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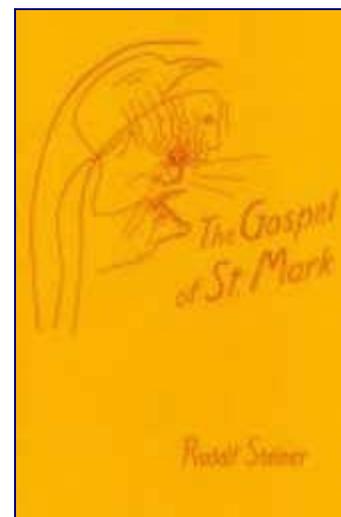
## *A READER'S JOURNAL*

### **The Gospel of St. Mark, GA# 139 by Rudolf Steiner**

Ten Lectures given in Basel in 1912

Published by Anthroposophic Press in 1986

A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©1998



This book marks the completion of my study of Rudolf Steiner's lectures on the four Gospels. On page 198, Steiner says the Gospels are "documents that flow into our souls." If that wasn't exactly true for me before I read Steiner's lectures on the Gospels, it certainly has become so since.

This was an enormously difficult book for me to read - I began reading it 9 months ago shortly after finishing the [Gospel of St. John](#) and stopped after two lectures at page 39. I moved to the [Gospel of St. Luke](#) instead, and then read the [Gospel of St. Matthew](#), followed by [Background to the Gospel of St. Mark](#). Then I was ready to re-visit the [Gospel of St. Mark](#), which I completed in six weeks. As in so many lectures on the Gospels, Steiner spends a lot of time talking about things that seem to have no relationship to the Gospels, except perhaps as background to the tenor of the times of the Mystery of Golgotha.

For example, he says:

**[pages 2 - 3] Then one sees how Greece began to decline, how it was stifled by Rome, though only externally. Generally speaking, Rome overcame Greece only politically, while in reality it adopted Greek culture, Greek education and Greek life. It might be said that politically the Romans conquered the Greeks, but spiritually the Greeks conquered the Romans.**

This concept of considering separately the political and spiritual aspects of some outcome is amazing. If we apply it to the political confrontation of the later Romans and the early Christians, again we see that the political winner was the Romans who at will killed Christians in their gladiator circuses and yet the Christians were eventually to overcome the Romans spiritually. To apply to the current political situation in the United States, the Democrats beat the Republicans politically in the last two presidential elections, but, by the country's implementing the Republican policies of cutting spending to create a balanced budget, it may be argued that spiritually the Republicans conquered the Democrats. The results of a spiritual conquering can be as dramatic as any political conquering, and that should give pause to any materialistic skeptic that would argue against the reality of spiritual events.



What is a Gospel exactly? Steiner says on page 17, "It is an impulse that descends through the realms of the archangels and angels; it comes down from these realms and enters into mankind." He points out that "ev-angel" is what we call these kingdoms of angels, and from that root comes our word for the writers of the Gospels, "Evangelists".

On page 36, Steiner says that "human evolution is itself the greatest work of art that has ever existed" and goes on to show how the various historical figures contribute to this work, Zarathustra, Buddha, and Christ, for example. He urges that we accept the place of Christ in cosmology just as we accept the place of the sun in our Solar System:

**[page 37] When we speak of Christology in a true cosmological sense, it is not necessary to show a preference for the Christian above any other religion. That would be the same as if some religion in its sacred writings stated that the sun was the same as the other planets, and then someone came along and said, "No, we must place the sun higher than the other planets," and some people opposed this by saying, "But this is favoritism toward the sun!" This is not favoritism, it is only recognizing the truth.**

Human evolution in the sense of Charles Darwin is not what Steiner referred to as the "greatest work of art" - Darwinian evolution is a meager palimpsest of human evolution, rightly understood. In the study of the bible we are presented with ample opportunities to find evidence of the differential evolution of the four human bodies, namely, the physical, etheric, astral, and ego bodies. Steiner points out that in Christ's time, the etheric body was much stronger than it is today and was thus able to work on the physical body to perform healing cures that would be considered

miracles today. That some exceptional humans can yet heal others by the laying on of hands today is a remnant of a widespread human capability in Christ's time.

**[page 55] No one at that time would have thought of it as a miracle if someone stretched out his hand and said to a leper, "I will it, become clean." . . . In those days physicians usually healed in that way, so it was not something that should be particularly emphasized that Christ Jesus cured lepers through compassion and the laying on of hands. Such a thing was then a matter of course. What is worthy of note in this chapter is something quite different, and this we must picture to ourselves correctly.**

Steiner brings up the image of the woman who takes hold of his garment. Christ says to her, "Daughter, your faith has aided you. Go in peace and be healed from your plague." What is important in this story is that the woman approached Christ, and initiated the contact.

**[page 57] The main point of this description was not that one could influence the body through the soul - in that epoch that would have been a matter of course - but that insofar as the new age was just beginning, one ego must henceforth be in direct relationship with another ego.**

**[page 59] Christ combines the moral and magical elements in His healing, and in this way made the transition from the ego-less to the ego-filled condition, and this can be found in every single description.**

Here is the way to read the miracles in Mark's Gospel - notice how those who are cured use their ego power to initiate their contact with Christ. When Christ says to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." (Mark 2:1-5), it is as though he were saying, "This person I may cure, for I perceived from his personality that his karma is such that he may stand up and walk." [page 59] In Mark 7:24-30 a Syrophenician woman approaches him for help with her sick daughter, he first ignores her, then rebuffs her status as a foreigner by saying, "it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." Again she persists by replying, building on his rebuff, "Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." [See also Matthew 15:21-28 for his version of this story.] Again we see that His intent is to teach that one must use one's ego to obtain one's healing from the time of the Mystery of Golgotha on.

The way to read the Bible, this "cosmic book", is to first understand the evolution of humanity and the concomitant evolution of consciousness, and to do that, a solid grounding in spiritual science is required.

**[page 60] True knowledge of the Bible will, because of its own inner strength, stand firmly on the ground of spiritual science, attaching equal value to all the religious creeds of the world.**

Thus the essence of spiritual science is to find respect for all religions, because the insights of one religion shed light on the tenets of the others and "all the individual leaders of mankind proclaim in their teachings different aspects of the same truth." [page 70]

There is another deep truth hidden in Steiner's revelation to us that Christ spoke in parables to the crowds, but explained the meanings of the parables to his disciples in private conversations. [page 73] If someone today were to observe a class room in which a teacher is lecturing, he might say, "Some kids are getting the message and others are not." This is a form of human reason that is so common today that anyone might formula such concepts and express them instantly. This way of thinking is so common that the way of thinking that we must imaginatively put ourselves into in order to inform ourselves of the way of thinking of the masses in Christ's time seems very strange indeed. We must imagine that someone of Christ's time saw a teacher holding forth in a class, but he did not think about what happened until perhaps later, when at home, he might, in an intermediate state between what we today call "waking" and "sleeping", see a sower spreading seeds and notice how the seeds that fall on good, fertile ground grow and flourish, while those thrown by the wayside quickly die before they bear fruit. The next day if you were to ask him what he had learned about the teaching he had witnessed the previous day, he might tell you the story of his near clairvoyant vision of the sower. This is the essence of how thinking was accomplished during the period of time of Christ Jesus.

**[page 76] To the crowd He spoke on the assumption that they would understand what they had preserved as a heritage from ancient clairvoyance. To His disciples He spoke on the assumption that they were the first who would be able to understand a little of what we today can say to human beings about higher worlds. . . that rational understanding of things that belonged to the higher worlds and of the secrets of human evolution that in later times would become the common property of mankind.**

Today, when the "secrets of human evolution" have become the "common property of mankind", it is difficult indeed for us to understand that humankind's very process of thinking and understanding the world was once so very different. As I mentioned in my review of *The Innocence of Father Brown* by G. K. Chesterton, Father Brown's way of obtaining information was by a process of information that is remarkably similar to the process required for us to understand the consciousness of humanity in biblical times. Here's one crime that the meek Father Brown solved using his process [from ARJ *The Innocence of*

*Father Brown*]:

**In the *Twelve Fishermen* in this volume, Father Brown apprehends the perpetrator of a heinous crime that had been committed right in the sight of unsuspecting observers, while Father Brown, recording some notes in an isolated darkened room out of sight of the crime, had deduced both the existence of the crime and the criminal as he listened to the footsteps in an adjacent hallway.**

How did he become aware that a crime had taken place? He heard the quick steps of waiters delivering food and recognized the pattern by imagining himself as a waiter, placing himself imaginatively into the person making the step. Then he heard slow-paced steps of the honored guests that were being served. Another pattern. He continued his writing until a strange thing happened: the steps of a waiter coming from the kitchen suddenly turned into the steps of a honored guest. When this repeated itself several times, he put himself in his imagination into the steps and realized suddenly that the only reason one would perform such a quick change of pace was that one wanted to appear to be a waiter to the other waiters and a honored guest to the other guests. Since both guests and waiters wore formal attire, the switch was possible. The waiter/guest removed the precious silver knives from the dining table as a waiter and was ready to leave the building with them as a guest when Father Brown confronted him with the crime. Our word "information" is a very flattened form for expressing this interesting process - to get information, we must in-form ourselves into the person or situation from which we wish to obtain information. Little by little we subtract process from content, and we may well starve on what we are left with, up until now. This process of subtracting processes from content was first brought to my attention by a popular poet of the 1930's, Samuel Hoffenstein, in this little verse that I first read in 1958:

**Little by little we subtract  
Faith and Fallacy from Fact,  
The Illusory from the True  
And starve upon the Residue.**

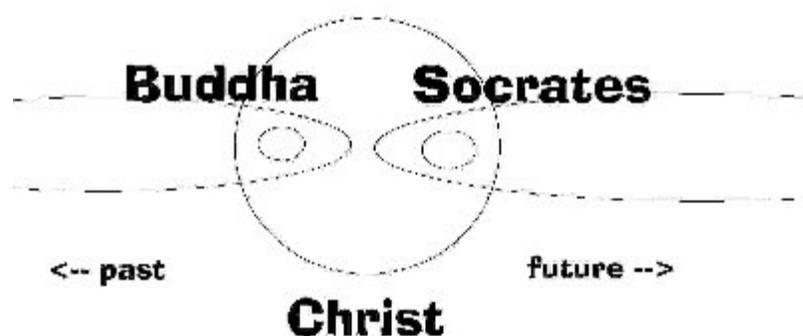


Diagram 1 above shows pictorially the insight that Rudolf Steiner shares about the relationship of Buddha, Socrates, and Christ.

**[page 82] Thus there is one stream of human development that goes as far as the Buddha and ends with him; and there is another stream that begins with Socrates and goes on into the distant future. Socrates and the Buddha stand next to one another like the nuclei of two comets, if I may be allowed such an image. In the case of the Buddha,**

**the light-filled comet's tail encircles the nucleus and points far back into the indeterminate perspectives of the past; in the case of Socrates the comet's tail of light encircles the nucleus in the same way but points far, afar into the indeterminate distances of the future. Two diverging comets going in succession in opposite directions whose nuclei shine at the same time . . . Half a millennium passes, and something like a uniting of these two streams comes into being through Christ Jesus.**

How did humans in the time of Krishna perceive themselves, long before Buddha's time? Steiner says that it is similar to the way a human today, "when his etheric body is freed through spiritual scientific training, feels himself spread and poured out into what lives in everything." These earlier humans experienced the process of informing of Father Brown as a natural birthright, as humans today experience their ability to think and reason. Even the way they experienced their breath is different from how we experience breathing. We experience ourselves breathing in oxygen and breathing out carbon dioxide, they experienced themselves taking in Brahman with their every breath and they knew that to the extent they took in Brahman, they lived. What does Steiner say about the attitude that we are only inhaling oxygen when we breathe? "But that is a delusion; with every breath we inhale and exhale spirit." One may reject this view at one's own peril, for the time will come when one's body is gone and spirit will be all that remains. To hold otherwise is to remain locked into a physical-only body and to experience a cessation of existence when one's body ceases to exist. It may seem contradictory for me to state that one experiences a cessation of existence, but the resulting darkness or dimming of consciousness resulting from such beliefs can be thought of as the hell into which Christ descended immediately following his death on the cross at Golgotha to retrieve the lost souls who had held exactly such a belief.

How does it make sense to you that we are made in the image and likeness of God? Steiner tells us a story from Krishna that sheds some light on that question. Krishna said, "The Devas gather around the throne of the Almighty, and in deep devotion ask who He Himself is. Then He answers, 'If there were anyone else other than I myself, I should describe myself through him.'" [page 94] We are led to understand from this story that one can always describe oneself in terms of someone greater than oneself, unless there is no one greater, then the description must cease because there is no higher cause. When we reach God, the questioning of a higher cause must cease and "the cause must be *perceived*."

In the following passage, Steiner gives us some clues about the function of wounds in a person's body, especially about how the five wounds on Christ Jesus's body on the Cross provide a model for how our bodies would look if the totality of egohood were to enter it:

**[ page 132 ] It is a profound mystery that is given to us by occult science in the picture of the Mystery of Golgotha. Anyone who understands the true nature of the human being and of humanity, and the nature of the human being and of humanity, and the nature of the earthly ego and its relation to the form of the human body, knows that when the human body is entirely penetrated by the earthly ego such a penetration would be abnormal for the ordinary man as he walks about on earth. But when a man goes out of himself and sees himself from outside and is able to ask the question, "How would this body be if the totality of egohood were to enter into it?" then his answer must be that it would be pierced by five wounds. The form of the cross on Golgotha with Christ upon it with His wound is derived from the nature of man and from the very being of the earth itself.**

This seems to provide an explanation of many wounds that occur in myths. Achilles's wound in his heel, e.g., what was the impact on his life that his mother had made him impervious to wounds [to incursions by the ego] by dipping him in the River Styx? This passage in Steiner seems very important, but it would require some serious study and meditation to scry a meaning from Achilles's wound in relation to his egohood, much less all the other famous wounds in history and mythology. This one passage in Steiner could trigger a lifetime of study.

Twice in this Gospel a young man clothed in linen is mentioned. Once in the scene when the guards come to take Christ Jesus away after the betrayal by Judas and another time when in the tomb after the resurrection. Steiner makes the point that these two young men are in fact one being, the youthful cosmic impulse, the cosmic Christ, who in the arrest scene, had become loosely connected to the Son of Man, but was closely following him, and fled naked when his garments were grabbed by the guards. This is a remarkable insight by Steiner and adds a new depth to our understanding of the events surrounding the Mystery of Golgotha.

**[page 188] Through all that we have present to you ... one thing has been shown in particular: that the Mark Gospel allows us to feel most clearly the whole cosmic greatness and significance of Christ.**

In closing there is a fascinating story that Steiner relates, giving full credit to the originator as he does. It is a story I first heard some 22 years ago while in a training session with Richard Bandler about an experiment done with a frog. The has to do with the ease with which materialistic science can make accurate deductions about an experiment and be dead wrong! In fact, "dead wrong" is the best way to describe materialistic science that in all its various specialities makes deductions that are both accurate and wrong for the simple reason that the living spirit is left out of the reasoning process, up until now. Here's the reference and the famous experiment in Steiner's words:

**[page 191-192] A certain Professor Schlaucherl ("clever fellow") a character in the comic paper *Fliegender Blätter* wished to prove just how a frog hears. To this end the Professor causes the frog to jump on a table, then he hits the top of the table. The frog jumps away, thus proving he heard the tap. Then he proceeds to tear off the frog's legs, and again hits the table. But this time the frog does not jump away, proving clearly that the frog hears with his legs.**

Steiner goes on to explain that attaching a portion of the brain to a speaking center is just as foolish, because it amounts to claiming that a person cannot speak only because that portion of the brain has been removed. No matter how many frogs the Professor's experiment is performed on the outcome will be the same: the frog will not jump. Not matter how many brains the "speech area" is removed from, the person will not speak. To claim that the frog does not jump because it cannot hear the tap on the table is as accurate as to claim that the person does not speak because his speech capability was removed, and both are wrong.

A similar claim is made that the heart is a pump by scientists who offer as proof the fact that removing the heart stops the blood from pulsing. The idea that the heart is a pump did not arrive on the scene before the mechanical pump for pumping water had been invented. The heart as pump is a crude mechanical metaphor that has been taken literally by materialistically grounded physicians for so long that it has become acceptable as a fact. And it is put forward as proud fact of the progress of materialistic scientific medicine. It seems that the prouder materialistic science is over a theory, the wronger they are - just like Professor "Smart Guy" with his frogs.[\(1\)](#)

What has this to do with St. Marks' Gospel? Steiner tells us how humanity sank over eons of time so deeply into the physical plane that we are left with only materialistic explanations for living beings.

**[page 193-194] The divine spiritual powers have given to man his outer image, his outer form. But since the old Lemurian epoch what lived in this outer form stood always under the influence of the luciferic forces, and then, during the later phases of evolution also under the ahrimanic forces. It was under these influences that what men have called science, knowledge and understanding have come into being. It is no wonder that just exactly at that time the true supersensible being of man appeared before mankind, and men were least able to recognize it, and were least able to know what mankind had become. Man's knowledge and understanding had become ever more deeply enmeshed in**

**sense existence, and gradually became ever less capable of penetrating close to the true being of man.**

One day, just as I neared the end of this book, an amazing thing happened on the way to pick my wife Del up: once more I got behind a toll tag-less driver in the left toll-tag lane and, as I hovered behind to make sure he'd clear the tollgate, as I've learned to do, the red car's back-up lights came on, a sure sign that he'd gotten into the toll-tag-only lane without having a toll-tag on his car. I blinked my headlights quickly and blew my horn, so they'd ticket that idiot. I was irate at his carelessness, then looked in my rear view mirror and moved over to the adjacent right lane that was empty to speed through the toll booth. As I did, I remembered Del saying that this rarely happened to her. That is, it hardly ever happened that she got behind a tag-less driver in the tag lane and had to wait while he backs up to clear the toll booth. Hmmm, that unanswered question came back to me as I drove up the Greater New Orleans Bridge. I also noticed that the tag-less driver had an out-of-state license plate on his car. It suddenly occurred to me that I had been hassling an innocent driver, probably a first time user of the bridge, unfamiliar with the tag-only lanes, trying to make sense of what the signs meant, and getting trapped.

What I've learned is that when some pattern continues to repeat [MR#1 Once in a Row is Enough], even if it's a random pattern like getting behind a tag-less driver, that there's a reason, which means there's something for me to attend to in full consciousness.

I'd just been reading the last lecture of Rudolf Steiner's "Gospel of St. Mark" in which he said the following about how His fellow men should have reacted to Jesus at the moment when the Mystery of Golgotha was being accomplished. Here are the passages I read later to Del as we sat at our table in Houston's restaurant on St. Charles Avenue:

**[page 194] Before such a man His fellowmen should have stood and worshipped saying, "Here am I in my true nature, here is my highest ideal. Here am I, in the form to which I can attain only through my most ardent striving, a striving that can come only from the depths of my soul. Here I stand before that in myself which is alone worthy of reverence and worship, the divine in me."**

**[page 195] At that moment in history mankind ought to have possessed that self-knowledge. But what did this mankind do? It spat upon the Son of Man, it scourged Him, and led Him forth to the place of execution. . . . Instead of recognizing himself, man is described as having crushed himself under foot, as having killed himself because he did not recognize himself. Yet through this lesson, this cosmic lesson he is able to receive the impulse to attain gradually for himself his true being within the wider perspective of earth evolution!**

Del said, "It came to me as you were reading that, that I would have spat on Him myself, and it causes me great pain to realize that."

I replied, "All we can do is let that pain become compassion for our fellow humans."

"Yes," she said, "and I'm reminded of the biblical verse, 'As you have done this to the least of my brethren, you have done this to me.'"

And there I had been, in the bridge toll queue, blinking my lights and honking my horn, spitting in effect, on this innocent man in the toll-tag lane, visiting crucifixion on him in my thoughts. And by doing so, I was crushing myself under foot. And I had been doing it over and over again, up until now. I realized the significance of that biblical quote, "As I have done this to the least of my fellow humans, I have done this to myself." In that moment I realized the influence of Lucifer and Ahriman on my own life, and that their striving in the service of crucifixion can only be countered by my ever vigilant striving in the service of compassion. I have learned to understand compassion as a gift that I give myself in the act of giving it to others.

