

II. The Question of Christian Ethics

Rudolf Steiner was asked: ‘How can we defend Anthroposophy?’ He answered: *For the defence of whatever has been done on the grounds of the anthroposophically oriented spiritual movement we need do no more than speak the truth and not lie!* He obviously sensed a certain unbelieving attitude among his listeners because he added: *I know this, this can be affirmed. No other defence at all is necessary for anthroposophically oriented spiritual science because it is the duty of every human being to reject what is untrue* (Dec. 20, 1918, GA 186).

If this answer were to be given today, in a time that – compared to the first third of the century – is entirely overgrown by the lie, it would be met with hardly more than a wistful smile. ‘For’, some anthroposophists would say, ‘if that were the case, we would have to give up all hope for Anthroposophy’. Another might add: ‘There are certain circles who started off by saying the same as you (i.e. the author). Now they lie more than all the others’. And a third would possibly ask: ‘What is truth?’

I remember saying in the course of a difficult conversation with a long-established Dornacher, that we had hoped to find brothers and sisters there. Instead of a reply he only had an ironic smile and everything was mirrored in it – scepticism, personal disappointment and an almost Mephistophelean irony towards the ‘simpleton’ from Moscow. It was as if he wanted to say: ‘Oh, you naïve person, you seem to have fallen straight out of heaven. If only you knew what our life here is like!’ I saw that bitter experience and necessity had forced this person to adapt to everything and become ‘as all are’. A problem as old as the world with always the same solution! And yet we from the former Soviet Union have something to counter it. Occasionally we ask: How then can it be that at home, under far more difficult circumstances than you find here, we still did not live ‘as all do’? What is at stake for you compared to what we stood to lose? – When asked this question some prefer to withdraw in order to avoid a conversation that is becoming embarrassing. Others seek to evade the issue with a compliment to the effect that we, the Russians, are after all stronger than Western anthroposophists and that the salvation of the Society and society as a whole would possibly come from us etc.

And yet the experiences we brought from the Soviet period are indeed valuable. They belong to the sort of exceptions that prove superior to the rule. If we look deeper we have to agree that it is just this exception that keeps the world alive. In our totalitarian, bloody past we did not fear the masses but only the single individual. Is it not strange? – After living through this experience it became clear to us: No, it is not at all strange!

And here an example from French history. Joan of Arc came dangerously close to the positions of the ‘Godones’ (how the French named the English at the time, because they always heard their ‘God damn it’) and called across to them: *In the name of God I tell you: surrender!* Scornful laughter, insults and affronts are thrown at her. Sir William Glasdal, leader of the ‘Godones’, behaves no better. Joan calls out to him: *Glassidas! Glassidas! Surrender to the heavenly King! You call me a ‘whore’, but I pity your soul and those who belong to you!*¹

The world’s ‘practical’ and ‘pragmatic’ people cannot fathom speeches of this kind. They have experience of a world that considers only their own speech and activity as right. But, what a miracle! Suddenly experience no longer works. It is the ‘miserable whore’ who is right. The English are forced to withdraw from France and the whole history of Europe takes an entirely new turn.

Another example: *Do not live with the lie!* – Alexander Solzhenitsyn exhorted in *The Imperium of Evil* and of the lie, where one risked one’s head for the truth. And again, as once before the walls of Orléans, scorn, ridicule and insults rang out. But soon they had lost their self-confidence, their triumph, and only the fear was to be heard that people would sooner or later make this simple demand the rule of their life. They might take it into their souls in order to rid Russia of its ‘Godones’.

If we are not indifferent to historical experience we should ask ourselves: what keeps these exceptions alive? Where is the source of their strength? – It is there, whence *all things were created* (John 1;3). There is to be found the archetypal phenomenon of this ‘law of exceptions’ by virtue of which the truth, seemingly scattered to the four winds and ever again suppressed by the lie, emerges victorious in the end.

¹ *Glassidas! Glassidas! Rend-t’y, rend-t’y au Roi des Cieux. Tu m’as appelée putain ... J’ai grande pitié de ton âme et de celle des tiens; Glassidas.*

Under the compulsion of ‘world-historic’ illusion this is not easy to recognize. Even the numerous examples from the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles appear to us like fairy-tales, unreal, though we do not always dare to admit it. The fear that we must also take upon ourselves the task of unmasking evil if we want to be like Christ in our life² keeps us back. Here we must clearly distinguish the concepts of **unmasking** and **criticism**. Criticism is based on rejecting the one and simultaneously agreeing to another. It is not only destructive, it can also be very creative. Unavoidably, however, the human being appears in the role of a judge. Many situations in life call for this role. Unmasking on the other hand is a means whereby secret and unrecognized evil and vice are brought to light.

Rudolf Steiner once spoke of the human being meeting an unknown being in the spiritual world. He has to ask this being to reveal to him its true countenance. If the being is evil it will simply disappear. Something similar also happens in the physical world. People with secret, evil intentions conceal their true nature. For this reason the law **that everyone reveal himself openly** should hold in the Anthroposophical Society (AS), an institution concerned with esotericism. It has nothing whatever to do with interfering in an individual’s personal life, it concerns only those things he does in community with others.

The circumstance that this principle is knowingly trampled underfoot leads us to suspect that the Society has become a means of concealing something unknown. **Such a situation needs to be unmasked not only for ethical reasons but also because of the occult laws of the new Christian Initiation.** I would even say that it is one of the most essential demands of anthroposophical life, namely the maxim: *to live Anthroposophy*.

The realization of this principle proves to be extremely difficult, however. Fear is the greatest obstacle. The opposing forces, having a great deal to hide from us, see to it that fear is ever present in us and enters flesh and blood. But the feeling of fear, so Rudolf Steiner says, is always the real expression of Ahri-man’s presence in us.

In his utopian novel *Invitation to a Beheading* Vladimir Nabokov describes a future condition of human society where it is utterly **improper** to grasp events – i.e. have access to one’s own ‘I’. This faculty is there described as perceptive

² Rudolf Steiner recommended to anthroposophists the works of Thomas à Kempis.

villainy, but we should beware of falling into utopias ourselves by promoting our fear and the bad intentions of others.

Let us try for a moment to be completely honest with ourselves and in this mood to turn to some scenes from the Gospels. Jesus is invited to eat with a Pharisee. While they are sitting at table, a woman enters the house *and starts to wet his feet with her tears and dry them with her hair. The Pharisee said to himself: if he were a seer he would have to recognize what kind of woman this is that touches him. He should see that she is a sinner.* Jesus recognized the thoughts of the host and said: *I came to your house and you did not wash my feet, you did not kiss me, you did not anoint my head with oil, but she has washed my feet with her tears, etc.* (Luke 7; 36-46).

If without prejudice we tried now in imagination to place this scene in our own time we would have to say out of the attitude and conceptions of today: Christ has no tact! He was invited as a guest and ought to have shown appreciation towards the master of the house. He should not have spoken thus, especially since the latter only thought and did not speak.

Indeed, this is what we would have to say if we could summon up the courage to think our opportunism through to its ultimate conclusion. We arrive at this horrendous paradox, because our conception of Christian ethics has become hopelessly confused and we are paralyzed by fear for our own well-being. **It is this fear that, under the veil of decency, makes us refrain from naming the deeds that destroy anthroposophical life in its nature.**

We are not concerned here with petty nagging or dubious ‘courage’, to show up people’s shortcomings, but with fundamental questions of the spiritual development of humanity that allow no room for compromise.

The impulses of a deeply esoteric Christianity are active – or at least should be – through the Anthroposophical Society and therefore not only Christ’s teaching, but His actions also, form the basis of our ethics. Christ’s actions were in harmony with His words. He preached love but did not demand that white should be called black in the name of love. *Christ neither hates nor unjustly loves,* says Rudolf Steiner (June 10, 1915, GA 157). Here lies the key to an understanding of all those passages in the Gospels where Christ becomes the accuser.

The scribes and Pharisees ask Christ to give them a sign. He answers: *An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign* (Matthew 12:39). And He pronounced to the people and his disciples: *The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat ... but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all of their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad ... They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplace ... But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in ... Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? ... For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence ... For you are like whited sepulchres* (Matthew 23:2-27).

When during a lecture he was giving in the Goetheanum an anthroposophist from the East touched on questions that it would be of the utmost importance to discuss but which are veiled in a cloak of silence, we could afterwards hear the audience call out: 'Rebel! Rebel!' It would be interesting to know what these anthroposophists would have said as members of the nation against whom Christ brought His accusations. And what might have been expected of them if they had been witness to this scene: *Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves* (Matthew 21:12)?

Of course the scene has an esoteric meaning; but it also took place outwardly.

So long as we shut ourselves off from such pictures because we do not grasp the ethical content hidden in the Lord's answer to the question asked by Peter: *Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? – I do not say seven times, but seventy times seven* (Matthew 18; 22), we will be forced, even with regards to matters of the greatest importance – the scene where Christ announces: *If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink, whereupon there was a division among the people because of him* (John 7:37-43): to ask, following again the 'evil' logic of opportunism, 'why does He aggravate the situation, why is He destroying harmony? Was Lucifer possibly involved?'

Such a view of things appears paradoxical only because we are looking at those events from a distance of two thousand years. But we should also ask: from where did the people of the time when Christ was among them, receive the strength and understanding that enabled them not to turn away from him? (Granted – some had already turned away.) It is just this force of which we speak. The age-old trial of the soul is repeated to this day every time a human being is forced to represent the cause of Christ under conditions that are new to him.

The archetypes of those events have remained the same. As then, the word resounds for us today with the same unaltered force: *No-one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God* (Luke 9; 62). Behind our backs are concentrated all varieties of atavistic occultism, the entire 'collegiate' of vices that Moses already called his people to fight against.

It is probity towards the kingdom of God that led Peter and other Disciples of Christ and showed them the way. Let us observe its activity quite openly. Saint Stephen proclaimed in all forthrightness before the Sanhedrin: *Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you have become the betrayers and the murderers now. How does the 'audience' react to his words? – When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth* (Acts 7;52-54).

Paul enters the synagogue of Antioch and proclaims to the 'men of Israel': *God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus ... Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish* (Acts 13; 33 and 40).

Assuming that something similar were to take place in the present day, would it not immediately be interpreted as disrespect or even affront of another religion? In anthroposophical circles would not everyone turn away from such a person and call him a fault-finder, a 'rebel'? Not one anthroposophical book or magazine publisher would print a single line he wrote. We would have to assume that, if today the New Testament were to be published in our circles for the first time,³ it would only be possible in *Samizdat*!⁴

³ We are obviously aware that this would be the case in any Christian faith.

We should not only see what is paradoxical here. On the contrary, we **must** arrive at this conclusion if we think through everything that makes up the everyday life of the Society and movement. If we wish to avoid these absurd conclusions, we must change the way we act and bring it into harmony with Christian ethics. It means for example, that if in a college of teachers of a Waldorf school some ‘greenhorn’ not able to distinguish between freedom of action and action out of personal wilfulness, or an insane ‘elder’ explains that he is in favour of Waldorf pedagogy but opposed to Anthroposophy and therefore prohibits the use of the word ‘Anthroposophy’ in the teachers’ conferences, someone has to get up and put these ‘modernizers’ into their place without worrying about their ‘freedom’ or the consequences for his own career.

If, proceeding from Christian ethics, we look into Rudolf Steiner’s biography the same ‘style’ of behaviour as in the New Testament is shown in his actions. And we are no longer surprised about the enormous difficulties this created for him.

When he took a stand for Dreyfus he was called a Zionist. But when, as he wrote himself, he commented *purely out of spiritual-historic insight, in complete objectivity*, without any personal evaluation, on the polemic unleashed in the press by Hamerling’s *Homunculus*, the man in whose house he lived and whose children he tutored said: *What you write about the Jews cannot at all be interpreted in a friendly sense* (GA 28, chapter 13). It caused discord in the relationship with the family with which Rudolf Steiner had had a close friendship for many years (it was resolved later).⁵ Rudolf Steiner did not in the name of friendship compromise over a question that even then heralded the approach of great social catastrophes. His attitude in these matters was also for the good of his friends, but this became apparent only much later (but not to everyone – it is veiled for some ‘anthroposophists’ to this day).

⁴ *Samizdat* (Russian) – (prohibited) literature published in private printing in the Soviet Union; printing and distribution were at great personal risk for all involved (Publisher’s Note).

⁵ *To all this was added* – Rudolf Steiner writes –, *that many of my friends had adopted an anti-Semitic nuance in their understanding of Judaism out of the national conflicts of the time. They did not look with sympathy towards my position in a Jewish household; and the master of this house found only confirmation of the impressions that he had received through my essay in the friendly relations with such personalities* (GA 28, chapter 13).

Rudolf Steiner made visible the secret background of the First World War. Not a few anthroposophists interpreted this as German nationalism. The world press called him first an agent of the Entente, then of Bolshevism. Even Edouard Schuré allowed himself to be carried away by nationalistic frenzy. After the war it turned out that Rudolf Steiner had been profoundly right in his statements. Schuré later repented his temporary failure. (To this day there are ‘anthroposophists’ who are unable to overcome their ‘frenzied’ state regarding this question.)

When Rudolf Steiner began to develop the themes of *historic symptomatology* and *karma of untruthfulness* he was faced with an outright opposition within the Society, and it is certainly possible that the main thrust of this opposition is still to come.

It is now apparent that courage is certainly needed if we wish to follow the principles of Christian ethics, which encounter opposition everywhere because they contain a life-renewing character. These ethics are supported by a clear consciousness, are positive through and through, but compromises with evil are alien to it. It is like love – **we can only follow it if we do not expect a reward**. Man can become a truly ethical being only out of pure love for truth and justice. If an ethical person rejects something he is motivated by neither antipathy nor hatred. We find wonderful examples of such conduct in the New Testament also; reference to them, however, grows increasingly difficult, even in anthroposophical circles. – The bad translations and theology are partly to blame, but we should not lend too much weight to this aspect of the problem.

Anthroposophists read Rudolf Steiner’s commentaries on the Gospels. These do not want to replace them, but help us find a deeper relation to the texts of the Gospels; a relation that is built on the level of the **consciousness-soul**. It then becomes apparent that Christ and the apostles and prophets preach the ethical individualism to which the *Philosophy of Freedom* points the way, and this cannot be otherwise when we understand that, **with Anthroposophy, Christianity moves from the stage of preparation to the stage of its realization**.

In our time is not enough merely to seek the truth. Truth must also be realized today. We have to fight for the cause of Christ on earth but follow the principles of Christian ethics unconditionally. There are many Pharisees and Sadducees and scribes, not only in the outer world but also among anthroposophists. They extol the Christ in the loftiest terms and speak of His return but on closer ex-

amination give the impression that for them He did not live on earth the first time. How can one put a stop to their floods of empty words that poison everything around? We know one way: we must not allow either the dogmatizing or the profanation of Anthroposophy and must recognize its task ever anew in the changing conditions of the present. We must live through the tragedy of our time with a concerned and often pain-filled heart. Then we will learn to distinguish the liar from one who speaks the truth. And yet something else is needed: we must overcome the fear that lames our will, in other words – the overpowering force of Ahriman.

Fear and indifference sometimes also take hold of the spiritual researcher and drive him to the abyss of existence. Those who already carry this ‘companion’ within have difficulty ridding themselves of it because – figuratively speaking – it can pull a sack over our head. We came to recognize this through the realization that something is forcing us to dance around an issue that we should have understood and left behind long ago.

Leafing through catalogues of anthroposophical publishers and programmes of various conferences and seminars – what is not to be found there! ‘Social hygiene’, ‘social organics’, ‘social aesthetics’, ‘social understanding’, analyses of the crisis of civilization and much more besides. But it seems that, almost as though by agreement, no-one addresses the concrete reasons, the occult-political background of the evil that increasingly takes hold. We limit ourselves to general formulae such as: Ahriman exists, he is cunning etc. and then go on to report on the individual manifestations of decline. **The essential link in the chain, developed by Rudolf Steiner in his historical symptomatology, is omitted.** Today the problem can be stated as follows: either we devote ourselves in all conscientiousness to work with it or we must accept that the following applies to us:

*You are no more,
Than a brief, lying picture
Formed by your own illusion* (Strader, 1st Mystery Drama).

We will be forced to admit, with all the consequences reaching into life after death, indeed into the next incarnation and beyond: that we must not play cat and mouse with Ahriman – the existence of humanity is at stake.

Our century is sociological through and through, today all relationships and problems are reduced to the social level. **If they are not resolved in these manifestations they are not resolved at all.** Here lies the tremendous importance of social understanding which is not possible without spiritual science. Knowledge of history and of cultural history is required too. It is often asking too much of an individual to achieve all this alone, we must help each other. Maybe the true spiritual brotherhood of human beings united in spiritual knowledge and a quite concrete, in no way abstract, concern for the destiny of humanity and of Anthroposophy will arise in this way.

As the reader will readily understand, the principles of Christian ethics when viewed in this light do not contradict the spiritually appropriate action that was summed up in the guiding verse of a certain anthroposophical group: *When I am truly still, God works within me – when I truly act, I rest within myself.*

Spiritual-scientific knowledge is also the path of individual development. We acquire knowledge in order to learn how to think, feel and act differently. The latter requires the greatest effort. **But if we strive to know ourselves without at the same time wanting to become a different person, we squander our forces and will only do harm to ourselves.**

The condition of rest is attained on different paths. A person can be tranquil, out of indifference to the surrounding world and the cares of others – in short: an egoist. Another kind of rest is transmitted by eastern occult practices under the influence of Lucifer. We can come to rest through false mysticism, through renunciation of knowledge or by placing ourselves beyond good and evil. The inner rest we can acquire on the path of Spiritual Science is the more correct and at the same time the most strenuous. It is a stable condition controlled by our ‘I’, making the secret of good and evil accessible to understanding and allowing the heart forces to be active. It is clear that this condition does not come of itself and certainly not from the beginning. An imperturbable calm of soul has to be won over the course of years, sometimes even decades, through suffering.

We must add a few words on the personal attitude of the author. After publishing the brochure *Voice from the East*⁶ he was asked by several anthroposophists whether he had not been led by feelings of antipathy. In all conscience I de-

⁶ *Stimme aus dem Osten*, Moskau-Basel-Verlag, 1992.

clare: no, I had not. When I wrote of my concern for the soul-development of those whose behaviour contradicts divine as well as human law, it was indeed not hypocrisy. When a Russian expresses himself emotionally it does not necessarily mean that he bears a grudge in his heart. At times it is just this concern for people close to us that causes us to treat them somewhat more sternly.

Now, should we approach evil with force? – This is one of the questions in the ethical cosmos of the Russian person. Rudolf Steiner says that I can satisfy the demand of someone begging for my last shirt only under certain social conditions. **Under the present conditions** it is advisable to think about what the ingenious, famous Russian philosopher and dissident Alexander Zinoviev writes in his essay *The Ivan-Gospel*⁷: *it is a sin not to confront violence ... but it is an even greater sin to remain indifferent in the face of violence. Do not forget that silent thought is already a deed. It is just out of the invisible thought of protest that the mighty field of force of protest arises without which a visible deed is unthinkable. Already by your thinking you contribute a quantum of force to the common cause of the defence of man.*⁸

Anyone who wishes to ‘fight against the enemy’ should turn to politics. A Christian occultist cannot allow himself to have personal enemies. But if someone considers him an enemy, he will send him his blessings. Humanity is One. Whoever understands this and fights for the interests of humanity will think of the friends as well as the enemies of humanity’s true interests. This is the principle of Christian ethics.

⁷ Cf. the magazine *Voprosy filosofii* (*Questions of Philosophy*), No. 11.

⁸ This Russian ‘Max Stirner’ also says much that is contradictory. Sometimes he speaks utter nonsense in interviews; but these shortcomings should not obscure what is fruitful in his world of ideas – we have to be able to separate the essential from the non-essential in his statements.