individuals concentrate on those phases of Steiner's ideas which concern them. Farmers will concentrate on his farming methods, in which among other things, he advocates

³ Steiner, The Way of Initiation, p. 63.

⁴ Ernst Boldt, From Luther to Steiner, translated by Agnes Blake (London: Methuen and Company, 1923), pp. vi f.

the abolition of chemical fertilizers.⁵ A group of Steiner's followers have organized themselves into the Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association, Inc., which is located in Chester, New York.

Rudolf Steiner's words on education include The Education of the Child, Essentials of Education, Spiritual Ground of Education, and many more. One place in America that makes an application of his educational principles is the Rudolf Steiner School for Boys and Girls, which is located in New York City.

Steiner also worked in the field of medicine. This is not at all unusual, seeing the close relation he made between the spiritual and the physical. Besides founding a school of medicine, he worked on cures and treatments for several diseases, notably influenza and cancer. Nor was his work confined to human beings. It is claimed that "his cure for distemper in certain animals has been successful in almost every case."⁶

The arts absorbed much of the interest and energy of Rudolf Steiner. In the imposing and unique Goetheanum, created by his architectural skill, is a striking example

⁵This information was obtained in an interview with Miss Eleanor Minne, employed at the New York headquarters of the Anthroposophic Society in America, 211 Madison Avenue, New York 16.

⁶A Student of Rudolf Steiner, op. cit., p. 8.

as a sculptor. It is "the colossal group carved by him in wood of the Christ overcoming the Powers of Darkness."⁷ His cultural and esthetic emphases have in large measure been continued by his followers. The Goetheanum is the ^{sire} sight of an endless number of plays, concerts, and lectures. Each summer an elaborate production of "Faust" is staged there. Impressive effects are created by an extensive use of tones and colors in these productions. The color of the costumes, the color of the lights are varied with the type of emotion the actor or actress is expressing.

The Anthroposophist is clearly a man with a mission. He is to put the spiritual power of the universe to work in his own life and in his daily endeavors. What is more, he is to multiply the effect of what he has seen and learned by imparting it to others. He wants others to know the inner peace and freedom which he knows. This then is the task of Anthroposophists:

They venture to impart their inner experiences, trusting that there are others around them whose spiritual eyes, to be sure, are still closed, but whose intelligent comprehension may be aroused through the force of what they hear. For they have faith in humanity and want to give it spiritual light.⁸

⁷ Ibid., pp. 5 ff.

⁸ Rudolf Steiner, Christianity As Mystical Fact, translated by Henry Monges (New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc., c.1947), pp. 14 f.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

If Anthroposophy were simply "a path of knowledge," then it could be evaluated in basically philosophical terms. Its intuitive method of seeking knowledge could be compared with the ways of reason and experience. Its claim to be the way to knowledge could be compared with the claims of other epistemological schools and an appraisal could be made.

But the brief evaluation presented here will be on an entirely different basis, the basis of the relation of Anthroposophy to religion, specifically to Christianity. The relation of the movement to Christianity is evident. Although the movement shuns the title of a "religion," Anthroposophists assert:

Rudolf Steiner's works are so largely ethical and Christian emphasis mind that, if one assimilates them, he will develop a deeper reverence for the world around him, a greater humility in face of the Divine, and a greater understanding and sympathy for his fellow men.¹

If Anthroposophy claims to be Christian and if it wants to make Jesus Christ an important (if not central) part of its system, then it should be subject to evaluation on Christian terms.

¹This information was taken from promotional material printed by the Anthroposophic Press, Inc., New York 16, N. Y.

It is the writer's conviction that Anthroposophy will have an increasing impact on sections of Christendom. It has many features that make it appear quite appealing. It tries to maintain a high intellectual, esthetic, and moral level. It takes a very attractive view of man and his potentialities. It is not inconceivable that Anthroposophy will appeal to many within the Christian Church. Therefore further study should be made as to its views on areas germane to Christianity. A comparison of Anthroposophy and Christianity on various areas of religious truth is clearly beyond the scope of this paper. But even this preliminary study has revealed a few areas in which there seems to be a basic divergence between the Christian and Anthroposophist points of view. A few of these can be mentioned in the hope that further study will be done on them.

Since Anthroposophy claims to be a path of knowledge, the questions of the source of knowledge would appear to be basic in its relation to Christianity. Christianity is a revealed religion. Its message rests upon the revelation of God. Man knows God because He has appeared in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ (cf. John 1, 18). The Christian Church has historically maintained that whatever spiritual truth man possesses is a result of God's revelation in One who is The Truth. Compare this view with that of Rudolf Steiner. He closes his book, The Way of Initiation, with these words:

Truth and the higher life do, indeed, abide in every human soul, and it is true that everyone can and must sooner or later find them for himself.²

The source of higher knowledge is with everyone, according to the Anthroposophists. This view seems to make revelations of no importance at all to them. Boldt sums up the Anthroposophist's position toward revelation through Scripture when he says that the efforts of the Mystics and Classic writers to do away with the letter of the Scriptures "have in our own time been achieved by the Anthroposophical Spiritual Science put forward by Rudolf Steiner."³

Without a dependence on revelation, it would appear that Anthroposophy has made significant divergences from historic Christianity. Anthroposophy's view on the person of Christ needs to be examined in the light of Christian emphases. Steiner's view of Christ as a reincarnated Zarathustra is foreign to Christianity. So also his treatment of the Christ as a "cosmic entity" dwelling in, and later departing from, the man Jesus. His treatment of the "Logos made flesh" would be important material for a further research paper. Similarly, Anthroposophy's view of man tends to speak little of sin. A strong emphasis of man's

² Rudolf Steiner, The Way of Initiation, translated by Max Gysi (Third Americanized Edition; New York: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, 1923), p. 163.

³ Ernst Boldt, From Luther to Steiner, translated by Agnes Blake (London: Methuen and Company, 1923), pp. 44 f.

A strong emphasis on man's inner powers seems necessary to their system. The Anthroposophist needs to be convinced that within himself are spiritual powers that wait only to be developed by the proper exercises. Finally, Anthroposophy's view of eternity seems different from Christianity's, largely because of its stress on reincarnation, a concept the main stream of Christianity has rejected. The appeal of the idea of reincarnation is clear. Since many people are not satisfied with their present lot, they will be eager to hear of reincarnation, of another chance.

It is the writer's tentative conclusion that Anthroposophy's man-centered, revelation-shunning "path of Knowledge" must be seen as a danger to the Christian Church. Further research is necessary before this conclusion can be verified or rejected. In fairness to Anthroposophy and Christianity, this research ought to be made.

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