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A READER'S JOURNAL

The Apocalypse of St. John, GA# 104, by Rudolf Steiner

Twelve Lectures given in Nuremburg in 1908
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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2003

Sometime during the writing of my Steiner reviews this past year, I received a nasty note from a distant relative the thrust of which was that I was falling into sin by reading these occult works. I placed the note in a nearby oval file receptacle with a smile. I smiled — as Galileo might have smiled when a

friend chided him for dropping two different weight balls out the window of the tower at Pisa. "Surely you can find out all you need to know about the physical world by reading Aristotle," his friend probably said. Well, Aristotle said that heavy balls fell faster than light balls, and Galileo proved that they all fell at the same rate. Equipped with his new knowledge of the physical world, Galileo set the stage for our technological age. Rudolf Steiner performed equivalent research in the spiritual worlds, and has set the stage for a new spiritual age, one that will only come if humankind picks itself from the depths of materialism and rises once more to an intimate understanding of the spiritual world. Not everyone had to perform Galileo's research with dropping balls to accept their validity. Likewise it is not necessary to perform all of Steiner's research to accept the validity of his reports. And when Steiner goes to the ancient texts, he finds a closer correspondence to his research than Galileo did with the balls.



[page 11] And when man has come, by whatever means, into possession of the knowledge that leads him into the supersensible behind the sensible, the invisible behind the visible, a knowledge as definite as his knowledge of outer objects and events, then he may go to the traditional books and records. Furnished with supersensible knowledge he may approach the records through which, during the course of evolution, tidings have reached man of the supersensible world, just as the geometrician approaches the geometry of Euclid. . . . Nor does one who approaches the records of the Christian message equipped with knowledge of the supersensible world find that they lose in value; indeed, on the contrary, they appear in a more brilliant light than they showed first to those armed only with faith. They prove to contain deeper wisdom than had been dreamt of earlier, before the advent of anthroposophical knowledge.

[page 12] Let us ask ourselves who is better able to judge the geometry of Euclid — one who can translate the words literally and wants to reveal the contents without having first penetrated into the spirit of geometry, or one who already understands geometry and is therefore able to discover it in the book? That is what many have done with the ancient records of religion, even those who are supposed to be chosen to fathom their true sense.

The word religion comes from *re — ligare* which means to re-tie or re-unite humankind with the world of spirit. If this attempt at reunion does not involve a living experience, but only the exegesis of ancient texts, we will suffer similar errors as did the Aristotelians of Galileo's time. Steiner in his writings on anthroposophy, the knowledge of the full human, brings to us a living experience through which he is able to infuse the most difficult and recondite passages of the Bible with new life, new insight, and new light. That is what he does to the Apocalypse of St. John in this series of twelve lectures plus introductory

lecture. Lest one think that such an infusion will come easily — banish the thought — to understand the material in these lectures one needs to be able to understand the entire scope of the evolution of the human race and our solar system. "Each condition of consciousness can only run its course in seven conditions of life; each condition of life in seven conditions of form. That is $7 \times 7 \times 7$ conditions." (page 177) Seven cubed is 343 conditions of form that we will pass through. We are currently at the midpoint of this evolution, somewhere in the middle of the 172nd condition.

Does it seem strange to you that we should be in the middle? Right smack in the middle of our evolution! How odd! And yet consider a simple arithmetical analogy: pick an integer number of any size and ask the question, "Are there more integers to the left of this number or to the right of this number?" Any mathematician will say, "Considering all positive and negative integers, there is an equal number to either side." That is the paradoxical aspect of the concept of infinity. We are beings living in an infinite universe and as such we can only see as far back in our evolution as we can see forward — that places us directly in the middle of our evolution, whatever stage of evolution we are currently in. Like a sailor on the open seas, we can see exactly as far in front of us as behind us.

If I were writing this several thousand years ago, I might be talking about how the stage of evolution is set for us to begin to understand the physical and material world in which we live in a new, deep fashion. But I'm writing today about how we're ready to move into a new understanding of the spiritual world once again as we arise from the depths of the materialistic abyss. Let's take a quick look at how we came to this point in our evolution. Come back with me to the Atlantean times, when the air had a thick vaporous quality that prevented one from seeing more than a few feet. How did humans survive under these conditions? Simple, the human eyes were not a primary source of information — humans of that time could see the spiritual world directly. So if someone approached you, you could see in the patterns of colors and lights if it was a friend and how they were feeling. Similar to the way a clairvoyant today would analyze a person by looking at their auric fields. This was a common human condition.

Then the water vapor suspended in the atmosphere was released, flooding Atlantis, and making it possible for the first time for there to be a rainbow in the newly cleared air of the sky. The Atlanteans, some of them, had migrated eastward and settled in the area around India. In the first post-Atlantean cultural epoch, the ancient Indian remembered full well that ability to see the spiritual world directly. They spurned the superficial reflections of light and colors from the surface of the material world, calling it *maya* and yearned for those days when their ancestors could see directly the spiritual world. They worshiped Brahma, a pure spiritual being. How was it possible for them to remember those days, several reincarnations ago? Steiner points out that, "With the growth of the intellect in mankind, memory has receded considerably into the background." One cannot project one's capabilities today onto a people hundreds, much less thousands of years ago. The ancient Indians had a prodigious memory that spanned many lifetimes.

Following the ancient Indian age, a new cultural epoch in Persia sprang up in which humans began to develop intellectually and thus lost the sharpness of their memory of the days of Atlantis. As a result they began to work with the physical world, building buildings, making pottery, plowing the earth, etc. It was during this age that Zarathustra pointed to the physical object of the Sun in the sky and said that this object was the vesture of a high spiritual being, Ahura Mazdao.

In the next epoch, the Chaldeans looked upon other objects in the sky and learned to read their positions as the writing of spiritual beings, thereby creating their science of astrology. As the Persians had learned to divide the earth with their plows, the Egyptians during this epoch learned to divide it with the laws of space. Together the Egypto-Chaldean culture created astrology as a means for making decisions in harmony with the spiritual world.

Then came the Greco-Roman epoch in which the spiritual world was intellectualized in abstract terms such as truth, beauty, and form. Art came into flower — human forms came to be portrayed in marble sculpture and human life in dramas. In Roman law, the concept of a will and testament came into being

for the first time whereby one's will could survive one's physical life. Humankind's fall into the material world was nearly complete at this point, and required the appearance of Christ Jesus and His deed on Golgotha to stem our collective fall into the abyss, to move humankind upward towards the spiritual world again.

Before we look into the Apocalypse, let's consider what it would take for a human being to become a seer in order to see directly the spiritual realities laid out for us by St. John in Revelations. Just as we cannot see with our physical body unless we have eyes, nor hear unless we have ears, so too our astral body must have organs of perception.

[page 37] If a man wishes to become a seer, his astral body must be treated as a sculptor treats a piece of clay; organs must be worked into it. This was, in fact, what was always done in the schools of initiation and in the mysteries. The organs were moulded in the astral body.

The pupil was given an exercise during the day that affected the pupil's astral body at night. Once the organs had been molded into the astral body, the next stage was to imprint the organs into the etheric body, similar to the way a seal is imprinted into sealing wax. The next stages of initiation remind me of the way that Dorothy and her three friends in Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz* came to their realization about the true nature of the fearful Wizard.

[page 41] At first it appears in pictures, then sounds are heard, and then the last veil falls away — as if we were to take away the screen behind which the man is standing and speaking. We see the man himself — we see the spiritual worlds itself. First we perceive the pictures, then the sounds, then the beings, and lastly the life of these beings.

By now the reader may have suspected a connection between the seven seals of the Apocalypse and the initiation process, but there is also a connection between the seven seals and the seven ages or cultural epochs. In the two tables below are listed the seven Great Epochs with dates for our current fifth Post-Atlantean Epoch and its seven cultural epochs. The fifth Great Epoch will end with the War of All Against All as indicated by the double bars between the fifth and sixth Great Epochs. This great war is mentioned often in these lectures and one needs to get clear on which period of time Steiner is referring to for its occurrence. Review the tables and then read what Steiner tells us about the seven seals:

[page 84 — 85] So step by step, after the great War, will issue and reveal itself all that is now being hidden in the soul. Let us imagine the beginning of the great War; the soul that has heard the call which from age to age the Christ-principle has uttered, will live on into all that is indicated in the messages to the Churches. [See Rev 2,3.] Through seven ages has been laid into it what these ages can give. Let us imagine how the soul waits, how it waits on. It is sealed seven times. Each cultural age has added its seal. Within you is sealed what the Indians wrote in your soul; within you is also imprinted what the Persians, the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans have written in your soul, and what our own cultural age inscribes in it. The seals will be unloosed; that is, the things written there will be outwardly revealed after the great War of All against All.

Table 1. The 7 Great Epochs or Root Races (of present Physical-Etheric State)

1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
Polarean Epoch	Hyperborean Epoch	Lemurian Epoch	Atlantean Epoch	Post-Atlantean Epoch	6 th Great Epoch	7 th Great Epoch
~	~	~	Flood ->	7893 BC-5067 AD (Current)	7 seals <-War	7 trumpets

Table 2. 7 Post-Atlantean Cultural Epochs or Sub-Races (Post-Atlantean Great Epoch)

1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
Ancient Indian Epoch	Ancient Persian Epoch	Egypto-Chadean Epoch	Greco-Roman Epoch	Anglo-German Epoch	Russian Epoch	American Epoch
7893 BC->	5733 BC->	2970 BC ->	747 BC ->	1413 AD -> (Current)	3573 AD ->	5067 AD ->

The statement is made that only the Lamb is able to open the book with the seven seals. What is the meaning of the word 'book' as used in the Bible? The word only appears in Genesis, Matthew and Revelations. It is used only to refer to a chronicle or one thing following another, a history. What is this book of life containing the seven seals?

[page 86] The book of life which is now being compiled in mankind, in which from age to age is being written in the ego of man what each age offers, this book which is written in the soul of man and which will be unsealed after the great War of All against All, is here meant in the Apocalypse.

In lecture five, Steiner goes into detail about the evolution of our solar system that expands on the material he was to cover a year later in lectures in Düsseldorf (1909) and later in Berlin (1911), which lectures are published in a book entitled, *Spiritual Hierarchies and the Physical World*. [See review in ARJ.] The expansion leads us to understand certain aspects of the Apocalypse, such as the twenty-four Elders, who are "beings who can look back on the human stage" of evolution. He lists seven from each of the Saturn, Sun, and Moon evolutions and three from our Earth evolution for a total of twenty-four.

Before a man set foot on the moon on July 20, 1969, there was an old saying that the moon was made of green cheese. Everyone knew that was ridiculous, but where did this idea ever come from that moon might be made of some almost vegetative material? In the following passage Steiner describes a stage of the evolution of the moon close to "green cheese":

[page 99] Certain beings always remain behind. Beings between the present plants and the present animals, which could only take root in a vegetable basis such as was the substance of the old moon — these beings have also remained behind, and on this account are incapable of thriving on the mineral ground of our present earth.

What plants in our current world cannot grow except on living plant substance? We call them parasitic plants, which includes lichens, moss, and mistletoe. These plants, existing somewhere between the plant and animal kingdoms, must have a distinctly different astral body enveloping them. The ability of ancient man to perceive this distinctive astral body surrounding mistletoe apparently led to the custom of kissing under the mistletoe at Christmas time.

As early as the 18th Century, a demonstration was performed in science classrooms to show how our solar system could evolve from a large cloud of gas to planets revolving around a central sun. A solution of alcohol and water was created of equal density to olive oil and a large drop of oil was inserted into the liquid. Being of equal density the oil remained suspended in the middle of the beaker in the form of a sphere. A disc of equal diameter to this sphere was placed at the end of thin rod, inserted into the sphere of olive oil, and rotated. Soon droplets of oil formed along the periphery of the sphere and rotated around the sphere like planets around our sun. This demonstration was taken to prove that a completely materialistic explanation for the evolution of our solar system sufficed. And yet, as Steiner points out, this explanation

ignores the essential motive force of rotation is provided by a living being, the experimenter! The essential work of rotating the nebula of gas was performed by the spiritual beings for whom the nebula was their field of work. "It was the whole choir of these beings, who filled the nebula, who produced the movements." (Page 105) Was this production only something that happened thousands of years ago? No, it happens every second of every day.

[page 106] With every sunbeam descending to the earth come the deeds of those spiritual beings who in the course of the evolutions of Saturn, Sun and Moon had progressed so far that they are able to participate in the rapid development taking place on the present sun.

One of the great themes of these lectures is that of "descending into the abyss". At the time of the great War of All against All those who "use the life in the body for anything more than an opportunity to gain ego-consciousness will descend into the abyss and form the evil race." (Page 125) The phrase "all against all" comes from the fact that everyone has an ego. In historical times and our current time wars are constantly being fought by one country against another, one ethnic group against another, one religion against another, one class of worker against another, one gender against another, one race against another, etc, the only thing in common is that the wars consists of groups of more than one person united by some common bond. In this final great war, it will be every ego for itself basically and the war will be fought between individuals in groups of one.

The ego is represented in the *Apocalypse* as the sharp two-edged sword in the mouth of the Christ-figure in the first seal. The ego is the most refined tool of a human — it is the tool of possessions and also of freedom:.

[page 136] The ego is the cause of man's directing all his wishes to the satisfaction of this ego as such. Its striving to draw to itself as its own possession a part of the earth which belongs to all, to drive away all the other egos from its realm, to fight them, to be at war with them, is one side of the ego. But on the other hand we must not forget that it it's the ego that at the same time gives man his independence and his inner freedom, which is in the truest sense of the word exalts him. His dignity is founded in this ego, it is the basis of the divine in man.

To understand the meaning of the seven trumpets we must go to the very end of the seven Great Epochs, to the very boundary of our physical earth development. Table 1 shows the seven seals that are loosed during the seven stages of Great Epoch 6, and the seven trumpets that blow during the seven stages of Great Epoch 7, the last stage of our physical earth's evolution. The Sun is the cosmic body of Strength, the Moon the body of Wisdom, and the Earth the body of Love. This is shown graphically in the description of the Fourth Seal (see photo of Steiner designed artwork in rear of this book). First one needs to know that Mars represents the watery aspect of the strength of the Sun and Mercury the earthy aspect of the wisdom of the Moon — and these two aspects filled the evolution of the Earth. In the fourth seal Mars is the left column resting in the sea and Mercury the right column resting on the earth. Supported above the columns of strength and wisdom is the radiant Christ representing love. In this fourth seal, we are reminded of the Transfiguration of Christ in which He is seen standing between Elias (symbol of Sun strength) and Moses (symbol of Moon wisdom). At the end of the seven trumpets what is to become of the earth?

[page 146] The more the soul is warmed by love the more powerfully will it be able to work on matter; it will spiritualize, astralize, the whole earth and transform it into an astral globe. But just as love dissolves matter, as warm water dissolves salt, so will the opposite of love press down — again throughout seven stages — everything which has not become capable of fulfilling the Earth mission.

In the second seal, we meet the four figures of the lion, eagle, bull, and man. Where do these arise?

[page 163] Therefore we have four stages of development in Atlantis during which man first progresses as group-soul, and each of the first four Atlantean races corresponds to one of the typical animal forms — lion, eagle, calf or bull, and man. This passes over into the human stage in the fifth age.

These four forms remains as potential forms for a particular person if work is not done to overcome them. In the lion group-soul first appeared the rudimentary foundations of what was later to become the human heart. In fact our heart first appeared as a horn of the lion head. Steiner defines a horn thus, "the organ which is the external physical expression for something etheric." This definition forms the basis for understanding the seven heads with the ten horns that appear in the fifth seal. During the evolution on Atlantis, the first four stages each developed a horn on the top of the group-soul heads, but the last three stages developed a male-female physicality and thus came to have two horns on each head.

In the time before Christ came to earth, humans had fallen into physicality so far that they wandered in the dark reaches of Hell, an abyss without hope. Christ's pouring out His light into the earth on Golgotha helped to save these lost souls from the abyss. During the remainder of the Fifth Great Epoch we are in the midst of, those souls who do not develop by receiving into themselves willingly Christ's love will be welcomed at the abyss by the beast with seven heads and ten horns. Here Steiner answers a key question that humans have asked about the nature of God for thousands of years, "How could a good and wise God allow humans to do bad things?"

[page 206] Love would be impossible for man and freedom would be impossible for man without the possibility of sailing down into the abyss. A man unable, of his own free decision, to choose good or evil, would be a being only led on a leading-string to a good which must be attained of necessity and who had no power to choose the good of his own fully purified will, by the love which springs from freedom.

Basically he says that without the freedom to choose between good and evil, humans would be sub-human, mere puppets on a string. There is a paradoxical injunction called the "Be Spontaneous Paradox" that unthinking humans put their companions into constantly. The key element to avoiding the paradox is to recognize a spontaneous process, that is, a process that one can only perform without prior planning or forethought or command. With the faintest presence of planning, forethought or command, the result is a shadow of the process rather than the real thing. What are some spontaneous processes? Smiling, sneezing, hiccups, and sexual erection are some examples. These are physiological conditions that the attempt to create one of them on command makes its creation impossible. (Or at least unlikely until the command is forgotten or some other spontaneous process takes over.) Ask a group of people to smile for a photograph and you get *ersatz* pretend smiles all around, except from one or two folks who either didn't hear you or ignored your command. That's why it's best, if you must perform the atrocious act of posed photographs, to ask them to say "Cheese!" or "Sex!" or something completely unexpected. They will smile spontaneously at the unexpected request and that's what you wish to have on film.

The most insidious paradoxical requests of this type are the psychological ones such as, "Tell me you love me." This one request has broken up more marriages and families than any other one. This is the Be Spontaneous Paradox that God was wise enough to avoid with humankind as we mentioned above. It's like saying "I have this string attached to your mouth and your will, and when I pull it, the words 'I love you' will issue forth directed at me." One does this horror, in its many forms, only at one's peril.

In full freedom, one lives one's life, and that freedom includes the freedom to concentrate one's life on acquiring physical possessions. If one fills one life with the materialistic attachments of the ego, one moves oneself closer to abyss. One who has devoted one's life to acquisition of material goods, when one reaches the end of one's life, is chagrined to find that all these goods must be left behind to proceed into the spiritual world. In biblical times, cities were protected by walls and the gates were generally small for easy protection from invaders. The tiny gates called "needles" were very difficult for a camel to enter because they had to be first unloaded and then the camel had to crawl through the needle in order for its

large hump to clear the top of the needle. That is the origin of the simile that "it is as hard for a rich man to enter heaven as it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle." It is not impossible, but it requires that one off-load all one's earthly possessions and "crawl" in humility to enter.

I wondered as I neared the end of this book whether the course of one's life in this incarnation proceeds in the flow between materialism and spirituality as one's reincarnations over many lifetimes proceed up until the end of this Great Epoch which will terminate in the War of All Against All. So that a man who, in this current life, holds tightly onto the materialistic world until the very moment of his death, will end up in his last incarnation before the end of the Great Epoch tottering on the brink of the abyss.

It would seem to me that we go through this life making decisions that affect entire streams of our future lives before us. Or, looking at it another way, those streams of our future lives infuse our current life with direction. Or, as I state in [Matherne's Rule #4](#): *It all happens at the same time*. These streams flow into one another, from one another, and are part of one great stream-line of our lives. To be an initiate is to be able to experience the stream-lines of a life, either now, in the past, or in the future.

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