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THE MYSTERY
of the
TRINITY
and
The MISSION of the SPIRIT



RUDOLF STEINER

"What is theology?" is a question that most of us know the answer to. "The study of religion" or, for the etymological among us, the "science of

God". But if we ask when theology came into being, that's a little harder. Let me make it easy for you and give you Steiner's view on when:

[page 10] . . . theology actually came into being during the time from the fourth and fifth centuries after Christ through the following very dark centuries up to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when it was brought to a certain conclusion through scholasticism.

He goes on to point out that theology as brought into being by St. Augustine, but whose own writings could no longer be understood by theological scholars of the thirteenth century. An evolution of consciousness had overtaken the scholars and Steiner proceeds to carry us, the reader of his lectures (originally the audience of his lectures), back into the mindset of Augustinian contemporaries. This time machine of thought that he uses is nothing other than his anthroposophical spiritual science. It is not like just setting a dial on a fancy mechanical and electronic device, it is more like an intensive study in Steiner's work applied to the idea that is being raised. It is like getting on an elevator that goes to three floors: Floor 1: Imagination, Floor 2: Inspiration, and Floor 3: Intuition. At each floor a different hierarchy of the spiritual world awaits your pleasure to assist you with your task of time travel or mindset travel, whichever you prefer to call it.

[page 11] In the ascent to Imagination, in the entire process of climbing, ascending to imaginative knowledge, we notice more and more that we are dwelling suspended in spiritual processes. This "hovering" in spiritual processes with our entire soul life we experience as if we were coming into contact with beings who do not live on the physical plane. Perceptions from our sense organs cease, and we experience that, to a certain extent, everything that is sense perception disappears. But during the whole process it seems as if we were being helped by beings from a higher world. We come to understand these as the same beings that the old theology had beheld as *angels, archangels, and archai*.

That takes us to Floor 1: Imagination and the third hierarchy of spiritual beings, the *angels, archangels, and archai*. If we continue, we discover behind the sense world a new capacity that we call Inspiration as we reach Floor 2, and the second hierarchy we discover there are variously called *exusiai, dynamis, and kyriotetes* or *Powers, Might, and Dominions*. And finally we reach Floor 3: Intuition.

[page 11] And when we ascend further still, from Inspiration to Intuition, then we come to the first hierarchy, the *thrones, cherubim, and seraphim*. Through immediate spiritual training we can experience the realities what the older theologians actually referred to when they used such terms as first, second, and third hierarchy.

Then along came the Romans with their propensity for the abstract and humanity's perceptions, observations, and insights into spiritual realities were transmogrified into abstract concepts. We owe our present system of law to the Romans and our present system of abstract thinking to the Romans as well. We owe our very idea of a legacy to the Romans - the idea that one's property acquired in life might be passed along to others by the will of the deceased. In other words, that the will of the deceased might outlive their physical body. What if the deceased were a group of men in an ecumenical college gathered together to decide which writings and ideas about the spiritual world were important enough to be passed along to their successors? This did happen during the first millenium after the Christ even, and we, their successors in the 21st Century , with the legacy of understanding and believing in the way that those Romans willed us to some 16 centuries ago. Those who ask, "What is this initiation stuff? I never heard of such foolishness!" speak that way because of this selfsame legacy and would best read the next passage from Rudolf Steiner to understand why the idea of initiation seems so strange to them:

[page 13] "For as long as possible nothing new shall be seen in the spiritual world" -- so decreed this college. "The principle of initiation shall be completely rooted out and destroyed. Only the writings we are now modifying are to survive for posterity."

He goes on to explain that the situation would have been worse than it turned out but for the infusion of the northern peoples about that time, the Goths, Lombards, etc., who brought remnants of old clairvoyance with them.

[page 15] But this old clairvoyance was not related to *inner* perceptions -- to spiritual perceptions, yes -- but rather to spiritual perceptions of things *outer*. The northern peoples did not see the spiritual world from the *inside*, so to speak, as had the southern peoples. The Northerners saw the spiritual world from the *outside*.

What does this mean? Simply stated, they saw the dead walking amongst them. If you want evidence of this consider the historical personality Charlemagne (742-842) or "Charles the Great". What made him "Great" was that he was "larger than life," to use the current vernacular. These two expressions are abstract terms as understood by our 21st Century ear: "Great" and "larger than life", but they were literal descriptive impressions in Charlemagne's time. People saw him leading the Crusades for hundreds of years after his death. To be "larger than life," rightly understood, means to survive one's physical body. Even when we use the word "spirit" as in the "spirit of Charlemagne infused the crusaders," we betray the curse put upon us by that ancient college of Romans who willed that we would thenceforth think abstractly if we do not see Charlemagne as a living spirit riding among the crusaders urging them to victory.

Another example of the living dead were those chosen to be guardians of the Holy Grail.

[page 19] And the Grail legend could never be completely understood without the knowledge of who these guardians of the Grail actually were. To say: "Then the guardians of the Grail weren't real people" would have seemed laughable to the people of that time. For they would have said: Do you who are only shadow figures walking on the earth really believe that you are more real than those who have died and now are gathered around the Grail?

Let us take another look at the three Floors of Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition through a study of plants, animals, and humans. Clearly plants are visible to our physical eye because they contain mineral particles embedded in them; the form into which the physical particles are embedded is the etheric body, so that is what we see. What is an Imagination?

[page 32] We could answer that the plants are all Imaginations, but as Imaginations they are visible only to imaginative consciousness. . . . In a sense we can say of the plant that it nullifies the physical and makes manifest the being of the etheric.

To summarize what Steiner says on pages 32 through 35: the physical body is visible to us in the mineral world. The etheric body is visible to us in the plant kingdom. ["what we see is really the etheric made visible through the agency of the physical."] The astral body is visible to us in the animal kingdom. The "I" or Ego body is visible to us in the human kingdom.

When we move from Imaginations to Inspirations we move from the images of stationary plants to the images of mobile animals. "That infusion of life is what makes a merely imagined concept into an inspired concept."

[page 34,35] When it is a plant that is concerned, you can picture yourself inwardly at rest and merely changing the concepts. But if you want to think a true concept of an animal (most people do not like to do this at all because the concept must become inwardly alive; it wriggles within) then you must take the Inspiration, the inner liveliness, into yourself, it is not enough to externally weave sense perceptions from form to form. You cannot think an animal in its totality without taking this inner liveliness into the concept.

Everyone knows about nightmares. Note the aptness of the word. The compound word is "night" and "mare," a female horse, an animal that comes to you in the night. Nightmares generally have animals in them, and Steiner says, "Animal forms are filled with Inspirations."

So we can grasp the mineral form with sight, the plant form with Imagination, the animal form with Inspiration, and finally the human form with the Floor 3 process, Intuition. When we meet an old friend that we haven't seen for 30 years or more, it is in the eyes that we first recognize each other. External appearances may change, but the eyes never change. The eyes, as "windows to the soul", are the way that we identify the "I" of each other when all other appearances have changed. The "I" is the window to the soul. No wonder people who don't want to be recognized among friends wear dark glasses. No wonder one who is lying will not look you directly in the eyes. In a human we see the "I", "while invisibly within are astral body, etheric body, and physical body." (page 36)

Under ordinary conditions it is not possible to see the etheric body of a human being, but when one sweats the etheric body comes into external manifestation. One would not read Paracelsus' views on sweating correctly if one interpreted him as speaking only of drops of perspiration on the outside of the body.

[page 38] But you see, Imagination is required in order to relate the process of sweating to the whole human being. Paracelsus was one who made this connection. . . . To the observation of the etheric body in the human being it appears that the liver, for instance, sweats, that the stomach sweats -- that every organ sweats and secretes. . . . When Paracelsus spoke about the sweat of the human being he did not say that it is only on the surface. He said rather that sweat permeates the whole human being, that it is his etheric body that is seen when the physical body is allowed to fall away from sight. This inner experience of the etheric body is, as I have said, the life of feeling.

Inspirations can appear to us as animals in dreams. Think of all the fairy tales, myths, and old stories you have heard in which animals appear in various forms. Whenever an animal appears in a myth or an old story, you can be certain that there is an Inspiration from the spiritual world present in the animal. This is a result of the ability of the originators of the tales to see directly into the spiritual world with the process that today we would call clairvoyance, but in their time it was called merely seeing and those who did it best were called "seers."

[page 39] The form of the sphinx, for example, was intended to create a picture of something that had been seen in Inspiration. We are dealing, therefore, with superhuman beings when we speak of animal forms in the purely spiritual world. . . . It was incomplete accordance with this practice when the Holy Spirit was portrayed in the form of a dove by those who had received Inspiration. . . . And how would the contemporaries of the mystery of Golgotha who were endowed with atavistic clairvoyance have characterized the Christ? Perhaps they had seen him outwardly as a man. To see him as a human being in the spiritual world they would have needed Intuition. And people who were able to see his I in the world of Intuition were not present at the time . . . but they could still see him in atavistic Inspiration. They would, then, have used animal imagery, even to express Christ. "Behold the Lamb of God!" was true and correct language for that time.

With the legacy of abstract thought bequeathed us by the Romans, we find ourselves hobbled as far as seeing into the spiritual world directly. Something had to grow up to replace that direct seeing and that is the process we know today as faith. We are faced with the paradox of believing that we can only see the sensory world and have to develop an abstract thought that a spiritual world exists outside of our ken. The Scholastics of the Middle Ages worked tirelessly to convince us logically of this possibility. They were under the heavy influence of the Intellectual Soul Age and their words seems rather hollow now to those of us currently living who are under the influence of the Consciousness Soul Age.

Steiner asks for us, "How are we to understand such images as the dove for the Holy Spirit or the Lamb of God for Christ?" and describes the answer given to us by the Scholastics to this seemingly impossible question, up until now.

[page 43] And out of this impossibility, or rather, out of the faith that was born with the conviction of the impossibility of the human spirit's ever achieving perception of the spiritual worlds through its own powers, there arose the Scholastic doctrine that the human spirit can achieve knowledge of the sense world by its own power, can also reach conclusions directly derived from concepts of the sense world, but that the human being must simply accept as uncomprehended revelation what can be revealed to him of the supersensible world.

In another lecture by Steiner I read earlier, I encountered the idea that Martin Luther, who could yet see into the spiritual world, as evidenced by his conversations with the Devil, was one who bridged the two worlds of direct perception of the spiritual world and acceptance of the existence of the spiritual world by faith. He averred that "man must rely on faith alone" because he saw that humankind was losing its ability to see directly into the spiritual world and faith would be the only path for many for years to come.

Abstract thoughts must be bad, some of you may be thinking, as they seem to remove us from the spiritual world and replace the living spiritual world with flattened out, dead images of what might be which we are asked to take on faith. Rightly understood, however, we could not have become free without our abstract thoughts. We can see it in our children as they grow up. About the same time as they are able to develop abstract thoughts, the thought seems to occur to them that they want to be separate from us, that they have grown tired of accepting on faith what we say is true. If they lack this development and remain under our wings, they will never be free individuals, but always subject to our wills, our volition, instead of their own. The key element in freedom is the development of their I's. So, too, it was in historical times for the human race.

[page 58] That which can be maintained in its full freshness in the human physical, etheric, and astral bodies -- that can only be maintained as long as something from the divine, spiritual nature is flowing into the human being out of the cosmos. But we could never have become free beings if the I had not appeared on the scene, if the divine-spiritual had not ceased to flow into us in the old sense. Human beings only became free

through at the same time achieving mastery of the I within their consciousness. But that was only possible when humanity became involved in the sphere of abstract thoughts. Abstract thoughts are, however, actually the corpses of the spiritual world. . . .When we become able to take hold of abstract thoughts, we take hold of the corpse of our spiritual and soul being as it was before our descent into the earthly world. But a precondition for our taking hold of the corpse of our spiritual and soul being is that something of the dying and paralyzing principle of death must enter our physical body.

Indeed, one can only quake in the face of death if one does not understand that it was a precondition of our coming to Earth in this lifetime, that it was a precondition for our living in freedom while on Earth, and that our every abstract thought is a reminder of that contract we willingly agreed to before coming to Earth.

If you as a parent undertake to chaperone your children everywhere they go, they will be good by your definition as you will have seen to it that they are good. You might say to your friends, "We have good children." and your friends, who have seen your children, how they behave when apart from you, may have a different opinion of how good your children are. Your children may be good when you're around and when you're not, but they will not be free of your influence -- it will be the You in them that is being good, not them. Your children would have extinguished their I-consciousness in order to be the model children you designed them to be, but they would not be free, lacking their own "I". A similar situation happened with Christ's mission on Earth.

[page 66] If Christians had been beings who were merely conscious of the Christ within them, then whenever they wanted to be good they would have had to extinguish their own I consciousness in order to let Christ awaken within them through the extinguishing of their own I-consciousness. They themselves actually would not have been able to be good; it would only have been Christ in them who was good.

This may sound very strange to those in fundamentalist churches today who exhort their flock to become as Christ and do in their life what Christ would do, etc. I hope it does sound strange and evokes not an abhorrence to the idea -- as their pastor would insist -- but rather a curiosity to read on and come to understand more deeply the reason and the good sense behind this idea. To continue Steiner's thoughts from above:

[page 66] That was not the task, the mission, of the divine Son, who had united himself with the evolution of the earth through the mystery of Golgotha. He wanted to live within humanity without clouding the dawning I consciousness of human beings.

Remember what we said above about what happens when you look at a human being? You don't see the physical body, the etheric body, or the astral body, you see the "I" as the prominent visible body of the four bodies of the human being. If Christ had remained physically visible on the Earth, he would have been visible in the "I" of each of us, and we would have been good because Christ was acting in us. Thus it came to be that Christ ascended to the heavens, in other words, came to be invisible to us. Christ removed the possibility of extinguishing our I-consciousness, but sent a spiritual being in his place.

[page 67] The kind of vision that enabled the apostles, the disciples, to behold Christ even after his resurrection -- that kind of vision disappeared. Christ had ascended to the heavens. But he sent to human beings that divine being who does not extinguish I consciousness. This is the being to whom the human being raises himself, not with earthly perception, but with imperceptible spirit. Christ sent humanity the Holy Spirit.

Let us bring to a close my review of these four remarkable lectures on the mystery of the Trinity by a few short quotes in Steiner's words:

[page 68] By sending the Holy Spirit Christ gave humanity the ability to raise itself to an

understanding of the spiritual out of the life of intellect itself.

[page 68] The Father is the unbegotten begetter who places the Son into the physical world. But at the same time the Father uses the Holy Spirit in order to tell humanity that in the spirit, the supersensible is comprehensible, even if this spirit is itself not perceptible but only works inwardly to elevate the merely abstract intellect to the realm of the living. In the spirit the supersensible can be understood when the corpse of thoughts that we have from our prebirth existence is raised to life through the Christ dwelling within us.

[page 69] The divine principle working as Christianity within evolving humanity cannot be understood without the Trinity. If, in the place of the Trinity, some other teaching concerning God were to enter, then basically speaking it would not be a fully Christian teaching. One must understand the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit if one would understand the teaching concerning God concretely and in a genuine way.



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