

The Lectures of Rudolf Steiner

Anthroposophy and Christianity

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I'd like to ask your forgiveness, first of all, for being unable to speak to you tonight in your native language. But friends who have been attending my lectures to members of the Anthroposophical Society this week have assured me that it would be all right to speak to you on a spiritual scientific subject in German.

The local members have also suggested the underlying theme of this evening's talk; I am to speak on the relationship of spiritual science — or anthroposophy, as it may also be called — to Christianity. In order to do so, I must first say something about the nature and significance of what is meant by spiritual science, about the point of view from which I shall be speaking.

This spiritual science is not trying to found either a new religion or a new religious sect of any kind. It hopes to be able to fulfill the tasks required spiritually of our contemporary culture.

Several hundred years ago, the dawning of the modern scientific age signified an advance in human cultural life which can be compared to the steps we must now take in mankind's development if further progress is to be made. Natural science opened the modern age for mankind through the knowledge of external physical laws. Spiritual science should play a similar role in the present and near future in recognizing the laws of the realms of soul and spirit and applying them to ethical, social, and all other aspects of cultural life.

Although it is still misunderstood and misrepresented — and understandably so — it can trust the power and effectiveness of its truth when it considers the course of natural science at the beginning of the modern age. Natural scientists, too, had to face prejudices hundreds and even thousands of years old. But truth possesses powers which always help it to victory against any hostile forces.

Now that we have mentioned the trust the spiritual scientist has in the truth and effectiveness of his work, let us turn to the nature of that research which is the basis for this spiritual science.

The spiritual scientist's way of looking at things is wholly in keeping with the methods of natural science. However, it must certainly be clear that since spiritual science covers an entirely different field from the external sense-perceptible field covered by natural science, researching the spiritual realm requires a fundamental modification of the natural scientific approach. The methods of spiritual science are in keeping with those of natural science in the sense that any unprejudiced person trained in natural science can accept the premises of spiritual science. However, as long as the natural scientific method is conceived one-sidedly, as all too often happens today, then prejudice will be heaped upon prejudice when it comes to applying the natural scientific approach to spiritual life. Granted, natural scientific logic must be applied to what most concerns man but which is most difficult to investigate for that very reason. Granted, this way of thinking must be applied to the very being of man himself. Granted, in spiritual science man must examine his own nature, making use of

the only tool that he has at his disposal — himself. The premise of spiritual science is that in becoming an instrument of investigation into the spiritual world, man has to undergo a transformation that enables him to look into the spiritual world, something he cannot do in ordinary life.

I'd like to start with a comparison from natural science, not to prove anything but just to make it clear how the spiritual scientific way of looking at things rests entirely on the premises of natural scientific thinking. Let us take water as an example drawn from nature. Suppose we are looking at the qualities of water as we find it around us. Then along comes the chemist and applies his methods to the water, breaking it down into hydrogen and oxygen. Well, what is he doing to the water? As you all know, water doesn't burn. The chemist takes hydrogen out of the water, and hydrogen is a gas that burns. No one just looking at water can tell that it contains hydrogen and oxygen, which have totally different properties from water.

As spiritual science shows, it is equally impossible for us to see the inner qualities of another person. Just as the chemist can split water into hydrogen and oxygen, the spiritual scientist, by means of an inner process which must be prepared in the soul's very depths, is able to distinguish between the external physical and soul-spiritual aspects of what confronts him outwardly as a human being. He is interested initially in examining, from the spiritual scientific viewpoint, the soul-spiritual aspect as something separate from the bodily nature. No one can discern the real facts of the soul-spiritual from looking at the merely external bodily nature, any more than the nature of hydrogen can be discerned without first extracting it from water.

Nowadays it very often happens that as soon as one begins to say this sort of thing one hears: "This conflicts with monism, which must be adhered to at all costs." Well, monism can't keep even chemists from splitting water into two parts. It's no argument against monism when something that can actually happen *does* happen — for instance, when the soul-spiritual is recognized as distinct from the bodily nature by applying the methods of spiritual research.

These methods, however, cannot be applied in laboratories or hospitals, but are processes that have to take place in the soul itself. They are not miraculous qualities; they are faculties which we possess to a certain degree in daily life. But they have to be infinitely heightened if we are to become spiritual researchers.

I don't want to beat around the bush with all kinds of general statements, so I'll come right to the point. We are all familiar with the soul capacity known as memory, and are aware of how much depends on it. Imagine waking up some morning with no idea of where we've been and who we are. We would lose everything that makes us human. Our memory, which has possessed inner coherence ever since early childhood, is essential to our life as human beings. The study of memory leaves contemporary philosophers perplexed. There are already some among them who go so far as to turn away from the monistic-materialistic view when it comes to looking at memory. In precise research they find that, although sensory perception (if one may refer to an activity of soul in this way) is superficially bound to the body, it will never be possible to say that memory is bound to the body at all. I am just calling this to your attention. Even the French philosopher Bergson, a man who certainly shows no tendency to delve into anthroposophy, has pointed to the spiritual nature of memory.

How do memory and the power of recall actually confront us? Events long past enter our soul as images. Although the events themselves may lie far in the past, our soul is actively involved in conjuring them up from the depths of our inner life. And what emerges from these depths can be compared with the original experience, though in contrast to the images provided by our sensory

perceptions memories are pale. However, they are closely connected with the integrity of our soul life. And without memory, we would not find our way in the world. But memory is built upon the power to recall, through which the soul can conjure up what is hidden in its memories.

This is where spiritual science comes in. Please note that it is not memory as such, but the power of summoning up a mental content from the soul's depths, which can be infinitely strengthened. Then this power can be used not only for conjuring up past experiences but for quite other purposes as well. Methods of spiritual research are not founded upon any external procedures applicable in laboratories or upon anything perceptible to external senses, but rather upon intensive soul processes which anyone can undergo. What makes these processes valuable is the boundless heightening of our attentiveness or, in other words, the concentration of our thought life.

What is this concentration of thought life?

This evening I have only a short hour to speak, so I'll just be able to touch on the principles of the topic under discussion. You can find the details in my books, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment*, *Occult Science — an Outline*, and *The Threshold of the Spiritual World*. Let me outline the basic soul activities which represent a boundless heightening of the attentiveness necessary for human life. Only this heightening makes spiritual research possible.

What activity does a person usually engage in when he confronts his surroundings? He perceives things; he applies his brain-bound thinking to them and forms mental images about them. As a rule he does nothing further with these images. But methods of spiritual science, based upon the concentration of thinking, begin just where our everyday mental activity leaves off. Anyone wanting to become a spiritual researcher must carry on from this point.

We must choose mental images which we ourselves can form for ourselves in detail and bring them into our field of consciousness. These should preferably be symbolic images that do not need to correspond with the external world. We must place these images, taken from the practice of spiritual science or suggested to us by the spiritual researcher, at the center of our full consciousness, so that for a longer period we turn our attention away from everything external, concentrating on a single image. Whereas we usually move on from one mental image to another, in this case we marshal all our soul forces, concentrate them on one chosen image, and devote ourselves totally to this image. A person observed in this activity seems to be engaged in something resembling sleep (although it is in fact radically different). For if such concentration is to be fruitful, that person must indeed become in some respects like a sleeper.

Just before we fall asleep, we feel how the will forces in our limbs quiet down, how a kind of twilight settles around us, how the activity of the senses ebbs away. Then we lose consciousness. In concentration, as in sleep, our senses must be wholly shut off from all impressions of the outer world; the eye should see as little, the ear hear as little as in sleep, and so on. Then the whole soul life is focused on a single mental image. This is what makes concentration radically different from sleep. In fact, it could be called fully conscious sleeping. Whereas in sleep the darkness of unconsciousness floods the soul, the aspiring spiritual researcher lives in a heightened state of soul activity. He mobilizes all the strengths of his soul and focuses them on the chosen image. The point here is not that we observe the mental image; it rather gives us the opportunity to pull our soul forces together and channel them. That's the important thing, because in this way we gradually succeed in wresting our soul-spiritual being free from our bodily nature. Again I refer you to my books for the details.

What I've just explained cannot be achieved all at once. Most people, even those who are not distracted by the demands of daily life, have to work for years on such concentration exercises; it is impossible to keep at them for more than a few minutes at a time, or for more than a fraction of an hour at most. We must repeat them again and again until we really succeed in strengthening the powers that otherwise slumber in everyday life (but are nevertheless there) so that they become effective in us to the point of freeing our soul-spiritual being from our bodily nature.

Let me share facts with you rather than talk abstractions, and say at once that if the spiritual researcher succeeds, by persevering energetically and devotedly in his exercises, in reaping the fruits of his efforts, then he arrives at an experience of what could be called purely inner consciousness. From then on, he can make sense of a statement that previously meant nothing to him: "I know that I am outside my body; in grasping and experiencing my inner being, I am outside my body."

I'd like to describe this experience to you in detail. We notice first of all that the power of thinking, which is usually active only in the affairs of daily life, frees itself from the body. To begin with, this experience is faint, but it makes its appearance in such a way that, having had it, we know it for what it is. Only when we return to our body and have submerged ourselves in the life of the brain, manifested in physical substance, do we realize what resistance the brain offers. We are aware that we use the brain as an instrument for ordinary thinking; but now we know that we have been outside it. We gradually learn to make sense of the statement, "You are experiencing yourself in the soul-spiritual element." We experience our head as though clothed in its thoughts. We know what it means to have separated our soul-spiritual element from our external bodily nature. First we get to know the resistance that bodily life puts up, and then to know life independent of the body. It is just as if hydrogen were to become aware of itself outside of the watery element. That is the case with a person who does exercises of this kind. And if he continues to do them faithfully, the great and significant moment comes when real spiritual research begins — a profoundly shattering moment that has far-reaching consequences for our entire existence. This moment can occur in thousands of different ways, but I will characterize it in the way it most typically comes about.

If we have carried on these exercises for a certain period of time, training our souls in conformity with the natural scientific approach, then that moment finally comes, either during waking life or in a sleep from which we awaken to realize that we are not dreaming but experiencing a brand new reality. The experience can be such, for example, that we say, "What is going on around me? It is as though my surroundings were receding from me, as though the natural elements were striking like lightning and destroying my body, and I nevertheless maintained myself, unlike this body." We come to know what seers throughout the ages have always pictured as "reaching the gates of death." This image brings home to us the true soul-spiritual state of man when he is living purely in the soul-spiritual element, instead of perceiving himself and the world through the instrument of his body (and this we experience only through the image; the reality is met only in death).

The shattering thing is to know that we have released ourselves from our body with our thinking capacity. And other forces can be similarly released so that we become ever richer and more inward as regards our soul life.

But the one exercise that I have characterized as concentration or as an unbounded heightening of attentiveness is not enough. We achieve the following result with this exercise: When we have arrived at the point where the soul experiences itself, images that we can call real imaginations make their appearance. Images rise up, but they are vastly different from those of our ordinary memory. Whereas ordinary memory contains only images of external experiences, these images arising now from the grey depths of our soul have nothing in common with anything that can be experienced in the outer world of the senses. Objections that we might easily be deceiving ourselves, that what thus

arises from these grey depths of soul may merely be reminiscences produced by memory, don't hold up. For the spiritual researcher learns to distinguish exactly between what memory can summon up and something radically different from the content of memory.

We must keep one thing in mind, however, when talking about this moment of entering the spiritual world: namely, that people who suffer from visions, hallucinations, or other such pathological conditions are not well suited to spiritual research. The less a person tends in that direction, which is a mere reflection of ordinary experience, the more safely and certainly he advances in the field of spiritual research. A large part of the preparation for spiritual research consists in learning to distinguish exactly between something that arises in an unconscious and pathological manner from within, and the new element which can make its appearance as spiritual reality following a spiritual scientific schooling of our soul.

I'd like to mention a radical difference between visionary or hallucinatory experiences and what the spiritual researcher perceives. Why is it that so many people believe themselves to be already in the spiritual world, when they are only having hallucinations and visions? How unwilling people are to learn anything really new! They cling to the old and familiar. These sick soul-figments appear to us in hallucinations and visions in basically the same way as external sensory reality. They are simply there, confronting us; we do nothing to make them appear. The spiritual researcher is not in the same situation with regard to his new spiritual surroundings. I've told you how he has to concentrate and refine all the forces of his soul that are usually asleep. This requires him to exert a strength and energy of soul not present in external life. He must constantly hold on to this strength when he enters the spiritual world. It is characteristic of hallucinations and visions that a person remains passive; he doesn't need to exert himself. However, as soon as we become passive toward the spiritual world for even a moment, everything disappears. We have to stay with it and to be continuously active. That is why we cannot be mistaken, since nothing of the spiritual world can appear to us in the way a vision or hallucination does. We must be fully active in confronting every least detail of what appears to us out of the spiritual world, so that we grasp what we are facing. This uninterrupted activity is vital for true spiritual research. But only then do we enter a world radically different from the world of the senses, a world where spiritual actualities and beings surround us.

But another thing is still needed: Wresting the soul free of the body happens as described. This further need, however, can again be explained with a scientific comparison. When we extract hydrogen, it remains separate at first, but then it combines with other substances, becoming something quite different. The same thing must happen to our soul-spiritual being after its separation from the body. This being must link itself up with beings not of the sensory world. It must unite with them and thus perceive them.

The first stage of spiritual research is separation of the soul-spiritual from the bodily nature. The second is entering into relationship with beings that work behind the scenes of the sensory world. To say this is held against one nowadays, even more so than any vague talk of "spirit" in general. Many people today feel the urge to acknowledge the existence of something spiritual; they speak of a spirit behind the world order and are perfectly satisfied to be pantheists. But as the spiritual researcher sees it, pantheism is just like taking someone out into nature and remarking, "Look, all this around you is nature," instead of saying, "Those are trees, clouds; that's a lily, that's a rose." Leading a person from one experience of nature to another, from one being to the next, and saying, "All this is nature," is to tell him nothing. The facts must be presented concretely and in detail. It is acceptable today to speak of an all-pervading spirit, but the spiritual researcher cannot rest content with that. After all, he is entering a realm of spirit beings and spiritual realities which are differentiated, just as the external world is concretely differentiated into clouds, mountains, valleys, trees, flowers, and so

on. But although we differentiate natural phenomena into plant, animal and human kingdoms, it is not acceptable today to speak of concrete details and facts encountered upon entering the spiritual world. The spiritual researcher cannot help but point out that entering the spiritual world means entering a world of real, concrete spiritual beings and events.

Another exercise we need to do is to intensify our feeling of devotion — devotion felt in everyday life and in life's special moments as religious reverence. This devotion must be boundlessly heightened and developed, so that a person can reach the stage of giving himself devoutly over to the stream of cosmic events, as he does in sleep. In contemplation or meditation, he must forget about any bodily movement, again as he does in sleep.

This is the second exercise, and it must alternate with the first. The person doing the exercise forgets his body so completely that he not only stops thinking about it but can even shut out all stirrings of feeling and will, just as in sleep he shuts out all awareness of bodily stirrings. But this condition must be brought about consciously. Adding this exercise in devotion to the first, he will succeed in making himself at home in the spiritual world with the help of his awakening spiritual senses, just as he finds his way into his physical surroundings with the help of his external senses.

A new world now dawns before him, a world that is always inhabited by his soul-spiritual being. A reality becomes apparent to his inner observation — a reality still rejected by current prejudices, although it is just as much a fact of strictly scientific research as our modern evolutionary theory. I am referring to the fact that he comes to know the soul-spiritual core of his being in such a way that he realizes: "Before I was conceived and born into this life which clothed me in a body, I existed as a soul-spiritual being in a spiritual realm. When I pass through the gates of death, my body will fall away. But what I have come to know as the soul-spiritual core of my being, which can live outside my body, will pass through the gates of death. From then on, it lives in a spiritual world."

In other words, we come to recognize the immortality of the soul already in this life between birth and death. We become familiar with something we know to be independent of the body and with the world that the human soul enters after death. We come to know this soul-spiritual core in such a way that we can describe it with scientific clarity.

Observing a plant, we see how the seed germinates, how leaves and blossoms develop, and how the fruit forms, producing new seed. We realize how its life culminates in this seed. Leaves and blossoms drop off, but the seed remains, bearing the promise of a new plant. We become aware that the seed, the essential part of a new plant, is already living in the plant we are observing. As we look at life between birth and death, we thus come to recognize that something develops in the soul-spiritual element that passes through the gates of death and is, moreover, the germ and essential core of a new life. The soul-spiritual core of our being, which is hidden in everyday life but reveals itself to spiritual science, carries the potential for a new human life just as certainly as a plant seed has the potential to become a new plant. Looking at things in this way, we arrive at the realization of repeated earth-lives in full harmony with the natural scientific approach. We know that the sum total of man's life consists not only of the life between birth and death but also of the life running its course between death and rebirth, from which man then embarks upon a new incarnation.

The only possible objection to what I've just said is that the germinating seed could perish if conditions didn't foster the development of a new plant. Spiritual science meets this objection by pointing out that, though the plant seed in its dependence on outer conditions may perish, there is nothing in the spiritual world to hinder the gradual ripening of the core of the human soul as it prepares for a new life on earth. In other words, the core of the human soul which matures during

one earth-life will appear again in a further life on earth. I can only indicate briefly how the spiritual researcher, faithful to natural scientific methods of investigation, comes to this view of repeated earth-lives.

People have accused spiritual science of being Buddhistic because it speaks of reincarnation. Spiritual science certainly does not draw what it has to say from Buddhism; it is firmly founded on the premises and principles of modern natural science. But spiritual science widens modern natural science to cover the life of the spirit without even taking Buddhism into account. Spiritual science can't help acknowledging the truth of reincarnation. It can't change the fact that in ancient times Buddhism spoke out of old traditions about repeated earth-lives.

I'd like to mention in this connection that Lessing's mature thinking, deepened by experience, led him to speak about reincarnation. At the end of a long working life, Lessing wrote his treatise on the education of the human race, in which he advanced the idea of repeated earth-lives. He said somewhat as follows: "Is this teaching to be rejected just because it appears at the dawn of human culture, before any scholarly prejudice could cloud it?" Lessing refused to be swayed by the fact that this teaching was a product of ancient times, a teaching that was later pushed into the background by scholarly prejudice. Spiritual science also doesn't need to shy away from it simply because it appears in Buddhistic doctrine. That is certainly no reason to accuse spiritual science of Buddhistic leanings.

Spiritual science recognizes the truth of repeated earth-lives out of its own sources, and it points us to our connection with the totality of human life through the ages. For the souls living in us have been here many times before, and will return again and again. Let us look back on early cultural epochs — for instance, to the time when people lifted their eyes to the pyramids. We know that our souls were already living at that time and that they will appear again in the future; they take part in every epoch.

It is still perfectly understandable today that people have a bias against such teachings. There are also people who take everything the way they want to see it. They know that Lessing was a great man, but it makes them uncomfortable to know that he acknowledged the truth of reincarnation at the height of his career. So they say, "Oh, well, Lessing was getting senile in his old age." That makes people more comfortable than to think that we have each been part of every civilization that ever existed on the earth.

Now, how does spiritual science want to introduce the facts I've just explained into contemporary culture? Why, no differently than natural science presents its findings, although this means that spiritual science is subject to the same prejudices as the initial findings based on the modern natural scientific approach. Just think of Copernicus, Galileo, or Giordano Bruno. What happened when Copernicus claimed that the earth didn't stand still, but revolved around the sun, and that the sun actually stood still in relation to the earth? How did people react? They thought that religion was at stake, that people's religious piety was jeopardized by this advance in knowledge.

It took the Church until the nineteenth century to remove the teachings of Copernicus from the Index and to integrate them into its doctrine. In every age advances in thought have had to fight against old prejudices. This young spiritual knowledge wants to make itself felt in human culture today in the same way as the new natural scientific knowledge did in its day. Spiritual science wants to emphasize the fact that mankind is ready to acquire knowledge of the spirit, just as in the achievements of Copernicus, Galileo, and Giordano Bruno the need for a new science of nature was made evident at a time when mankind was ready for it.

In his day, even Nicholas Copernicus, a canon of the Church, was accused of not being a Christian. And now it is easy in certain respects to accuse spiritual science of being unchristian. When this happens, I always think of a priest who, on becoming rector of his university, delivered a lecture about Galileo. He spoke somewhat as follows: "In those days people had religious prejudices against Copernicus. But a truly religious person knows that God's glory and light are not dimmed when we consciously penetrate the secrets of the universe. He knows that the grandeur of our view of God has in fact only increased as a result of extending our knowledge beyond the realm of the senses to calculate the course of the stars and the particular characteristics of the heavenly bodies."

A truly religious person can grasp that religion is only enriched and deepened by scientific knowledge. Spiritual science doesn't want to have anything to do with founding a new religion or to give rise to prophets or founders of sects. Mankind has matured; the time for prophets and founding religions is over. And in future people who feel the urge to be prophets will suffer a different fate from the prophets of old, who, in accordance with the ways of their times, were rightly revered as outstanding individuals. People of today who try to be prophets in the old sense will simply be laughed at. Spiritual science doesn't need any prophets because by its very nature it bases what it has to say upon the depths of the human soul, depths which our souls cannot always illuminate. And the spiritual scientist simply wants to investigate his subject as an unassuming researcher, drawing attention to vital matters. He says, "I've discovered it; you can discover it for yourself, too, if you try." It won't take long until the spiritual investigator is recognized as a researcher just like any chemist or biologist. The difference is that the spiritual researcher does his research in a field of concern to every human soul.

Tonight I could only sketch the activity of the research done in this field. But if you study the matter in more detail, you will find that it addresses the most vital questions of the human soul, questions concerning the nature of man and his destiny. Both are questions which can stir human beings to their depths every hour of every day; they give us strength for our work. And because the concerns of spiritual science deal with the depths of the human soul, it is only natural that it should grip us and unite with our inmost self, thereby deepening and enhancing our religious feeling to an unusual degree.

Spiritual science does not want to usurp the place of Christianity; on the contrary it would like to be instrumental in making Christianity understood. Thus it becomes clear to us through spiritual science that the being whom we call Christ is to be recognized as the center of life on earth, that the Christian religion is the ultimate religion for the earth's whole future. Spiritual science shows us particularly that the pre-Christian religions outgrow their one-sidedness and come together in the Christian faith. It is not the desire of spiritual science to set something else in the place of Christianity; rather it wants to contribute to a deeper, more heartfelt understanding of Christianity.

Can it be said that when Copernicus was arriving at his concept of the solar system in the peace and quiet of his study, he wanted to reshape the order of nature? It would be mad to say anything of the sort. Nature stayed as it was, but people learned to think about nature in a way that accorded with the new view of the world. I've taken the liberty of calling a book on Christianity that I wrote many years ago *Christianity as Mystical Fact*. No one used to mulling over what he presents to the world would choose such a title without weighing it carefully. Why, then, did I choose it? Only in order to show that Christianity is not a mere doctrine to be interpreted this way or that; it has entered the world as a fact that can only be understood spiritually. Nature didn't change because of Copernicus, nor does the truth of Christianity change when spiritual science is used as a tool for understanding it more completely than was possible in times gone by.

I've taken more time than was intended, but perhaps you will let me draw your attention to one concrete aspect of Christian spiritual research. Studying ancient pre-Christian cultures from the viewpoint of the spiritual researcher, we find that they all had mystery places which were simultaneously centers of religion, art, and science. Although the exoteric cultures of earlier times did not allow people to delve into the spiritual world by means of the spiritual scientific methods I have described, it was possible for certain individuals to be admitted into the mysteries as pupils or candidates for initiation. The art of the mysteries helped them to achieve what I have just been describing — namely, withdrawing from the physical body and developing a body-free soul life. And what came of it? The achieving of this body-free soul life enabled them to experience the spiritual world and the pivotal event in man's evolutionary history, the Christ Event.

Exoteric scholarship pays far too little attention to the role played by these pupils of the mysteries, although this is not for lack of available material on the subject.

Let me mention a symptomatic instance. St. Augustine said that there have been Christians not only since Christ's appearance on earth, but even before His coming. Anyone saying that today would be accused of heresy. A Church Father could say it, however, and that was indeed St. Augustine's opinion. Why did this Christian teacher state such a thing? We get a sense of why he said it when we see in reading Plato, for instance, how he prized the mysteries and how he speaks of their significance for the whole life and being of mankind. Some words of Plato that seem harsh have come down to us. He said that human souls live in muddy swamps after death if they have not been initiated into the holy mysteries. Plato spoke out of his conviction that the human soul is essentially of a spiritual nature, and that he who withdraws his soul from the physical body as a result of initiation can behold the spiritual world. A person who has not worked his way into the mysteries seems to Plato to be cut off from his true being. The crucial point is that in ancient times the mysteries were the only way to leave the world of the senses and gain entry into the world of the spirit. So it was that those who were recognized as schooled in the mysteries, men like Heraclitus and Plato, were called "Christians" by the Church Fathers because the mysteries had taught them to see the spiritual world.

That, however, is no longer the case. The relationship of the human soul to the spiritual world is tremendously different today than it was in pre-Christian times. What I have been describing tonight about what every soul can undertake for itself to succeed in entering the spiritual world has been possible only since the founding of Christianity. Since then, every soul who applies the methods set forth in the books mentioned above can ascend to the spiritual world through a process of self-education. In pre-Christian times the mysteries and the authoritative guidance of teachers were essential; there was no such thing as self-initiation then. And when spiritual science is asked what brought about this change, the reply based on its research must be that it was brought about by the Mystery of Golgotha ^[1]. The founding of Christianity has introduced to mankind a reality that can only be researched spiritually. Christ Himself could be found previously in the realm of the spirit only by a person who had learned in the mysteries to withdraw from his body. He can be found since the Christ Event by every human soul willing to make the effort. What the mysteries once introduced to human souls dwells since the Mystery of Golgotha in every human soul, shared by all alike.

How is this to be understood?

Those who were recognized as schooled in the mysteries, men like Heraclitus and Plato, were called "Christians" by the Church Fathers because the mysteries had taught them to see into the spiritual world. Spiritual science shows that while Jesus was living in the way the Gospels tell of it, there came a moment in His life — the baptism in the Jordan — when Jesus was transformed. A Being not there before entered into Him and lived within Him for the next three years. The Being that

thus entered Him went through the Mystery of Golgotha. This is not the time to go into detail concerning the Mystery of Golgotha, but spiritual science, from its fully scientific point of view, confirms what the Gospels relate. Through the Event on Golgotha the Being Who could previously be experienced only in spiritual heights united with earthly humanity. Since the time He passed through death on Golgotha, Christ lives in all human souls alike. He is the source of strength whereby every soul can find its way into the spiritual world. Human souls on earth have been transformed by the Mystery of Golgotha. The Christ came, as He said, "from above," but He has taken up His earthly abode in our human world.

Spiritual science is reproached for saying that Jesus was not always the Christ, but that Christ's life on earth began only when Jesus was thirty years old. Prejudiced humanity confronts spiritual science with one superficiality after another. The mere stating of the fact instantly invites prejudice. And the same holds true of almost everything that our opponents say regarding the position spiritual science takes on Christianity.

Don't we all agree that a child only begins to remember around his third year? Does this mean that what lives in him now was not already present before then? When we speak of Christ's entering into Jesus, are we thereby denying that Christ had been related to Jesus from birth on? We would not deny this any more than we would deny that the child has a soul before the soul becomes aware of itself during the third year of life. If we understood rightly what spiritual science had to say, we would not oppose it.

Anthroposophy is further reproached for making Christ a cosmic being; however, it only widens our earthly way of looking at things beyond merely terrestrial concerns into the far reaches of the universe. Thus our knowledge can embrace the universe spiritually, just as Copernicus, with his knowledge, embraced the external world. The need spiritual science feels to encompass what is most holy to it is simply due to a feeling that is religious and deeply scientific at the same time. Before Copernicus, people determined the movements of the stars on the basis of what they saw. Since Copernicus, they have learned to draw conclusions independent of their sensory perception. Is spiritual science to be blamed for doing the same with respect to the spiritual concerns of mankind? Up until now, people regarded Christianity and the life of Christ Jesus in the only way open to them. Spiritual science would like to widen their view to include cosmic spiritual reality as well. It adds what it has researched to what was known before about the Christ. It recognizes in Christ an eternal Being Who, unlike other human beings, entered once only into a physical body and is henceforth united with all human souls.

Those persons who make Christianity the basis for battling against spiritual science commit a peculiar error. Just inquire of spiritual science whether it opposes what it finds in Christianity! It affirms everything Christianity stands for and then adds something more to it. But to suppress what spiritual science has to add is not to insist on Christianity but rather to insist on a narrow view of it. In other words, it means to behave just like those who condemned Copernicus, Galileo, and Giordano Bruno. It is easy to see the logical error at the root of this argument. People come along and say, "You talk of a cosmic Christ living in the far reaches of the universe; this makes you a Gnostic." This is the same kind of error that we fall into if a person says to us, "I've just been given money by someone who owed me thirty crowns. But he gave me forty, because he was lending me ten in addition." If we now insist that the man hasn't paid his debt because he returned forty crowns instead of thirty, we're talking nonsense, aren't we? If people reproach the spokesmen of spiritual science with the remark, "You are not only saying what we say about the Christ, but you add to it," they don't notice what a monstrous mistake they've made; they are not speaking truly objectively, but out of strong emotion. Let people argue whether or not the findings of spiritual science about

Christianity mean anything to them. That depends on what people think they need. Of course it would be possible for us to reject Copernicus, Galileo, or Giordano Bruno. But we cannot claim that spiritual science has less to offer on the subject of Christianity or that it is hostile to it.

And there's something else that must be added here when the relationship of spiritual science to Christianity is discussed. Mankind changes as each individual goes from life to life in succeeding epochs. Our souls incarnated in times before Christ united with the earth, and they will continue to be reborn into further earth-lives in which the Christ is joined with the earth. From now on, Christ lives in each human soul. If our souls acquire ever greater depth as they live through successive earth-lives, they become increasingly independent and inwardly ever more free. Therefore they need fresh means of understanding ancient wisdom and need to continue making progress out of this inner freedom. It must be stated that spiritual science confidently proclaims these ancient Christian truths in a new form because it has understood the depth, truth and significance of Christianity. Let those who insist on clinging to their prejudices believe that spiritual science undermines Christianity. Anyone familiar with modern culture will find that it is precisely those people who cannot be old-fashioned Christians who have been convinced of the truth of Christianity by spiritual science. For what it has to say about Christianity can be said by spiritual science to every human soul, since the Christ of Whom it speaks can be found by every human soul within itself. But spiritual science can also say that it sees Christ as the Being that once really entered into human souls and into the earth-world through the fact of the Mystery of Golgotha. Faith has nothing to fear from knowledge, for the elements of faith, raised to the level of the spirit, need not shun the light of knowledge. Thus spiritual science will win those souls for Christianity who could not be won by speaking to them like a prophet or as a founder of a sect, but instead they need to be addressed by an unassuming scientist who draws their attention to what can be found in the field of spiritual science and who sets the strings in every human soul vibrating in harmony.

Anyone can become a researcher in the field of the spirit; you can find the ways described in the books mentioned earlier. But it is also true that a person who is not a researcher in this field can be permeated by the truth if he lets it work upon him without bias. Otherwise, he won't be able to free himself from prejudices. All truth resides in the human soul. Not everybody may be able to achieve the seer's view of spiritual truth, but the more our thinking is freed from sensory realms, the more fully it can follow the spiritual scientist as he draws our attention to his findings along spiritual paths. He only wants to make us aware that there are truths that can spring to life in every soul because they are already dormant in it.

Before closing I'd like to point out how spiritual science fits into our cultural life today. Spiritual science is in full agreement with the natural scientific way of seeing and thinking about things. It wants to present itself to culture in the same way that the loyal canon Copernicus and Galileo and Giordano Bruno presented themselves in their times.


Let's think for a moment of Giordano Bruno — what did he really do? Before he appeared on the scene and spoke words so significant for human evolution, people gazed into the skies and talked of the heavenly spheres in the way they thought they saw them. They spoke of the blue vault of the heavens as the boundary of the universe. Copernicus, Galileo, and Giordano Bruno had the courage to break through sensory appearances and to establish a new way of thinking. What was Giordano Bruno actually saying to his listeners? He said, "Look at the firmament, the blue vault of the heavens. The limitations of your knowledge have created it. That is as far as your eyes see; it is your eyes that create this boundary." Giordano Bruno extended their view beyond these limits. He felt it permissible to point out that everlasting starry worlds were embedded in the vastnesses of space.

What is the task of the spiritual researcher? Let me try to express it in terms of recent spiritual evolution. The researcher must point to a sort of "firmament of time," to birth and death as the boundaries of human life. He maintains that the exoteric viewpoint sees birth and death as a "firmament of time" because of the limitations of human understanding and perceptive capacity. Like Giordano Bruno, the spiritual researcher must point out that this "time firmament" doesn't really exist, but that people think it does simply because of their limited way of seeing. Giordano Bruno pointed beyond the supposed limits of space to endless worlds embedded in its vast expanses. The spiritual scientist must similarly explain that behind the supposed boundaries of birth and death there stretches never-ending time, in which the eternity of the human soul, the eternal being of man as it passes from life to life, is embedded. Spiritual science is in complete harmony with the impulses that brought about these changes in natural science.

May I be allowed to draw attention once again to the fact that spiritual science has no desire to found a religion of any kind; rather does it want to set a more religious mood of soul-life and to lead us to the Christ as the Being at the center of religious life. It brings about a deepened religious awareness. Anyone who fears that spiritual science could destroy his religious awareness resembles a person — if I may use this analogy — who might have approached Columbus before he set sail for America and asked, "What do you want to discover America for? The sun comes up so beautifully here in our good old Europe. How do we know if the sun also rises in America, warming people and shining on the earth?" Anyone familiar with the laws of physical reality would have known that the sun shines on all continents. But anyone fearing for Christianity is like the person described as fearing the discovery of a new continent because he thinks the sun might not shine there. He who truly bears the Christ-Sun in his soul knows that the Christ-Sun shines on every continent. And regardless of what may still be discovered, either in realms of nature or in realms of spirit, the "America of the spirit" will never be discovered unless truly religious life turns with a sense of belonging toward the Christ-Sun as the center of our existence on the earth, unless that Sun shines — warming, illumining, and enkindling our human souls. Only a person whose religious feeling is weak would fear that it could die or waste away because of some new discovery. But a person strong in his genuine feeling for the Christ will not be afraid that knowledge might undermine his faith.

Spiritual science lives in this conviction. It speaks out of this conviction to contemporary culture. It knows that truly religious thinking and feeling cannot be endangered by research of any kind, but that only weak religious sentiment has anything to fear. Spiritual science knows that we can trust our sense for truth. Through the shattering events in his soul life which he has experienced objectively, the spiritual researcher knows what lives in the depths of the human soul. Through his investigations he has come to have confidence in the human soul and has seen that it is most intimately related to the truth. As a result, he believes — signs of the times to the contrary — in the ultimate victory of spiritual science. And he counts on the truth-loving and genuinely religious life of the human soul to bring about this victory.

Notes

1.  Translator's note: Steiner is referring here to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

Source: <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/19140713a01.html>



