

*A READER'S JOURNAL*

**The Gospel of St. John, GA# 103**

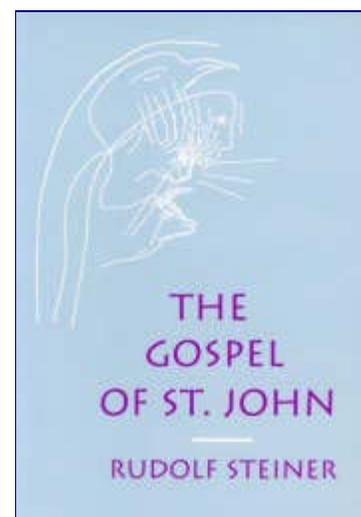
by  
**Rudolf Steiner**

Twelve Lectures given in Hamburg in 1908  
Published by Spiritual Science Library in 1940

A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©1998

These lectures in Hamburg in 1908 may be considered as prologue to the fourteen lectures Rudolf Steiner gave later in Kassel, which are

published by the title [\*The Gospel of St. John in Its Relation to the Other Gospels.\*](#)



One aspect of Steiner's approach to the Gospels that cannot be overlooked is his focus on gaining direct knowledge independent of the historical texts of the Gospels. Here's what Steiner says:

**[page 16] Let us suppose that through some circumstance all religious records had been lost, and that men possessed only those capacities which they have today; they should, nevertheless, be able to penetrate into life's mysteries, if they only retain those capacities. They should be able to reach the divine-spiritual creating forces and beings which lie concealed behind the world. And Spiritual Science must depend entirely upon these independent sources of knowledge, irrespective of all records. However, after having investigated the divine-spiritual mysteries of the world independently, we take up the actual religious documents themselves.**

Once we have independent knowledge of these mysteries, we can no longer view this Gospel as a "kind of poem imbued with religion" but rather as a statement of historical facts, even in its opening line, "In the Beginning was the Logos" or in the subsequent line, "The Logos became flesh and dwelt among us."

**[page 20] This simply means: "You have seen Him who dwelt among us, but you will only be able to understand Him if you recognize the same Principle within Him through which everything that is about you in the plant, animal and human kingdoms has come into being."**

Steiner makes certain we understand that he is no liberal theologian who refers to Jesus as the "simple man of Nazareth who is like other men" but rather that we are presented in Jesus something that is divine and spiritual, and which exists in all of us today. To understand rightly the curious materialistic interpretations of the liberal theologians, one must come to understand the evolution of consciousness — that humankind descended to the depths of its materialistic view of the world in the Middle Ages, and at the same time, religion, the early paragon of scientific thinking, became imbued with that same rampant materialistic world-view. This is why the spiritual nature of the words, "This is my body, this is my blood" degenerated, in theologians's minds, into "a physical transubstantiation of bread and wine into flesh and blood."



The paradoxical nature of this interpretation can be best understood by considering the folly of attempting to measure a physical change in the bread and wine by using the instruments of the physicist. After Francis Bacon no one would argue that a physical change occurs that cannot be measured physically, because Bacon so strongly make his case that no change occurs unless a detectable physical change can be measured. But as Steiner has repeatedly stated, spiritual changes can only be measured by that most delicate of instruments: a human being with super-sensible sight.

What is the "Word" that this Gospel talks about? It is a human capacity, one that no animal possesses. Animals can make sounds, but they are unable to communicate what exists in the depths of their soul to the outside world using words.

**[page 26] This is the capacity to utter aloud in words what exists within the soul, to communicate thoughts to the surrounding world by means of words. Behold the lower animals! They are mute, they do not express their pain and pleasure. They squeak or make other sounds, but it is the outer scraping and rubbing of the physical organs which produce these sounds, as in the case of the lobster. The higher we go in evolution, the more do we see the capacity developed for expressing the inner feelings in sound and communicating in tones the experiences of the soul. Therefore, they said, the human being stands thus high above other creatures, because not only can he express his pleasure and pain in words, but because he is able**

**to put into words what rises above the personal, that is to say, the spiritual, the impersonal, and to express this by means of thoughts.**

"In the beginning was the Word" is likewise paradoxical when considered from a materialistic point of view: How could words, which require a human voice, have existed prior to a human being with vocal cords? Steiner cuts through the possible confusion quite simply and profoundly by pointing out that his understanding of evolution has humans evolving so as to attain capabilities to match their needs. Given the existence of the Word, humans evolved until they were able to speak the Word.

**[page 27] The followers of St. John said further: What appears last in the human being existed in the world in the very earliest times. We fancy that the human being in his present form did not exist in the earliest conditions of the earth. But in an imperfect, mute form he was there and little by little he evolved into a being endowed with the Logos or the Word . . . What finally appears in time and space was already there in spirit from the beginning.**

This brings to mind the simple prayer from my catechism days that seemed so puzzling to me at the time, "Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end." Steiner has helped clarify the meaning of "it" by identifying it with the Logos. The Logos, originating from the divine Godhead, remained with humankind and in the fullness of time we were able to express the Logos or Word.

**[page 39] Like the flower within its seed, the tone-uttering human being, endowed with the Word or Logos, existed already in germ upon Saturn. Sound was concealed within this germ and developed out of it just as the whole plant grows out of the seed in which it has been hidden. . . . The whole human body has been constructed upon the Word and from the beginning it was so endowed that at last the Word was able to spring forth from it.**

"Where, then, is the physical body of the Logos, of which the Gospel of St. John speaks?" Steiner asks us and then tells us it is the sunlight streaming to earth from the sun, in both its material and spiritual components. This sunlight is the clothing of the Logos just as our physical body is the clothing of our soul. And he makes it crystal clear that this sunlight is as essential to us as it is to the plant life on earth.

**[page 51] Not alone the physical sunlight awakens the plants into life — they would wither and die if the physical sunlight did not act upon them — but together with the physical sunlight, the warm love of the Godhead streams to earth. Human beings exist in order that they may take into themselves the warm love of the Divine, develop it and return it again to the Divine. But they can only do this by becoming self-conscious ego-beings. Only then will they be able to render back this love.**

This love streams to earth from the seven principle Spirits of Light , or Elohim as they are called in the Bible. Because so much of the consciousness of early man was a night-time clairvoyant consciousness, one of the Spirits of Light moved to the Moon and took up residence there to stream ripened wisdom to earth in preparation for the development of love. Jehovah, as this Ruler of the Night was called, was preparing humans during night-time consciousness for the time when they would be able to receive the power of love during day-time consciousness.

Before that could happen, the power of the blood relation had to be broken. In the other Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, great care was taken to show the continuous blood-line of Jesus going back in one case to Adam and the other to Abraham. What does the Gospel of St. John do? It goes back, tracing not in blood, but in Light, not to a person, but to the Divine Godhead.

**[page 67, quoting from the beginning of the Gospel of St. John] *He was not the Light but was a witness of the Light. For the true Light which lighteth every man should come into the world. It was in the world and the world came into being through It, but the world knew It not. It entered into individual men (that is, the ego-men); but individual men (the ego-men) received it not. But they who received it could reveal themselves as Children of God. They who trusted in His name were not born of the blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man — but of God.***

Clearly there was a new line of descent — one that from then on would be traced all the way back to the Light of God. In the transition from the Old Testament to the New, individual humans, split off from any tribal or blood relations, would feel forever within themselves separate, individual egos. The separate "I AM" that had previously in Old Testament times been reserved only for prophets, those called the "Children of God," was henceforth to be available to all of humankind. This explains what Steiner means in another lecture when he says, "The time of prophets is past." His statement can be expanded to state that the time when only a special few will have a separate ego or "I AM" is over — from now on it is a capability available to all of humanity.

How does this humanity come to free itself from the bonds of the blood-line of the group soul of the tribe? By following the example of Christ.

**[page 75] When love becomes spiritualized to such a degree that no one will wish to follow any other impulse than this, then that will be fulfilled which Christ-Jesus wished to bring into the world. For one of the mysteries of Christianity is that it teaches the**

**seeker to behold the Christ, to fill himself with the power of His image, to seek to become like Him, and to follow after Him. Then will his liberated ego need no other law; it will then, as a being free in its inner depths, do the good and the true. Thus Christ is the bringer of the impulse of freedom of any law, that good may be done, not because of compulsion of any law, but an indwelling Impulse of Love within the soul.**

The capacity for doing the right thing out of inner self was called grace. This explains the verse of this Gospel that states, "For the law was given through Moses, but Grace and Truth came through Jesus-Christ."

To demonstrate unequivocally that Grace was thenceforth to replace Mosiac law, that the custom of marrying only within one's tribe or blood-line was passé, Jesus-Christ performs the miracle at the wedding in Galilee. Galilee means "mixed-breed" and was a place where peoples from all over, of every blood-line and tribal connection lived and inter-married.

Alcohol's effect on humankind was to draw humans deeply into materiality, severing their connection with the spiritual world. At the time that humankind had fallen so deeply into materiality that only a very strong force could draw it back towards the spiritual world, Christ appeared on earth.

**[page 86] The Christ indicated this to be His mission in the first of His signs. In the first place, that He was addressing Himself to those who had freed themselves from the blood relationship. He had to turn to a marriage where the physical bodies came under the influence of alcohol, because at this marriage wine would be drunk. . . . It must be kept constantly in mind that the Christ said: My mission is one that points toward the far distant future when men will be brought to a union with the Godhead — that is to a love of the Godhead as a free gift of the independent ego. This love should bind men in freedom to the Godhead while formerly an inner compelling impulse of the group-soul had made them a part of it.**

What should our attitude be if a sinner is brought before us? Steiner says that the real Christian would say to us, "it must be left to Karma" — that we should allow the course of earthly evolution to determine "what punishment Karma shall inflict upon a human being." In the biblical story of the adulteress, this is exactly what Jesus does when her accusers disperse.

**[page 121, Steiner's words]**

**When Jesus had lifted Himself up and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?**

*This He said in order to turn her thoughts away from all idea of outer judgment and point to an inner Karma.*

**She said, No man, Lord.**

*She was left to her Karma. Thus the only thing for her was to think no more about "punishment" which Karma fulfills, but to change her life.*

**And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.**

There are two more quotes from this book that I want to include. The first is an important explication of the famous dictum: "Know yourself." The second reminds us that the material world is always in synchronism with the spiritual world, that what is going on in one direction in the material world is always and at the same time going on in the other direction in the spiritual world.

**[page 178] When one considers the words, "Know thyself," in the Greek, they do not**

**mean that you stare into your own inner being, but that you fructify yourself with what streams into you from the spiritual world. "Know thyself" means: Fructify thyself with the content of the spiritual world.**

**[page 185] wherever condensation takes place, a spiritualization also always occurs.**

Readers who are not familiar with Rudolf Steiner's works may be thinking that Steiner has an unusual view of the Gospel of St. John, one that is not shared by any theologians that they have ever encountered. Perhaps that is because Steiner takes a unique evolutionary view which encompasses three time phases or chapters: 1.) Moses to Christ, 2.) Christ to Materialism, and 3.) Materialism to Spiritual Science. What better way to conclude this review of the Gospel of St. John than by letting Rudolf Steiner describe where we've come from, and where we are going.

**[page 160] The first chapter is the period of the prediction of Christianity (*Ed. Note*: Moses's time) up to the time of the appearance of Christ Jesus and a little beyond. The second chapter is the deepest possible immersion of the human spirit in matter and the materialization of Christianity itself. The third chapter will be a spiritual understanding of Christianity itself . . . a deepening of the soul through Anthroposophy. That such a document as the Gospel of St. John has not, up to our own age, been understood is due to our whole materialistic evolution.**

That materialistic evolution has made it difficult if not impossible to us to understand the full impact of the Gospel of St. John, up until now. With Steiner's infusion of spiritual knowledge into us with his books and lectures, we can expect a deepened understanding of this Gospel from now on.



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