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**The Challenge of the Times, GA#186
6 Lectures in Dornach in 1918**

by

Rudolf Steiner

Translated by Olin D. Wannamaker

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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2014

Chapter: Spiritual Science



"It is not improbable that man, like the grub that prepares a chamber for the winged thing it never has seen but is to be, that man may have cosmic

destinies he does not understand," written by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes on the title page of Spencer Heath's [Citadel, Market, and Altar](#). Heath dealt with our emerging society, much as Steiner spoke about in 1918, some forty years before Heath's words. Heath's three parts of society, the Citadel, the Market and the Altar mirrors the three-fold society that Steiner speaks about in this passage. (I have included Heath's words in parenthesis for convenience.)

[page 3] . . . this threefold organization . . . will be distributed as the political, or security, order (Citadel); the second, as the sphere of the social organization, the economic organization (Market); the third, as the sphere of free spiritual production (Altar).

Steiner speaks about our cosmic destinies with a scope that one rarely finds. He explains how the West is held back by the ghost of its Roman roots and the East is being led by a nightmare vision which it has yet to fully understand. As we are in the middle of the fifth epoch, the epoch of the West is descending, and already we can anticipate the ascent of the sixth epoch, the epoch of the East.

[page 26] In the West an image of the human being that is on a descending path and appears, therefore, as a specter; in the East an image that is ascending, but that must not be accepted in its present form since it is still merely an imagination of an oppressive nightmare and will appear in its true form only after this nightmare has been overcome.

This next passage will take many aback with Steiner's claim that Christianity is just beginning. What can that mean, some 2,000 years have passed have they not? Yes, but who knows but that we are still in Kindergarten so far as Christianity is concerned? Have any of the various Christian religions revealed the spiritual realities of the Christ? Many still claim Christ was born when Jesus was born, refusing to distinguish Jesus the human from Christ the Great Spirit which infused Jesus at his Baptism in the Jordan.

[page 27] As I have often indicated, the Roman Church has contributed more toward hindering the introduction of the image of Christ into human hearts and minds than it has helped because the conceptions that have been applied" within the Roman Church for the purpose of comprehending the Christ are all taken from the social and political structure of the ancient Roman Empire. Even though human beings do not know this, it works within their instincts.

Exactly as the aspects of Roman law works in our instincts today and so few comprehend how much of our social life is driven by its Roman roots. And even fewer can comprehend the essential difference between Judaism and Romanism, especially with the clarity that Steiner lays out for us.

[page 27] Now, the conceptions that were dominant in the Old Testament, that must be designated primarily as conceptions of Old Testament Judaism, and that took their worldly form in Romanism, which is in the worldly sphere the same thing as Judaism was in the spiritual sphere even though it is in opposition to Judaism, have come over into our own epoch by way of Romanism; they haunt our age in spectral forms. This Old Testament thinking, unpermeated by the Christ must be found in its true origin within the human being.

If you find yourself claiming, "This is in my blood" or "She is not part of my blood", then you are displaying an example of Old Testament thinking, "unpermeated by the Christ". It was a type of thinking which valued people of one's blood, one's kinsfolk, over everyone else in the world. Thinking which valued relatives over strangers simply because they were relatives. The New Testament over-turned such thinking with the injunction, "Love your neighbor as yourself", but millennia of Old Testament thinking left behind deep trace of blood-thinking in our hearts and minds.

[page 27, 28] This thinking depends upon what can be inherited with the blood from generation to generation. The capacity to think in the manner characteristic of the Old Testament is inherited with the blood in the succession of human beings. What we inherit as capacities from our fathers through the simple fact that we are born as human beings, that we were embryonic human beings before our birth — what we inherit as the power of thinking, what lives in our blood, is Old Testament thinking.

What is permeated by Christ cannot be acquired by Old Testament or blood-related thinking which comes into the world with us from our embryo, but can only be acquired by us after we have arrived in the world as a personality through our spiritualized exercises of the type Steiner teaches in his *Knowledge of Higher Worlds and Its Attainment*.

[page 30] This is the essential fact. The kind of thinking we possess because of our embryonic development leads to the recognition of the Godhead only as the Father. The kind of thinking that is acquired in this world through the personal life after the embryonic stage leads to the recognition of the Godhead also as the Son.

Steiner says elsewhere that if, e. g., a Middle East terrorist hates America, he will be reborn in his next incarnation as an American, i.e., hate creates such a bond to the person or thing hated that one must turn into or live in the thing hated. In this next passage, he indicates that intercommunication must exist between people in order for them to live as total human beings. Without that communication connection people of the West (America) will be stuck to an earthly existence as a ghost, and people of the East will experience a psychic-spiritual evolution apart from earth. If one understands the essential nature of communication between the peoples of the West and the East, one get a better understanding of the spate of wars such as Iraqi and Afghanistan which has involved so many American soldiers in those lands, and the terrorists from the same regions who have exerted such enormous attention on America.

Steiner distinguished three types of occult capacity and the section of the world who concentrate on each capacity: West: materialistic, Central: Hygienic, and East: Eugenic. Each section has much to learn from the other.

[page 100] In other words the people of the East and those of the Central countries will have to receive material occultism from the West. They will receive its benefits, its products. Hygienic occultism will develop primarily in the Central countries, and eugenic occultism in the Eastern lands. It will be necessary, however, for

intercommunication to exist between people. This is something that must be taken up into the impelling forces of the social order of the future. It makes it imperative for people to see that they will be able to live in future throughout the world only as total human beings. If an American should wish to live only as an American, although he would be able to achieve the loftiest material results, he would condemn himself to the fate of never progressing beyond the earthly evolution. If he should not seek social relationships with the East, he would condemn himself to being bound within the earthly sphere after a certain incarnation, haunting the sphere of the earth like a ghost. The earth would be drawn away from its cosmic connections, and all these souls would have to be like ghosts. Correspondingly, if the people of the East should not take up the materialism of the West with their eugenic occult capacities that pull down the earth, the Eastern man would lose the earth. He would be drawn into some sort of mere psychic-spiritual evolution, and he would lose the earthly evolution. The earth would sink away under him as it were, and he would not be able to possess the fruit of the earthly evolution.

The map is not the territory has become a familiar rant of mine since I spent a year in 1979 studying the 806 pages of Alfred Korzybski's classic tome, [Science and Sanity](#), published in 1933. What is a map but something that has been fixed immovably upon some media to represent a part of the territory which is always in the process of moving and becoming different. The difference between what the territory has *become* when the map was made (fixed) and what the territory is constantly *becoming* as it changes over time is essential to understanding the world in a human fashion. For example, we do ill if we imagine Human (time = a) is the same as Human (time = b). Human beings are constantly changing territories so long as they live.

[page 128] This habit of willing to be something and not willing to become something is an element kept in the background as an opposition to the science of the spirit. The science of the spirit cannot do otherwise than to call the attention of people to the fact that it is necessary constantly to become something and that a person simply cannot be some sort of finished thing.

"I am *not* a finished thing" — I can hear some of you dear Readers thinking that. Okay, but those of you who think that, ask yourself, have you ever introduced yourself as a teacher, a policeman, businessman, a nurse, (substitute your own occupation here)? If so, you have named a finished thing in the minds of those you are speaking to; even if you don't consider yourself a finished "teacher", say, others who are not teachers have a fixed idea of what a teacher is and they pin their fixed concept on you when you say, "I am a teacher." any form of the verb "to be" pins a fixed reality on whatever it identifies, does it not? He is a nurse. Pinned! She is a secretary. Pinned! He is a writer. Pinned!

[page 128] People deceive themselves in a terrible way about themselves when they believe they can point to something absolute that determines a sort of special perfection in their case. In man everything not in the process of becoming evidences an imperfection.

Korzybski used the term "semantic reaction" to refer to the problems created in a human being by the misuse of words, such as using the verb "to be" as an identifier. "Is" is a word which freezes *becoming* into *being*, the butterfly stuck through with a pin on a piece of cardboard. Pinned! Want to improve your social interactions? Quit using "is" "was" and other forms of "to be" as an identifying verb. Instead of pinning yourself by saying what you are, say what you do, e. g. I teach grade schoolers. I nurse old people back to health. I arrest law-breakers and help bring them to justice. I change jobs every few years. To label oneself with an occupational title is to identify oneself with a map which is ever fixed, never in the process of becoming, and thus evinces an imperfection. How many people are unaware of this imperfection, up until now?

The map, with its now obvious aspects of imperfection when applied to human beings, is an achievement of the intellectual soul which is our heritage from the time of the 4th PAE(1), and is being supplanted by the consciousness soul during our present 5th PAE. What is the consciousness soul? Ever heard anyone say, "Things can't be just black or white?" That person was speaking from his consciousness soul, rightly understood.

[page 155] Every conception characterized by the idea of mere duality — a good and an evil principle — will always fail to illuminate life. Life can be illuminated only when we represent it from the point of view of a trinity, in which one element represents a state of balance and the two others represent the opposite poles, between which the state of balance tends to move continually like a pendulum. This is the reason for the Trinity we undertake to represent in our Group(2); the Representative of Man balancing Ahriman and Lucifer, which is to constitute the middle point of this building.

The evolved soul level of each epoch nests inside of each other like the links of a telescope, ready to appear when the telescope must be extended. As we are in the fifth epoch, our intellectual soul influences from the fourth epoch are yet strong in us, while our consciousness soul of the fifth epoch is developing, and even now traces of our spiritual soul are forming inside of us. When the choice between two evils seems necessary, our consciousness soul can rise up to help us find a way of balancing or moving between the two alternatives as a healthy third option.

[page 155] This consciousness of a state of balance for which one strives, but that is always in danger of swinging toward the one or the other side, must become the essential element in the world conception of this fifth post-Atlantean epoch. As man passes through the stage of the consciousness soul, he develops toward the spirit self. This epoch of the evolution of the consciousness soul will continue for a long time. But within reality things do not proceed in such a way that one always follows the other in a beautiful scheme. On the contrary, one is telescoped in a way into the other. While we are developing in ever stronger measure the consciousness soul, there is always waiting in the background the spirit self that will then develop during the sixth post-Atlantean epoch just as strongly as the consciousness soul during this fifth epoch. Just as strongly as the consciousness soul works antisocially in its development, will the spirit self work socially.

Have we seen traces of this sixth epoch in our lives? Yes, during the 1960's when the "Dawning of the Age of Aquarius" was a theme brought forward by the hippies and immortalized in the lyrics(3), "harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abound . . ." — this was our preview of the sixth epoch which will come at the time of our entrance into the time when the Sun will finally rise in constellation of Aquarius, the Water-Bear, on the Vernal Equinox about a millennium and a half from now. Not surprising, according to Steiner, that 1960's premature dawning of the sixth epoch was fraught with all kinds of esoteric mumbo-jumbo, hippie communes, psychedelic art, androgynous clothing, etc.

[page 155, 156] Thus we may say that, during this epoch, man develops from the innermost impelling forces of his soul what is antisocial, but behind this something spiritually social exerts its influence. This spiritually social element that is exerting its influence in the background will appear in its essential nature when the light of the spirit self shall dawn in the sixth post-Atlantean epoch. It is not surprising therefore, that in this fifth post-Atlantean epoch what can enter livingly and in a well-ordered way into humanity only during the sixth epoch appears in all sorts of abstruse, extreme forms.

Even after the hippie communes disappeared, other extreme form of social communities rose up and disappeared ignominiously, such happened with much loss of life in Jonestown and Waco. Steiner voiced this warning to us in 1918, but it was ignored by many, up until now.

[page 156] During this fifth epoch, social life must be regulated through the fostering of spiritual science. Every effort to regulate social life outside the sphere of spiritual science will lead only to chaos and radicalism, bringing about unhappiness for humanity.

Only with the advent of the sixth epoch will humans be able to transcend their animalistic roots. Animalistic behavior is social in animals, but it become anti-social in humans. Human will grow out of this anti-social behavior by the sixth epoch. Only then will the social element dawn with grace and elegance and this hope for the future can shine in us now, even as we struggle through the chaos of our current stage of evolution in the fifth epoch. "Socializing without a science of the spirit and without freedom of thought is an impossibility." (Page 158) It is for each of us to develop our freedom of thought during the current age.

In particular, we must transcend and dissolve our social arrangements that are based solely on blood-lines, inheritance, and family groups.

[page 167] The culture that must come into existence cannot base the social order upon mere blood connections because these blood connections yield only one-seventh of what must be established in the culture of humanity. The other six-sevenths must be added through the Christ impulse: In the fifth epoch, one; in the sixth epoch, the second; in the seventh epoch, the third. The rest stretch out into the following periods of time. For this reason there must gradually develop in humanity what is connected with the true Christ impulse, and what is related to the mere Jehovah impulse must be superseded.

Steiner foresaw the ills of the future that President Wilson was creating with his 14 Points, which suggested dividing up of the map of Europe without regard to the blood-lines of many ethnic groups. For example, one need only look at the bloody battles which accompanied the subsequent splitting up of the artificial country of Yugoslavia near the end of the twentieth century, resulting in the restoration of separate countries for each ethnic group. The period of re-adjustment was nothing if not tumultuous. It was a noble gesture on Wilson's part, but according to Steiner's definition of "evil", it was a "good out of its time", a good that would require a much closer approach to the sixth epoch.

[page 170] In the future what controls the social life cannot proceed from anything having to do with kinship. On the contrary, only what the soul itself in its own free decision can experience as regulating the social order will be valid. An inner necessity will so guide men that everything that penetrates into the social order out of mere bonds of blood will be eliminated. All such things enter into manifestation at first tumultuously.

An even worse future was foisted upon the people of Russia by the leaders of its so-called revolution. Steiner recognized the lugubrious fate in store for the Russian people. In a sense the goal was for Russia people to have the kind of harmony and understanding which could arrive only during the sixth epoch, the Russian Epoch, but their leaders applied none spiritual science insights required to steer their country safely, instead they applied abstract principles which became subjugated to human avarice and power.

[page 180] It is characterized by the fact that in its present manifestation it has no right relationship to what is in course of preparation as a people in Russia for the coming sixth post-Atlantean epoch. Rather, it is brought in out of abstractions. Thus these more or less illusory ideals of the present Russian revolution are especially significant in connection with a study of this chaotic stirring within humanity in relation to something that is to come later.

Steiner was particularly harsh in his criticism of Trotsky for implementing something in Russia based on wholly abstract constructs. This was very similar to his criticism of President Wilson with his 14 Points.

[page 180, 181] Trotsky . . . is typical of the abstractly thinking man, living entirely in abstraction, appears really to have not the least notion that there is a reality in such a

thing as human social life. Something wholly alien to reality is thought out and is to be implanted into reality.

And now we know that Trotsky's folly hobbled the Russian life and spirit in so many ways for over 70 years, before the people threw off the shackles of Communism. This outcome was envisioned by Steiner only one year after the Russian revolution, "The Russian revolution is certain to suffer shipwreck because of its great illusion and isolation from realities."(Page 193)

Another insight of Rudolf Steiner could be said to predict that the language of the Internet, which would not arrive until 80 years later, would be English. The English language would become the instrument for expressing the consciousness soul and would find its way into every country via becoming the international language of the Internet. Here is how he described the situation.

[page 194] Let us consider the various impelling forces underlying the civilized world in the light of the most important European differentiations that come to expression through language. I have often brought to your attention the fact that the English-speaking peoples possess the real germinal potentiality for the development of the consciousness soul. It is important that we should see this clearly. This is connected with everything that happens to the world, if we may so express the matter, under the influence of the English-speaking peoples. . . . This spiritualized instinct to develop the consciousness soul exists nowhere else in the world as it does among the English people.

With the German-speaking people, which is Steiner's people, he feels a time-wave from future(4) proceeding from the Slavic people to the east over into Russia. His metaphor for the future is heat lightning and for the past shadows. The shadows of its Latin roots fills the Western English-speaking world and the Slavic heat lightning germinates the future for the Central European German world. There is a difference in the way the English and Germans understand the consciousness soul: the English have an instinctive understanding of it; the German needs to be educated to it. (Page 204)

[page 205] This is likewise the reason why the British people are endowed instinctively from the start for politics, whereas the Germans are a non-political people and not in the least endowed for politics. . . . The German folk character is the appearing, the seeming, if you will, the shaping of thoughts, that which is not in a certain sense of the solid earth. In the British folk character all is of the solid earth, but just trace [RJM: a trace of] the intellectuality of the Germans.

Steiner adds later that if the Germans "are expected to be political, they are not equal to a person who thinks politically through his instincts." An English person will claim that something is true, such as Darwinism, and base their thoughts on this statement, "The perfect is derived from the imperfect." On the other hand it is the nature of a German instinctive to claim that this is true and that is true. Steiner came to the understanding that "The perfect existed first and the imperfect comes into existence by decadence." (Page 209) Steiner recognized that both these ways of understanding evolution were true, a way of thinking that he claims comes instinctively to the German folk.

[page 209] The situation in which a thinking person finds himself the moment he must say one thing is true and the other also true — to recognize this situation in its whole fruitful character was really granted to the German peoples alone by reason of their folk character. This is not understood at all anywhere else in the world. It is not at all understood in the world that people can argue for a long time over this question, one maintaining that the perfect beings are derived from the imperfect, as Darwin does, and the other maintaining, as Schelling does, that imperfect beings are derived from the perfect. Both are right, but from different points of view. If we look at the spiritual process, the imperfect is derived from the perfect; if we look at the physical, the perfect is derived from the imperfect.

The Russian people have a unique culture of revelation that works this way. One person receives a revelation that should be received by all the people, but because that revelation is outside the Russian folk character, Russians in general depend on this unique person to receive that revelation for them. (Pag 212) I doubt I would have quite understood what Steiner was getting at if I had not spent a lot of time reading the revelations of a young Russian seer named Anastasia during the past seven years. She has single-handedly changed the way that Russians grow their vegetables; instead of large state-operated farms, they mostly grow vegetables in their dachas in small gardens for their own consumption(5).

I had read elsewhere that if an American does not want to go to a meeting, he *pretends to be* sick, but a Russian does not want to go to a meeting, he *gets* sick. Steiner adds a bit of further insight about the Russian character.

[page 213] When the Russian wishes to become political on the basis of his character, he is more likely to become ill. Among the Russian people becoming "political" mean becoming "ill". It signifies taking destructive forces into oneself. The Russian is anti-political, not merely non-political. . . . He has to do with what constitutes the third element in the sense of Goethe's fairy tale, that is, with knowledge and wisdom that is to dawn upon humanity during the sixth post-Atlantean epoch,

We have learned of the roots of the folk characters of the West, Central, and East, and how they are related to the intellectual soul, consciousness soul, and spiritual soul. It is a big challenge of our times to understand the instinctive soul of one's own folk, and how it differs from the soul of the folk of other lands. They can be drastically different and we need each other to help fully understand the world we live in. What we understand instinctively, they need their intellect to understand, and vice versa for us. As the French like to say about the difference between men and women, we can apply to the important differences between American, English, German, and Slavic-Russian people, "Vive La Difference!"

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----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 1.

The fourth post-Atlantean epoch, which ended around 1453 A. D. and was followed by the fifth epoch we are one-third into, the sixth epoch will come around 3573.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

Footnote 2.

Three figures in heroic size carved in wood by Rudolph Steiner in the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland.

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Footnote 3.

Lyrics by Gerome Ragni, Galt Mac Dermot, James Rado, James Jason Poyser, James Dewitt Yancey, Lonnie Rashid Lynn.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 3.](#)

Footnote 4.

The concept of a *time-wave from the future* came to me as a way to explain how a certain feeling would presage a later event in my life and other's lives. I formulated this concept as Matherne's Rule [No. 36](#), Remember the future. It hums in the present.

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**Footnote 5.**

One can read about her work in the Ringing Cedars Series of books beginning with [Anastasia](#).

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