

INTRODUCTION

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I. CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD, ENGAGING STEINER

In the late 1970s, at a salon at an elegant Park Avenue apartment, Christopher Bamford, the invited speaker, set out to recount the highlights of the history of Western esotericism. The guests were delighted by Christopher's knowledge and his enthusiasm for his subject, but as sometimes happens with Christopher, his knowledge overwhelmed his purpose. After two hours, the talk that was intended to range from ancient Greek philosophy to nineteenth century European Romanticism was still focused on the genius of Pythagoras. On that day, which might be considered the informal launch of Christopher's career as a scholar and exponent of Western esotericism, he did not "get to" Pseudo-Dionysius, Angelus Silesius, Celtic Christianity, Russian Sophiology, Novalis, or Rilke.

On subsequent occasions, especially for the Lindisfarne Association, he did "get to" those and other contributors to the Western esoteric tradition. With the late William Irwin (Bill) Thompson, founder and, for several decades, president of the Lindisfarne Association, Chris was one of the leaders of this distinguished fellowship that met annually for a week of talks at Zen Center in Crestone, Colorado, and later at Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico. At meetings with Wendell Berry, Jane Hirshfield, Amory Lovins, Lynne Margulis, David Spengler, Robert A. F. Thurman, and Arthur Zajonc, among other luminaries, Chris was a frequent, admired speaker on a wide range of esoteric topics.

Early in the storied history of the Lindisfarne Association, Chris founded and directed Lindisfarne Press to publish the works of

visionary spiritual and esoteric authors. In the 1980s, Chris was named editor in chief of Anthroposophic Press, later named Steinerbooks. Fortunately for both publishers, Chris joined Lindisfarne to Steinerbooks. Initially, Chris worked closely with the director of the press, Michael Dobson. From 2002 until 2018, he worked seamlessly with the next director, the late Gene Gollogly. Together, they published hundreds of titles, wide-ranging and high quality. John Scott Legg has assumed the role of editorial director. Mary Giddens has been the primary designer, and William (Jens) Jensen a copy-editor and designer. Stephan O'Reilly fulfills orders from around the world as well as numerous other essential functions. These four faithfully serve Steinerbooks, Rudolf Steiner, and Anthroposophy.

During the past thirty years, in collaboration with Rudolf Steiner Press, Steinerbooks has published handsome (actually, gorgeous) new editions of *The Collected Works of Rudolf Steiner*—eventually intended to include new translations of all 354 volumes in the German editions. Gene Gollogly often recognized Christopher as the ideal person to write the introductions, many of which are included in the present volume. My announcement to anthroposophic friends that I had proposed to John Scott that I was eager to edit and write an introduction for this volume has been greeted unanimously by a simple reply: *Yes, of course, great idea*. It is also true that whereas I thought I was the first to have the idea for this volume, it is not so, not at all. Many readers of Chris's introductions have proposed the same idea but apparently not to the publisher. Clearly, this is a book that has been begging to come into being. Early in the process I recognized that Jens Jensen, who worked closely with Chris on these introductions, would be the ideal compiler; I am grateful that he agreed.

In addition to his celebrated introductions to the *Collected Works of Rudolf Steiner*, Chris is also the author or editor of a half-dozen books that are distinctly his—i.e., books that he conceived and edited. His introductions to four of these books are included in

the present volume; they are compilations of Steiner's writings, but they are not included in *Collected Works*. Note these four important books in five years:

- 1999 *Staying Connected: How to Continue Your Relationships with Those Who Have Died. Selected Talks and Meditations by Rudolf Steiner*
- 2001 *Spiritualism, Madame Blavatsky, and Theosophy: An Eyewitness View of Occult History*
- 2003 *Isis Mary Sophia: Her Mission and Ours: Selected Lectures and Writings by Rudolf Steiner*
- 2004 *Start Now! A Book of Soul and Spiritual Exercises*

Additionally, beginning in the late 1970s (as mentioned), Chris worked intermittently for two decades on a history of Western esotericism. This study and writing enabled him to bring wide and deep knowledge of esotericism to his work as editor in chief of Anthroposophic Press/Steinerbooks and Lindisfarne Books. Further, serving as editor of these two imprints enabled him to add chapters to his history, published in 2003 as *An Endless Trace: The Passionate Pursuit of Wisdom in the West*. Although Rudolf Steiner is prominent in the first chapter of this learned, elegant history, and both Steiner and Own Barfield are prominent in the thirteenth (of fifteen) chapters, *An Endless Trace* is not focused explicitly on Rudolf Steiner or Anthroposophy. If not explicit, how might it be implicitly anthroposophic? The best answer to that question might be another book by Chris that is similarly not explicitly anthroposophic: *The Voice of the Eagle: The Heart of Celtic Christianity. John Scotus Eriugena's Homily on the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John* (2003). Including *Endless Trace* and *Voice of the Eagle*, that's six books in five years.

The depth of Chris's affinity with Christian mysticism and esotericism is evident in *The Voice of the Eagle*, a book well praised by Bruno Barnhart, Jacob Needleman, Bernard McGinn, and in a beautiful as well as accurate foreword by Thomas Moore, who writes:

Christopher Bamford, whose translation [from Latin] of Eriugena offers a brilliant clarity and beauty, places this wonderfully daring and cautious theology in the context of the Irish sensibility, where the veil between the holy and the ordinary is thinner than elsewhere on Earth....

With genuine enthusiasm, then, I recommend a close reading of this extraordinary book. Christopher Bamford has put it together with such care for detail that he and his Irish ancestor really mirror each other. In this light, the book has a fascinating form, as intricate as a musical composition. I don't know anyone else in the world who could have done it with such brilliance.... I recommend that the reader pick it up as one would approach the work of a true artist—for form as well as substance, and for inspiration as well as understanding. (pp. 9, 15)

To answer the question as to how Chris has been able to understand and explain the writings of Rudolf Steiner with depth and facility, I would submit Tom Moore's felicitous reference to the thin veil between the holy and the ordinary. Chris did not travel to Ireland physically, but he did drink deeply of Celtic spirituality. Bruno Barnhart, a Benedictine monk who was prior of the monastery eleven miles south of Esalen Institute, wrote that Chris's *Voice of the Eagle* "will be cherished by anyone who is thirsty for the water of wisdom." Chris was spiritually thirsty, and karmically found the deep well of Steiner's anthroposophic wisdom. His role as editor of Steinerbooks and primary author of introductions to Steiner's *Collected Works*, has the sure stamp of karma. Whatever the sources and route, Chris arrived in the exact right circumstance to edit and introduce the writings of Rudolf Steiner, and to do so generously and brilliantly.

Chris insists that the purpose of his introductions is to lead the reader to and through Steiner's text. It is nevertheless true that, if anecdotal evidence can be generalized, many who purchase these volumes read only Chris's introductions. As he explains in the foreword to the present volume, in all his introductions he sought to serve as an "I" to Steiner as a "Thou." As countless readers have

noticed, Chris's introductions are about Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophy, and the volumes in hand, and not about Chris Bamford. How non-contemporary!

The introductions for which Chris is justly prized reveal a deep personal—intellectual, spiritual, karmic—relationship with Rudolf Steiner. Without such a relationship these introductions would not exhibit such obvious depth and authority. They provide the reader access to Rudolf Steiner's sources, context, and intentions. Chris's success in these introductions is due to a steady avoidance of common flaws: they are thorough but not overwhelmed by detail and tangents; literary but not flowery; scholarly but not pedantic. Perhaps most remarkable, his introductions are reverent but neither boastful nor possessive; he shows Steiner's importance but does not hold Steiner so close that the reader would be forced to access Steiner with Chris attached, and perhaps in the way.

Chris's introductions show the many dimensions of Steiner's life, thought, practice, and legacy. They reveal, for example, that Steiner was both profoundly Christian and not limited to Christianity (at least not the Christianity available during his lifetime). For Chris as well as for Steiner, Christianity is to be understood in the context of the evolution of consciousness. More specifically, they both write of Christ in the spiritual world before the incarnation of Christ in the first century. They focus on the human figure of Jesus, the divine Christ, and on the astonishing relationship between them. While it is not untrue to say that Steiner was a Christian, it would be truer to say that he advances Christianity in the light of his esoteric research. More specifically, Steiner's purpose was to lead his audiences and readers to Christ. Similarly, with a deep Celtic and Russian Sophianic Christian sensibility, Chris's encounter with Steiner's Christology provides him with a spiritual path and career of service.

While Steiner states repeatedly that Christ is the essential center of Christianity, he also describes his experience of other high spiritual beings, including Sophia, Michael the Archangel, and

Christian Rosenkreutz. With his lifelong schooling in esoteric and mystical teachings and practice, Chris has been able to enter the mysteries that Steiner has revealed in hundreds of lectures. As his veil is always thin, he can see into Steiner's ideas, just as Steiner, with the thinnest of thin veils, was able to see actual spiritual beings, including several who serve and two who oppose the evolution of human consciousness.

Steiner asserts that the evolution of consciousness will advance by the evolution of thinking, particularly thinking suffused with love. He taught and exemplified a way of thinking that joins the soul to the universe, including especially to spiritual beings in relation to human souls. Humanity has evolved, and presumably (but not necessarily) will continue to evolve, in collaboration with beings such as Krishna, Buddha, Sophia, and the Archangel Michael, each of whom is distinct from Christ with their own tasks and are simultaneously one with Christ. Even the tempters, Lucifer and Ahriman, in providing obstacles in the way of human evolution toward freedom and love, ultimately serve Christ. Chris understands and explains without diminishing these profound mysteries.

Except for Bede Griffiths, a Catholic monk who lived in an ashram in south India for several decades, very few Christian thinkers affirm a close relationship between Krishna of the Bhagavad Gita and Christ. Steiner exemplified as well as taught the yogas of the Gita: knowledge, love and action—or in his terminology, thinking, feeling, and willing. There are also differences. As Chris explains repeatedly, Steiner was a thinker and teacher whose concerns and insights were not at all limited to, or even especially focused on, ancient revelations. While he researched the past, his mission was concerned primarily with the present and future. He was deeply involved in his time, in early twentieth-century Europe, an heir of Goethe and German Idealism, Marx's sociopolitical economics, and Blavatsky's "lifting the veil of Isis." He was a leader in contemporary

art and aesthetics, a keen observer of the first global war, and a prophet of the remaining decades of the twentieth century.

Steiner's life and teachings also serve as a model of the Eightfold Path and the Three Jewels as taught by Buddha. As Buddha was and is the first Jewel of Buddhism, Steiner is the first Jewel of Anthroposophy. In Chris's introductions, Steiner is the necessary and the primary spiritual and esoteric teacher for the present time. In Steiner's life and mission, these two disciplines—spirituality and esotericism—are totally integrated. Steiner's spirituality is rooted in love of Christ and in service to Anthroposophia. His esotericism is rooted in the Christian-Rosicrucian tradition and in service to Christian Rosenkreutz, the esoteric teacher whom Steiner traces from the fourteenth century to the present.

The titles of the six sections in this book reveal the range of the esoteric tradition from which Steiner issues and that he advances. Chris himself is a scholar of esotericism who knows the source and significance of profound secrets including: the mission of Christian Rosenkreutz and Rosicrucianism; Isis-Mary-Sophia; Michael the Archangel; the history of Theosophy; and the major figures in modern Russian and Celtic Sophiology. In my opinion and presumably Chris Bamford's opinion, it is not an exaggeration to assert that Steiner is the First Jewel not only of Anthroposophy but equally of contemporary Western esotericism and universal spirituality.

In that Steiner's teaching and practice are inseparable, they constitute an ideal *dharma* or Second Jewel of Buddhism. He taught non-attachment by precept and example, but unlike Buddha, he was not silent about personal identity. Not at all. He thoroughly researched his past lives, including lives that he shared with Ita Wegman, MD—most notably as Aristotle and Alexander, as well as Thomas Aquinas and an assistant named Reginald of Piperno. He advised his followers on the need to know one's past lives and especially on the need to prepare for one's future life. Steiner's account of

death and rebirth include his detailed description of the four distinct and deeply related bodies or principles: the physical, the etheric (life) principle, the astral (soul), and Spirit (“I”), an individual’s eternal identity. In hundreds of lectures, and in two of his most important, systematic books—*Theosophy* (1904) and *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (1909)—Steiner expounds in contemporary terms a thoroughly esoteric description of the human being and the spiritual practices most appropriate for each of these four components.

Third, as Buddha created monasteries for the practice of Buddhist discipline, and thereby was the creator of the Third Jewel, the *sangha*, Steiner similarly created a sangha for his followers to practice Anthroposophy and to research its results. More accurately, Steiner created three sanghas. He initiated and guided the anthroposophic movement, the broad-based, unorganized individuals and communities influenced by his insights and recommendations. The anthroposophic movement includes the influence of Steiner’s interpretations of Goethe and German Idealism, teachers in Waldorf schools, farmers using biodynamic methods, and artists influenced by his aesthetics. Members of the Theosophical Society who had been following Steiner created the Anthroposophical Society in December 1912 and January 1913.

Steiner agreed to lead this Society but did not join it until Christmas week of 1923, when he recreated the Anthroposophical Society, and not only joined it but also connected his destiny to it. At the same meeting, which concluded on January 1, 1924, he created the School of Spiritual Science, the esoteric core of the Anthroposophical Society, with several sections for esoteric research. It was at this meeting that Steiner spoke the *Foundation Stone Meditation*, a four-part verse that is spoken daily by many anthroposophists. All of these developments are recounted in Steiner’s lectures and Chris’s introductions in this volume.

II. CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD'S INTRODUCTIONS TO THE WRITINGS OF RUDOLF STEINER

1. RUDOLF STEINER'S BIOGRAPHY AND MISSION

Autobiography:

Chapters in the Course of My Life, 1861–1907

In this introduction, Christopher Bamford refers to Rudolf Steiner's *Autobiography* as "both a testament and a legacy." As a testament, it contains Steiner's own account of the inner and outer events that contributed to his identity and mission. As a legacy, it sought to shape the way his life and teaching would be interpreted after his death—which he sensed might be not far off. While he was writing these installments, over seventy weeks from December 1923 until just before he died on March 30, 1925, he was conscious of being the center of controversies both in European cities where he was lecturing to audiences of several thousands, and within the Anthroposophical Society, particularly between older and younger members.

Steiner was writing these installments at a considerable remove from the events he was recounting, from his birth in 1861 until 1907, the year of the fateful meeting of the Theosophical Society in Munich. As his ideas were under constant scrutiny and the subject of intense controversy, he sought to recount the course of his spiritual development objectively as an aid to younger members eager to relate to their teacher in the future. Although this *Autobiography* necessarily ends before the last eighteen years of Steiner's life, his astute chronicling of his first forty-seven years reveals the course of the eventful years ahead.

In ways that reveal the force of destiny, Steiner's early life, the more as illumined by Chris's introduction, clearly sowed the seeds of his adult life. As Chris writes in his introduction to the *Autobiography*,

He had achieved what he had set out to do. He had set down a clear record that could stand both as a commentary on the evolution of his teaching and as a directive for its continuation. He had demonstrated the clear, unbroken line of his own development. He had established the deep, abiding concerns that had directed his life. He had brought his life to a critical turning point, which many of his first readers could still recall.

The mountains of southern Austria and the latest scientific achievements of his day, especially the railroad and telegraph, set him on course to experience and reconcile the competing claims of spirituality and science. Following directly from his childhood, Steiner's career and mission were focused on the need to restore the proper relationship between modern science and a modern, even future, understanding of the relationship between spiritual and material realities. His study of the course of Western intellectual history had enabled him to lament the triumph of materialist thinking over the spiritual that accompanied the rise of science beginning in sixteenth-century Europe. He sought to know and to serve material and spiritual realities in their own right and particularly to overcome their separation.

Before Steiner could argue convincingly for the restoration of spirit in matter, he had first to study their initial unity as found in indigenous or shamanic consciousness. Steiner possessed an atavistic ability to see spirit active in matter. To develop this ability further, he was providentially led to a shaman, Felix Kogutzki, who in addition to introducing his receptive student to the secret powers of plants, led him to a discarnate Master who gave Steiner, at the age of eighteen, his life task. Then, while a college student, he was led to his philosophical mentor, Karl Julius Schröer, who arranged for Steiner, at twenty-two, to be named editor of the national edition of the scientific writings of Goethe. Chris's introduction shows these and other events and influences as a coherent whole. They reveal the course of an extraordinary life carefully crafted by spiritual beings

and given biographical expression by Steiner's brilliance, sacrifice, reverence, and humility.

Toward end of Chris's informative and inspiring introduction, he offers an ideal summation: "The *Autobiography* is the account of a spiritual development." It is Rudolf Steiner's path to healing "the great wound that divides human beings from their cosmic birthright: to live as earthly and spiritual beings in a spiritual and physical universe." Steiner's *Autobiography* shows how, in a destined life, thinking can become deed, perception can become participation, and human beings through their own activity can become coworkers and co-creators of heaven and earth. Each of the *Collected Works of Rudolf Steiner* includes a list of its 354 titles as well as a fourteen-page chronology of the "Significant Events in the Life of Rudolf Steiner." The remainder of Steiner's *Collected Works*, and the remainder of Chris's introductions to these volumes, reveals the myriad ways that the reader can emulate Steiner's life as a coworker and co-creator of heaven and Earth. The level of our effort and attainment will pale by comparison with Steiner's, but the mission of every spiritual teacher requires that it be met by the effort of striving souls. Both are necessary.

From the History and Contents of the First Section of the Esoteric School, 1904–1914

Christopher Bamford's introduction to this volume is placed immediately after his introduction to the *Autobiography*, because it includes Steiner's account of his own esoteric school from its origin within the Theosophical Society until its years within the Anthroposophical Society. Steiner's separation from the Theosophical Society seemed fated during the International Theosophical Conference in Milan in 1907, and irrevocable in response to the founding of the Star of the East in 1911. In 1913 Rudolf Steiner laid the Foundation Stone for the Goetheanum, the proposed headquarters for the Anthroposophical Society in Dornach, near Basil, Switzerland. With

this account of the evolution of Rudolf Steiner's career as an esoteric teacher, the reader will be better prepared to appreciate, and more importantly, to commit to some of the actual practices that he recommended to various audiences of Theosophists beginning in 1902. These practices—dozens of them!—are included in the Collected Works 266/1, 266/2, and 266/3.

It is important to remember that Madame Blavatsky (HPB), the cofounder (with Col. Olcott) and esoteric teacher of the Theosophical Society, died in London in 1891. Although she and Rudolf Steiner never met on Earth, she was clearly Steiner's link to Theosophy. Steiner accepted Annie Besant's role as his initiator into the Esoteric School in 1902 but he maintained a stronger esoteric connection to Madame Blavatsky, the founder of the Esoteric School. Steiner respected Col. Olcott, who succeeded HPB as head of the Theosophical Society, and accepted the decision reportedly from the Indian and Tibetan masters who guided the Theosophical Society that Annie Besant should succeed Col. Olcott. As Chris emphasizes, Rudolf Steiner's assent to serve as the teacher of the Esoteric School—always and necessarily out of his own experience—reveals two important “inferences”:

The first is that esoteric, inner development was personally important, even central, to Rudolf Steiner's own path and that he was eager to experience the inner teachings, exercises, and practices developed by Theosophy. And the second is that he understood that without inner development, practiced seriously and assiduously by at least a dedicated core group of committed students, any esoteric or spiritual movement was bound to be ineffective.

Because Steiner taught only from his own experience, his esoteric school would inevitably align with esoteric Christianity. While his foundational book, *Theosophy* (1904), kept the title of the esoteric source and Society founded by Madame Blavatsky, it issued from his experience and included practices he alone recommended. Similarly,

his book, *How to Know Higher Worlds*, also written in 1904, contains recommendations directly from his esoteric experience slowly evolving toward more Western consciousness in general and Christ-consciousness in particular.

2. ANTHROPOSOPHIC PRACTICE

Start Now! A Book of Soul and Spiritual Exercises

Chris Bamford's introduction to his *Start Now!* must rank as his most important writing on Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophy, and spiritual practice. The subtitle of this important book is not an exaggeration: *Meditation Instructions, Meditations, Exercises, Verses for Living a Spiritual Year, Prayers for the Dead, and Other Practices for Beginning and Experienced Practitioners*.

To a degree comparable to Steiner's books on soul and spiritual exercises, this collection of his works was inspired by Chris's own spiritual practices and devotion to spiritual and esoteric knowledge. The thirty-eight-page introduction is, in effect, a handbook or introductory guide to the spiritual life, complemented by the exercises that give this volume its practical value. The introduction explains the rationale. It essentially says, if you want to attain spiritual knowledge, and you should, Steiner's approach is readily accessible and efficacious. There follow dozens of exercises for developing meditative thinking, feeling, and willing. The contents are worth listing:

- Passages on the reality of ideas, the epistemological foundation of anthroposophic spiritual practice;
- Meditation instructions and explanations;
- Meditation sentences drawn from Steiner's first foundational book, *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom* (1894);

- “The Way of Reverence,” texts in support of devotion that can lead to the transformation of thinking, feeling, and willing;
- A passage on chakras drawn from Steiner’s *How to Know Higher Worlds: A Modern Path of Initiation* (1904);
- A clear and encouraging description of Steiner’s “Six Exercises,” often referred to as supplementary but are really foundational;
- A description of the “backward review” at the end of the day.
- Passages helpful for “living the year spiritually,” including Steiner’s *Calendar of the Soul* verses for the days of the week, zodiac verses, and meditations for annual festivals;
- Three sections drawn from Steiner’s esoteric research;
- Meditations for the those who have died;
- “Foundation Stone Meditation”;
- Descriptions of meeting with the lesser and greater guardians of the threshold.

It would be difficult to imagine a more useful book for anthroposophic practice. It shows the remarkable extent to which Chris is a “practitioner scholar.” Given the press of busy lives, the title of his book, while accurate, could as rightly be titled “Start Again!”

Probably because Steiner’s *Autobiography* ends in 1907, this thirty-eight-page essay published in 2004 and teeming with rich details, is five times the length of the introduction to Steiner’s *Autobiography*, published one year later. In this volume Chris, as editor of the contents as well as author of the introduction, had access to the entire 350 volumes of the German edition of Steiner’s Collected Works, including hundreds of Steiner’s lectures on spiritual practice. While Chris’s introduction to the *Autobiography* is true to that text, his introduction to this volume provides a deeper and more detailed account of Steiner’s life based on his remaining eighteen years. Steiner’s writings during these years provided Chris with many opportunities to show the ways that Steiner’s life, especially his last years, particularly 1924 (the year that Stewart Easton often referred to as an *annus mirabilis*) serve as a model of spiritual

practice. Steiner never tired of practicing and integrating original spiritual thinking, profound empathy, and tireless action in service to the spiritual world and humanity.

*A Way of Self-knowledge:
And the Threshold of the Spiritual World*

Rudolf Steiner wrote *A Way of Self-knowledge* during July and August 1912 as a “report of soul experience.” As such, it is an important complement to *Theosophy* (1904) and *Outline of Esoteric Science* (1909), which focus primarily on his worldview, including chapters on evolution of consciousness, the nature of the human being, sleep, death, and rebirth. It is similar to *How to Know Higher Worlds* (1904), in that it is full of meditation exercises, but it is different in its personal character. All of Steiner’s writings and lectures come from his experience, but *A Way of Self-knowledge* describes and explains his own practices.¹ Steiner also emphasizes, however, that each practitioner, depending on one’s karma and biography, will have a unique individual experience. Whatever an individual’s experience, the starting point should be meditative thinking.

This volume contains Steiner’s “new way of meditative knowing and being,” and what Chris refers to as “a fundamental *metanoia*, or transformation of consciousness.” Such a change of consciousness is a journey, not a change of clothes, and so, much deeper than the mere ability to refer to Steiner’s biography or quote his lectures. Christopher writes:

Coming of age in the last third of the nineteenth century—and faced with the overwhelming evidence that materialism was not only a house built dangerously on sand but also potentially

1 Although slim, this book is comparable to Sri Aurobindo’s extensive account of his own spiritual practice that he began in the same year as Steiner’s *A Way of Self-knowledge*. Sri Aurobindo kept his yoga diary regularly from 1912–20, and other years less faithfully. See Sri Aurobindo, *Record of Yoga*, I and II (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2000). See also: Debashish Banerji, *Seven Quartets of Becoming: A Transformative Yoga Psychology Based on the Diaries of Sri Aurobindo* (Los Angeles: Nalanda International, 2012).

destructive of the entire divine-cosmic human experiment we call “Earth”—Steiner’s primary concern from the beginning was to respond to the historical-spiritual call for a new epistemological path that, affirming the spiritual foundations of phenomenal reality, united the spiritual in humanity with the spiritual in the cosmos.

As Chris explains in terms easily accessible to a reader with limited familiarity with philosophical terminology, Steiner studied the philosophies, and especially the theories of knowledge (epistemology), which provided him a spiritually secure start, namely, the “I,” that is not limited to ordinary consciousness. This “I,” as expounded by three nineteenth-century German Idealist philosophers, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling, is called transcendental because it is united with, or part of, a divine source.

As the modifier indicates, these philosophers are called “Idealist” because they focused on the reality and primacy of ideas, or the conviction that ideas reveal reality—or rather, they are reality. Philosophical Idealists are in opposition to philosophers, usually called empiricists (many of whom are also materialists), for whom sensory experience is primary and from which ideas are derived. Steiner was an idealist philosopher who, following Goethe, was devoted to the study of the material world, or phenomena, and hence his philosophical method is also called phenomenological.

In philosophical terms, the primary concept developed by Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling is called the Absolute; in Christian terms it is Christ who, like the Absolute, is both transcendent and alive within each human soul. Steiner thought, wrote, and lectured using both Idealist philosophical terminology and Christian theological terminology. Chris explains both languages clearly and accurately. He also explains the meditative epistemology that establishes the intimate relationship between *the “I” that I am essentially* and *the “I” of ordinary awareness*. In daily life, in ordinary consciousness, I think and act oblivious of myself as a spiritual “I.” Consciousness

of my true, spiritual “I” is available only by meditation or intuition, and then only when accompanied by a proper soul mood such as silence, reverence, devotion, patience, and solidarity with all existence, human and divine.

Steiner’s doctoral thesis on Fichte (1891) and his foundational volume, *The Philosophy of Freedom* (1893), served as an ideal background to the esoteric research and teaching that he began in 1902 at the request of the leaders of the German branch of the Theosophical Society. On the death of HPB in London in 1891, Col. Olcott served as the second president until his death in 1907. He was succeeded by Annie Besant, who had clairvoyant ability, was a free thinker, a prolific author, and powerful lecturer, an atheist and anti-Christian, and a leader of Irish and Indian independence movements—an excellent opportunity to develop anti-Christian commitments. In 1916, she founded and was the first president of the Indian Home Rule League, modeled on the Irish Home Rule that led to Irish independence from Britain in 1921. While it was obvious from the first moment of Besant’s ascendancy that she and Steiner would eventually prove incompatible, one wonders whether Blavatsky and Steiner would have been able to collaborate.

In summer 2013, Rudolf Steiner published *The Threshold of the Spiritual World*, a volume that complements *A Way of Self-knowledge*. Steiner refers to it as “a few descriptions of spiritual experiences.” The focus of these two volumes, written in 1912 and 1913, coincided with intense turmoil within the Theosophical Society. During these two years, many members of his audience began to identify as Anthroposophists. Steiner’s recommendations for meditative practices in these two volumes could have been written at any time during his two decades as a spiritual teacher, but they took on a special relevance owing to his opposition to C. W. Leadbeater and the Star of the East. By his lectures, books, and mystery dramas (*The Guardian of the Threshold*, 1912, and *The Soul’s Awakening*, 1913), Steiner was teaching his followers what they were ready to

hear concerning spiritual practice. He was also necessarily responding to the controversies within the Theosophical Society.

The turmoil in 1911 to 1912 focused on C. W. Leadbeater (1854–1934), an Anglican clergyman and an accomplished clairvoyant. Part of the controversy concerning Leadbeater was focused on his having been accused of sexual misconduct with young boys.² More controversially, in 1909, Leadbeater announced that Jiddu Krishnamurti, a teenage boy whose family lived next to the Theosophical Society headquarters in Adyar, India, was a “coming world Teacher” or “Bodhisattva being”—a “Second Coming” of Christ in physical form. Annie Besant, whether based on conviction or in order to avoid a schism by those who supported Leadbeater and the Star of the East, vigorously supported Leadbeater. In response, Steiner announced that his Rosicrucian-Christian esoteric path was incompatible with Annie Besant’s focus on an Indian path and especially incompatible with the Star of the East and claims for J. Krishnamurti. In 1929, Krishnamurti rejected the lofty spiritual status that Leadbeater had attributed to him and dissolved the Star of the East. Subsequently, Krishnamurti had an impressive career as a spiritual author and lecturer for more than fifty years, until his death in 1986.

Although Steiner does not refer to the leadership of the Theosophical Society in these two volumes, it seems virtually certain that he had Leadbeater in mind as an example of a faulty esoteric practice. Specifically, he might have had in mind what he referred to as “the golden rule of the occult sciences” that he emphasized in his foundational book *How to Know Higher Worlds*: “For every single step that you take in seeking knowledge of hidden truths, you must take three steps in perfecting your character toward the good.”³

2 Various websites state that Leadbeater was a victim of exaggerated charges. He was defended by Annie Besant, acquitted, and readmitted to the Theosophical Society.

3 Rudolf Steiner, *How to Know Higher Worlds: A Modern Path of Initiation*. Trans., Christopher Bamford. Afterword, Arthur Zajonc.

As Steiner wrote to Besant, because Leadbeater's esoteric research was not grounded in thinking, it lent itself to error. Steiner accused Leadbeater of bypassing the intellect, which should be developed and then transformed by meditation and other spiritual practices, all of which help to safeguard against error. In Steiner's view, the only healthy way to clairvoyant cognition is through the enlivening of ordinary thinking by practices of meditative attention and concentration. There can be no "leap" to higher psychic or spiritual levels that bypasses these practices. Steiner writes:

Thought is the same on all planes. Whenever thought is developed—whether on the physical or on a higher plane—it will be a guide in everything if it is free from the senses and grasped in I-consciousness.... When all human higher powers are so closely linked with the powers belonging to the lower levels of the sexual realm, a slip such as Mr. Leadbeater's can occur at any time.... With good foresight into the peculiarities of our fifth cultural epoch, the Masters of the Rosicrucian School have elaborated the "Path" that is the only one appropriate for a Western person in the current cycle of development.

Supplemented by Chris Bamford's careful introduction, the two books in this volume (CW 16/17) offer many spiritual practices under the heading of meditative thinking. Further, as Chris emphasizes, these exercises are especially significant for being among Steiner's own daily meditation practices.

3. WESTERN ESOTERIC TRADITIONS

Spiritualism, Madame Blavatsky, and Theosophy

Books about HPB and the Theosophical Society by Theosophists omit reference to Steiner almost entirely. Except for the important book introduced here, *Spiritualism, Madame Blavatsky, and Theosophy*, edited with an introduction by Christopher Bamford, Anthroposophists almost completely ignore the significant extent of

Steiner's debt to Madame Blavatsky and to Theosophy. From 1906 to 1912, Steiner delivered four lectures in honor of Madame Blavatsky on May 8, "White Lotus Day," the anniversary of her death. Each of these lectures acknowledges HPB's contributions to esoteric knowledge. HPB was the single most influential figure in the reemergence of spiritualism and esotericism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Her theosophical teachings influenced W. B. Yeats, George Russell (AE), G. I. Gurdjieff, C. G. Jung, and almost anyone interested in spiritual ideas not available in mainstream religious traditions. Perhaps owing to his practical works, especially the Waldorf approach to education and the biodynamic method of farming, Steiner has surely eclipsed her significance, but his teachings and influence were facilitated and advanced by Blavatsky's. Chris offers an inspiring tribute to HPB's influence:

HPB...introduced world religions and world history into the theretofore parochial and tightly guarded confines of Western thought. It was she, likewise, who opened up the possibility of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and laid the ground (with the philosopher Hegel) for a truly global theory of history as evolution of consciousness. Above all, it was her stubborn, independent, open-minded exploration that broke open the hegemony of the aging secret societies and began the process of tearing the veil of the temple and making esotericism part of cultural life in two equally important ways. She made available—for rational reflection, speculation, and contemplation—long-hidden spiritual teachings and doctrines, both Western and Eastern, about the universe and humanity's place and role within it. At the same time, she introduced and began to teach methods and practices of inner work by which any person of good intention willing to make the effort could achieve direct cognition of the realities she expounded, more theoretically, in her books. Thus, despite herself and her passionately held anti-Christianity, she was, perhaps without knowing it, of Christ's party.

A discussion of the influence of HPB and Theosophy inevitably raises the complex, important topic of the relationship—continuity, similarity, contrast—between religion and spirituality, or what Chris refers to as “post-religion spirituality,” a “tricky term.” Yes, and a tricky topic for Theosophy and Anthroposophy and for all religious traditions. Chris explains Steiner’s complex response to the relationship between Anthroposophy (which he characterizes as a universal spiritual science, a way of spiritual knowing) and religion, particularly Christianity. As Chris himself is obviously committed to both Anthroposophy and Christianity, and deeply informed and practiced at both, he is an ideal guide for this important topic. He is also, if I may say, too informative on this topic for many readers. His introduction to this volume includes approximately five pages that will be of interest only to readers with a desire for such detailed knowledge; most readers will be content with the perfectly clear, accurate summary provided by the last paragraph:

Madame Blavatsky’s great “theosophical” contribution was both to link [spiritualism] to the perennial and esoteric wisdom traditions of the world and to incorporate into its program *a method* (meditation, ritual, and astral travel) whereby one could confirm its teachings for oneself. Rudolf Steiner’s perhaps even greater contribution, as we shall see, was to remove the dust of the past and Blavatsky’s prejudices and place both method and teachings squarely in the evolutionary development of human consciousness.

Chris’s “we shall see” refers the twenty-one lectures in *Spiritualism, Madame Blavatsky, and Theosophy*, which Steiner delivered in four somewhat distinct periods:

- 1904 when he was beginning to teach a Rosicrucian-Christian esoteric path;
- 1906–12 when he was steadily advancing this path and making an explicit affirmation of “the Christ Impulse”;

- 1915–16 when he was teaching within the Anthroposophical Society in the context of nineteenth-century occult movements and asserted that Madame Blavatsky was the victim of an “occult imprisonment”;
- 1923 when Steiner was recognizing the need to reorganize and enliven the esoteric content of the Anthroposophical Society.

Clearly, for the history of the Anthroposophical Society and its relationship to his predecessor, the Theosophical Society and its permanently important founder, *Spiritualism, Madame Blavatsky, and Theosophy* is an indispensable book.

***The Secret Stream:
Christian Rosenkreutz and Rosicrucianism***

The surest description of Rudolf Steiner’s relationship to Christian Rosenkreutz is Steiner’s lecture series, *Esoteric Christianity and the Mission of Christian Rosenkreutz*.⁴ Chris made an excellent choice of title—*The Secret Stream*—for a second collection of Steiner’s lectures on Christian Rosenkreutz and Rosicrucianism. Steiner delivered these “Twenty-three Lectures Given between September 17, 1911, and December 19, 1912” while separating from the Theosophical Society. Although it is difficult to assess what anthroposophists truly understand concerning Rudolf Steiner’s mission and teachings, it seems likely that anthroposophists are generally vague and confused concerning the mission of Christian Rosenkreutz.

It is rather confusing that Steiner places Christian Rosenkreutz at the center of some of the most important events in the evolution of human consciousness, yet his influence is almost totally unknown outside Western esoteric literature. Steiner’s lecture, “The Mission of Christian Rosenkreutz: The Mission of Gautama Buddha on Mars” collected in Bamford’s *Secret Stream* as well as in Steiner’s *Esoteric*

4 Foreword by Marie Steiner; translator, Matthew Barton (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2000).

Christianity and the Mission of Christian Rosenkreutz, is surely one of the most important of Steiner's lectures. Of the dozen or more significant topics in these pages by Chris Bamford, perhaps none is more in need of his knowledge and ability to explain than the amazing mission and influence of Christian Rosenkreutz.

The surest way to stop a conversation about Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy, and to see a listener or audience close down, is to introduce Christian Rosenkreutz, and specifically his relation to Buddha. I can attest that, along with a reference to two Jesus children, there is no more decisive way to lose an audience than a reference to "Buddha on Mars." It is hard to measure the preparation needed for someone new to Anthroposophy to consider Steiner's assertion that, in 1604, Christian Rosenkreutz sent Gautama Buddha to the Mars sphere to perform a sacrifice there similar to Christ's sacrifice on Earth. This is exactly the claim that Rudolf Steiner shared with his audience of Theosophists in 1911 and 1912, the years when Theosophists and Anthroposophists were choosing their esoteric "streams." Rudolf Steiner placed the mission of Christian Rosenkreutz at the center of the anthroposophic stream. As Chris explains in the last sentence of his important introduction to this volume:

During this time [the seventeenth century], Christian Rosenkreutz himself—in the body, as well as out of it—continued to be active. But the earthly reality of the *Fraternitas* [of Christian Rosenkreutz] was no more. It was to bring this reality once more into the earthly sphere of cosmic and human evolution that Rudolf Steiner dedicated his life.

Isis Mary Sophia: Her Mission and Ours

Again personally, scarcely any topic in this compilation of Chris's introductions is as inspiring or as close to Chris's mind and heart as his often-quoted, poetic introduction to the collection that constitutes *Isis Mary Sophia*. This is one of his compilations, along with *Start Now!* and *Staying Connected*, that best reveals his deep,

devoted, reverent relationship to the mission and contributions of Rudolf Steiner. A scholar of Russian Sophiology—i.e., a scholar of the descriptions of Sophia in the writings of Vladimir Solovyov, Sergei Bulgakov, and Pavel Florenski—Chris begins his introduction to *Isis Mary Sophia* with a remarkable passage from Vladimir Solovyov’s essay, “Three Meetings”: “Let it be known today, the Divine Feminine is descending to Earth in an incorruptible body. In the unfading light of the new Goddess, Heaven has become one with the depth.” Chris’s own poetic announcement reveals a similar beauty and authority. Since it was published in 2003, Chris’s volume, particularly for his informed and inspiring introduction, has been the obvious first source for anyone interested in Rudolf Steiner’s description of Sophia.

An evolving reality: The mystery of Christ and Sophia

In his beautiful introduction, Chris emphasizes that “Sophia is a still-evolving mystery.” Perhaps because Sophia, like everything feminine in modern Western culture, has been diminished relative to *and by* the masculine, it is tempting for advocates for the reality and efficacy of Sophia to render her more objectively at the price of her mystery. By contrast, following Steiner, Chris emphasizes her elusive character. He writes too beautifully not to be quoted at length. And if you read it twice and aloud, so much the better.

Over the centuries, the being of Sophia, or feminine Divine Wisdom, has been emerging from the mists of ancient history, like Venus from the waters, to become a sign and mystery of our times. Though it is difficult to say who she is, wherever we turn, we see traces of her coming—as if tracking the fringes of her mantle as it brushed aside the tangled, sclerotic cobwebs of centuries of cerebration. As she draws near, much that was forgotten is reentering consciousness, not only as memory but also from the future, *as possibility*. It demands that we rethink who we are, whence we have come, and whither we are going. We see her in the crumbling of the old social order and in the dawn-light breaking through the night of patriarchal dominance in

ways of knowing... Mention could be made, too, of the efflorescence of feminine spiritualities and of the recovery of the women of the Gospel who sustained Jesus with their own substance. Then there are the Marian apparitions that, since the 1840s, have accompanied the end of modernism...

But there is still more. A new mood is abroad, a kind of heart's yearning for what Sophia has traditionally always provided—a seamless vessel of harmony and meaning, uniting Heaven and Earth, within which we may live, move, and have our being... What we need now is something that places spirit once again at the heart of our existence. Sophia gives us this ethical directive, calling upon us to sacralize—consecrate, make spiritual—the whole world and all our lives, not just on Sundays. “Everything that lives is holy,” said Blake.

As Chris explains, Sophia is both emerging and mysterious: “She is a great secret, an open secret, perhaps, but one at once so profound that it reaches to the very substance of the world and so close to our essential humanity, who we are, that we cannot see her. Beginning in God before creation, she unfolded through creation and now participates in creation's redemption.” It should now be obvious why it is more sensible to quote than to explain Chris's understanding of Sophia.

First glance at who She is

At the conclusion of the previous section, Chris explains who She is by what She does: She collaborates with the Holy Trinity:

Coming from the Father, she is present and active not only in the birth, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, but also in the descent and dissemination of the Holy Spirit... She is, to mention a few of her titles, the Mother of God, the Mother of Humanity, the Soul of the World, the Holy Spirit, and the Goddess Natura. She is also the human soul. No wonder it is hard to grasp her.

Notice that in this passage Chris describes who Sophia is without reducing or restricting her to a single function or single identity. Continuing his account of Sophia's multi-faceted collaboration with the Trinity, he writes:

Put another way, Sophia is a divine feminine spiritual being who knows, feels, and acts from the very highest spheres of divinity to the lowliest, humblest clefts and corners of the Earth—passing through all the many levels of the starry heavens. She is, we may say, the very “soul” of God, of the world, and of humanity.

Steiner and Sophia

In this section, Chris emphasizes the importance of Sophia for Rudolf Steiner's mission and teaching, *anthropos* (human) and *sophy* (divine feminine wisdom):

Spiritual intelligence, freedom, contemplation, love, friendship—these “Sophianic” realities implicitly occupy the very center of Anthroposophy, or spiritual science. As for the basis of these, if we study Steiner's directions for spiritual practice, we find that *Sophia pervades Anthroposophy from the ground up*. For the foundations of Anthroposophy—in a sense, its beginning and end—are reverence or devotion, service, and selflessness.

The positive relationship between wisdom and love is one of the defining characteristics of Anthroposophy. Chris offers a succinct summary:

According to Steiner's account of our present evolutionary state, which he calls the “Earth stage of evolution,” and our particular epoch within it, the “consciousness soul,” humanity's task is the transformation of wisdom into love. Steiner writes: “Beginning with the Earth phase of evolution, *the wisdom of the outer cosmos becomes inner wisdom in the human being*. Internalized in this way, it becomes the seed of love. Wisdom is the

prerequisite for love; love is the result of wisdom that has been reborn in the ‘I.’”

Sophia, Philosophia, Anthroposophia

In his inaugural lecture to the First General Meeting of the Anthroposophical Society on February 3, 1913, Rudolf Steiner traced the evolution of Sophia from the experience of Greek philosophers, to the appearance of Philo-Sophia to Boethius (a philosopher in prison awaiting execution), to Dante’s experience of Lady Philosophy, and then to Anthroposophia, the manifestation of Sophia with whom Rudolf Steiner had a special relationship. Steiner urged his listeners to foster the mission of Anthroposophia in the present time: the transformation of thinking from what Chris calls “cerebration” to sense-free, “I”-based, spiritual thinking.⁵

Mary

In complete accord with Steiner’s relation to Sophia, Chris’s explanation and celebration of Sophia prominently includes the profound relationship of Sophia and the Mother of Jesus. He quotes Steiner’s insistence that Anthroposophy is not a religion and is compatible with all religious traditions, but for both Steiner and Bamford, Sophia, and therefore Anthroposophy, has a special relationship to Christian theology and practice. While Anthroposophia may be understood to be “spiritual not religious,” universal not specifically Christian, Mary the Mother of Jesus, presumably the most significant manifestation of Sophia in the last two thousand years—since the reign of Isis—has been the very center, and “the great mystery of the Christian tradition.” Christopher writes:

Mary is the great mystery of the Christian tradition. Nothing would have happened without her assent to God’s desire that

5 See also Robert McDermott, “Rudolf Steiner on Sophia,” in Debashish Banerji and Robert McDermott, eds., *Philo-Sophia: Wisdom Goddess Traditions* (Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Books, 2021), pp. 257–73.

she conceive and bring forth a son—to be called Jesus, who would bear the Christ. Without her astonishing “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word,” there would have been no Incarnation, no “Word made flesh,” no death and resurrection, no ascension.... It is difficult not to conclude that she is close to the inner core of Christ’s mission, as well as to his teaching and ministry.

A single femininity

This section offers a double affirmation: Sophia is one yet plural in manifestation. Chris writes:

The feminine divine is clearly present everywhere in the founding civilizations of our present moment. She is called by many names—Inanna in Sumeria; Astarte among the Hittites; Ishtar in Babylon; in Egypt (among many others), Isis, Maat, Hathor, Nut, and Neith; in Greece, Demeter, Persephone, Artemis, Athena, Hecate. The list is endless—Sophia and Mary are only two more. The more one seeks, the more Goddesses one finds. This apparently riotous confusion should *not* be taken as evidence of polytheism—far from it. These figurations—all of whom may be said to be aspects of Sophia—represent different states of one and the same primal principle, acting according to successive phases of becoming.⁶

4. ESOTERIC CHRISTIAN RENEWAL

Christianity as Mystical Fact and the Mysteries of Antiquity

It is not unusual for a person with knowledge of either Steiner’s philosophy or his spirituality to find it confusing that before 1900 Rudolf Steiner was a philosopher in the tradition of German Idealism (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) who wrote on Goethe and Nietzsche, and after 1900, an esotericist and some kind of Christian. Many

6 In a recent conversation, Chris mentioned that Mirra Alfassa, “the Mother” connected with Sri Aurobindo, would seem to be a twentieth-century manifestation of the divine feminine.

of his colleagues and friends, most of whom were prominent in intellectual circles in Berlin during the last decade of the nineteenth century, found the lectures in *Christianity as Mystical Fact* (1901) distressing as well as confusing, whereas subsequent audiences of his lectures and readers of his books on spiritual and esoteric topics tend to ignore his philosophical writing. It is usual to assume a dramatic break between these two parts of his career. It is also usual to assume *Christianity as Mystical Fact* does not offer his mature account of Christ and Christianity. To these assumptions Chris brings new insights in support of the continuity between Steiner's philosophy and spirituality. The continuity is spiritual thinking. As Chris explains, we should see that these lectures on Christianity have deep roots in his early life and early adulthood when he was developing his own karmically guided spiritual path, and further that his relationship to Christ and Christianity—though not the institutional Christianity available to him—form the foundation of his entire mission.

As Chris shows, we should learn to see that Steiner's philosophical writing is suffused with the presence of Christ as Logos. The Prologue to the Gospel of St. John comes to mind: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

In 1908, just seven years after *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, Steiner delivered twelve lectures on the Gospel of John, including lectures on the Logos, initiation, and Christ in relation to human evolution. These lectures had a long preparation. They all affirm the reality of spirit in thinking. Logos is a theological as well as a philosophical reality. An experience of Christ such as Steiner's "standing in a solemn festival of knowledge," affirms that Christ manifests as consciousness or spiritual thinking. As is evident in these lectures, Steiner was convinced that Christ and Christianity were guiding the evolution of consciousness prior to Christ's Incarnation. Similarly, through his disciplined effort to think spiritually, Steiner was in relation with Christ and Christianity before his experience of Cosmic

Christ in 1899. Steiner's experience of Christ resembled the conversion of Saul to Paul on his way to Damascus—sudden but with a long preparation. In these lectures Steiner presents Greek initiates as servants of the evolution of consciousness necessary for the mission of Christ.

Steiner affirms Christianity to the extent that it furthers this essential task of the present time. Like many at the present time, Steiner's life-defining relationship with Christ was partially incompatible with historical/ institutional Christianity, particularly the Roman Catholic Church available to him in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe. He wrote: "The Christianity that I had to find was not in any of the existing confessions." Chris traces Steiner's relationship with Christ as the source and goal of his spiritual experience. He shows the impact on Steiner of his years as an altar boy, his unsatisfying conversation about Christ with a Roman Catholic monk, his resistance to Roman Catholic dogmatic theology, and his steady advance toward an initiation based entirely on his own experience.

Christianity as Mystical Fact is the first fruit of this "celebration" and indeed a watershed in Steiner's entire work. As such, it is the fulfillment of twenty-five years of intense inner and outer work. In that sense, it is not a sidebar between the earlier epistemological works and the later anthroposophical ones, but something new—a truly evolutionary, creative transition; it is a flowering of what came before, containing the seeds of what is to come after. In it, what was achieved in earlier works epistemologically as a transformation of knowing is shown to be ontological, a question of the cosmic transformation of being—a new kind of transformation made possible by the transformative being of Being itself, the Christ, the Son of the Father, now available to all through the cosmic fact of the Incarnation.

In practical terms, this means, in the first place, the cultivation of pure thinking, which is sense-free (that is, free of perceptual content),

through the development of an empty receptive attention leading to the recognition of the I AM; this, of course, is none other than the Pauline “Christ in me.” *The Philosophy of Freedom* marks a beginning watershed in the accomplishment of this goal. As Michael Wilson noted in his unsurpassed introduction to Rudolf Steiner’s *Philosophy of Freedom*, “Rudolf Steiner himself referred to his philosophy of freedom as a Pauline theory of knowledge.”⁷

Although Steiner’s philosophy is rightly regarded as a twentieth-century extension of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, he was also a Platonist—as were Aristotle and Aquinas in important respects. Steiner regarded Plato as an example of pre-Christian spiritual thinking made possible by Logos-Christ. Steiner recounted a conversation with Heinrich von Stein, a professor of philosophy at Rostock University, author of *Seven Books of Platonism*.⁸ In this conversation, Steiner agreed with Stein’s affirmation of the incarnation of Christ as the transformation of thinking “at a higher level than the mere elaboration of a philosophy,” but then disagreed with Stein on one important idea:

In Stein’s view, the revelation of Christ gave philosophy its content from outside. I was unable to agree with him. I knew that the Christ revelation can become an inner experience once we have understood our own true being in spiritually awake consciousness; the Christ revelation can then become an inner, living reality in the human being through the conscious experience of ideas.

7 Michael Wilson, introduction, *The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1964), xii.

8 As Steiner’s views were close to Professor Stein’s, in 1981, at age 30, he submitted to him his dissertation on Fichte. In 1891 Steiner passed an oral examination on philosophy, mathematics, and mechanics; in combination with his dissertation, he was awarded a doctorate in philosophy.

First Steps in Christian Religious Renewal

Steiner's relation to religion, and specifically to Christianity, is complicated and controversial. Suffice it to say that although Steiner's life's task (spiritual science or Anthroposophy) was not religious in the usual sense of the term (beliefs, dogmas, rituals), Steiner recommended that Spiritual Science (Anthroposophy) could prove helpful to all religious traditions. In his own spiritual life Steiner did not commit to a religious institution. He repeatedly stated that Anthroposophy is not a religion but is compatible with all religious traditions—admittedly, in many ways most closely aligned with Christianity. He affirmed Krishna (including the yogas of the Bhagavad Gita) and Buddha (including the Eightfold Path). He created and bequeathed a spiritual-esoteric path related to Christ and servants of Christ. Steiner himself clearly had a deep commitment to some non-institutional parts of Christianity, particularly the Christian esoteric tradition, the New Testament, prayers such as the Our Father, and a devotion to Jesus Christ, the mother of Jesus, Sophia, and Michael the Archangel.

As Chris explains, Steiner places religion in the “Abel” stream and Anthroposophy in the “Cain” stream.

“Abel” represents the priestly, receptive, mystic, feminine function of those who receive everything from the divine; while “Cain” represents those who create everything out of themselves, the artists and scientists: the creators. (cf. page 204)

In his forty-page introduction to *First Steps in Christian Religious Renewal* (CW 342), Chris provides an in-depth and necessary history of the founding of The Christian Community. When a group of theology students asked Steiner to speak to them on how the modern Christian Church could be renewed, he responded with a series of five lectures in June 1921. He discussed what he considered positive and negative in the practice of in the course of many centuries. These lectures, which included suggestions for how Christianity

could be renewed, led to the founding of The Christian Community, Movement for Religious Renewal in 1922. This new ecclesiastical church was not founded by Steiner, but rather by 45 individuals inspired by him. On September 16, 1922, Fredrick Rittelmeyer, who had previously held a leading position in the Lutheran Church, celebrated the Christian mass in a renewed form for the first time in this new ecclesiastical movement.⁹

5. FIDELITY TO THOSE WHO HAVE DIED

Staying Connected: How to Continue Your Relationships with Those Who Have Died

As a shrinking number of individuals are able to provide reliable knowledge concerning death and afterlife, it is a significant service that Rudolf Steiner and Christopher Bamford have provided. While many, perhaps most, individuals and families must face the death of a beloved friend or family member with little more than the rather empty expression, they “will be missed,” or “I am sure they are with us today” (though not likely next week)—Steiner and Chris offer detailed descriptions from the other side. It is a pity that William James, who spent thirty years searching for “one white crow,” one individual with reliable knowledge from across the threshold, did not know of Steiner’s convincing accounts of the afterlife and rebirth.

At fifteen pages, this introduction is one of the shortest of the more than fifty introductions that Chris Bamford has published—and it is one of the most compelling. It is obvious that Chris has a deep, existential relation to this topic. While reading Chris’s writing on “staying connected” to the dead, Joseph Campbell’s description of the “Hero’s Journey” comes to mind. It is as though, while facing the immanent death of his beloved wife Tadea, Chris

⁹ I am grateful to Rev. James Hindes, a priest of The Christian Community and a friend for several decades, for exact wording of this account of the founding of The Christian Community.

went in search of the meaning of what they were facing, and what would follow. Although it is too often not noticed, there is a necessary second half to the hero's journey—the journey back to the community with wisdom, exactly what Chris, drawing on Steiner's spiritual research, has provided.

Similar to Steiner, Chris has edited this volume and written this introduction out of his own spiritual experience. In this respect, this volume resembles the other three volumes that are composed of Steiner's lectures, arranged to serve one of Chris's defining commitments: death, esotericism, Sophia, and spiritual practice. Just by the way, Chris edited these four volumes in five years: *Staying Connected* (1999), *Secret Stream* (2000), *Isis Mary Sophia* (2003), and *Start Now!* (2004). It needn't be said that Chris's defining commitments are those of Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy, but it should be noted that these four volumes comprised of Steiner's writings and lectures fill a need of individuals and contemporary culture. Chris concludes his introduction on a personal note:

I must say that living and working with the concepts and exercises contained in these talks and meditations has changed my life. This is a most practical book. Do what it recommends and you will experience the presence of the dead in your lives. You will know that the community of human beings on both sides of the threshold is not theory, but reality.

In addition to this inspiring introduction with strong practical advice, Chris provides brief introductions to each of the book's three sections: Entry, Practice, Experience. Some of the sentences in these introductions to each section (not included in this volume of introductions) deserve to be read. Here, without further comment is Chris's introduction to the first chapter, "Entry":

The dead cannot understand dead, materialistic thoughts, but only living, spiritual thoughts. Spiritual thoughts are those we make our own. First, we think them fresh and try to raise them to their highest meaning for us. Then, emptying ourselves, we

offer that experience to the spiritual world. Our thoughts can become living reality for us in this way, they are able to cross the abyss between the living and the dead. The dead can share in such thoughts and learn from them; they can even act within them and take them further. In fact, without such thoughts we are not present for our loved ones who have died. They look for us in vain. More than that, they are constrained, even fettered, by our absence.... Through the process of living thinking and living feeling, the dead can also communicate with us. After all, they continue to care and still have a great deal to offer. To establish relationships with the dead requires effort. This effort is part of the greater work of overcoming materialism and spiritualizing human life on earth. Since this work is an aspect of cosmic evolution as a whole, it involves the entire spiritual world and all the beings in it (p. 27).

Chris wrote this urgent plea in 1999. In 2007 he returned to these topics in an introduction to Steiner's lectures in 1917 published as *Collected Works* volume 179.

The Influence of the Dead on Destiny

This introduction is devoted to Steiner's account of the connection of the living to the so-called dead, and particularly to the significance of this connection for the evolution of human consciousness. As just quoted, this connection "involves the entire spiritual world and all the beings in it." These lectures were delivered in December 1917, in anticipation of the end of World War I, November 1918, and amid extreme uncertainty of what would follow four years of unprecedented suffering and death.¹⁰ In these lectures two themes, or commitments, were entwined: the reality of Christ and His representative Michael the Archangel in the war against evil, embodied by Lucifer and Ahriman, and the need for humanity to develop a

10 For Steiner's life and works during the turbulent year 1917 see Henry Barnes, *A Life for the Spirit: Rudolf Steiner in the Cross Currents of Our Time* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1997), chapter one, "The Twentieth Century: Battleground for Human Individuality," pp. 7–22.

close relationship with the dead. As Chris writes, Steiner recognized and announced in these lectures and other lectures at this time, that Anthroposophy “would have to enter the public, cultural domain as a visible alternative to the ruling paradigm.” “Historical Necessity and Freedom,” the title that Marie Steiner chose for the first edition of these lectures, appropriately refers to the necessity to confront the prevalence of unconscious behavior and the need to achieve freedom from the double temptation of Lucifer and Ahriman. Chris writes:

Above all, people must learn to understand where the boundary between the so-called physical world and the spiritual world lies. This boundary lies right in the middle of the human being.

In contrast to the dominant materialist paradigm that limits human life to the world of senses, in these lectures and others during this year (e.g., *Riddles of the Soul*¹¹), Steiner is at pains to establish the spiritual world and spiritual experience of humanity. Perhaps with the painful awareness of millions of soldiers killed in the fields of Europe during the previous three years, Steiner argues that the spiritual parts of the human being, the astral/soul and Spirit (“I”) can and should connect with the dead. Chris writes:

He emphasized that, if we enter the world of the dead (where Christ is also present) with conscious, spiritual-scientific discipline, a new way of speaking about spiritual realities and a new way of collaborating with the spiritual world would become possible.

As I closed the introduction to the first selection in this chapter with Chris’s acknowledgement concerning the personal importance for him of working with the dead, an apt conclusion to this introduction is Chris’s acknowledgement that, on this topic or this necessary task, Steiner is “adamant.”

11 CW21. Also published in part as *The Case for Anthroposophy* (edited, translated, and introduced by Owen Barfield (Chadwick Library Edition, 2018).

The task of spiritual science is now to develop the consciousness of our belonging together with the souls of the dead... The rest of earthly development will not be able to proceed for the welfare of humanity, unless humanity develops the living feeling of being together with the dead.

6. ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE WORLD

Chris Bamford's introductions to Steiner's *Collected Works*, especially those with practical and historical import, are valuable for their in-depth accounts of Steiner's life at the time of each lecture. Steiner often urged his followers to be interested in the world. It would be hard to imagine anyone more interested in the world than he. By researching Steiner's interests and personal situations, Chris's introductions render each lecture series and each individual lecture more significant and more intelligible. Chris's introduction to *Love and Its Meaning in the World* is the concluding selection in this volume. Steeped as he was in the Gospel of John, Steiner's life, mission, vision, and works all aim at the greater realization of love—at present and in the foreseeable future. In effect, these four lectures offer an account of Steiner's deepest practical works during the last six years of his earthly life:

In six short years, in addition to continuing (and continually deepening) his spiritual research and making every conceivable attempt to strengthen the Anthroposophical Society and endow it with all that it would need to carry on his mission after his death, Steiner founded at least five major initiatives, still thriving today, and nurtured their beginnings: the threefold movement for the renewal of the social organism; Waldorf education; anthroposophic medicine; a movement for religious renewal, The Christian Community; and biodynamic agriculture.

*Freedom of Thought and Societal Forces:
Implementing the Demands of Modern Society*

During the months in 1919, when Steiner delivered the six lectures in *Freedom of Thought and Societal Forces*, he also wrote and gave lectures on social renewal, delivered lectures to teachers in the newly founded Waldorf school, and arranged the first eurythmy performance—all with the intention of reordering society in three related but distinct spheres: political and legal; economic; and free cultural life (including religion, education, arts, and sciences). His critique of private wealth and economic inequality showed that he was the same person who had taken a deep draft of Marx's critique of labor as commodity and, prior to his career as an esoteric teacher, was a professor in a Worker's College.

In addition to exposing "soul-destroying capitalism," Steiner sought to bring together both workers and "the interests of the elite (corporate or intellectual)." At the same time, in contrast to Marx and virtually all other significant social scientists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Steiner insisted that economic life must affirm that human beings are essentially spiritual. Chris writes that, without inner work and self-knowledge, "no real social progress is possible." Of course, if profit is the sole purpose of economic life, it is unlikely to affirm the spiritual nature of workers.

Steiner's threefold social order is aimed primarily at the prevention of economic control of the legal-political and cultural spheres. By urging that the economic realm be cooperative instead of inherently competitive, Steiner is exposing and attempting to liberate legal-political rights and individual creativity from economic competition. In his view, all cultural activities, especially education, should be supported but not controlled by economic interests. Steiner was convinced that the competitive function of national economies would inevitably cause wars—exactly what happened in 1914. Steiner's attempt to implement the threefold social order did not succeed during his lifetime and appears to be even further

from implementation one hundred years later. Similarly, Anthroposophy has not become the major spiritual movement that Steiner intended, and yet, and yet . . .

***Becoming the Archangel Michael's Companions:
Rudolf Steiner's Challenge to the Younger Generation***

Chris's introduction to Steiner's lectures on the mission of Michael the Archangel includes an account of Steiner's delight when he was approached by a group of idealistic young adults seeking advice on how they might change the world following the catastrophic four years of war. Again, the context is crucial and illuminating. As Chris explains, Rudolf Steiner had been waiting for the younger generation (ages 18 to 25¹²) to find him and Anthroposophy. Steiner and these young idealists shared a commitment to a new age, a new consciousness, a better world. For twelve days in October 1922, Steiner met with several dozen young spiritual seekers eager to replace the thinking of the previous generations by openness to radically new forms and processes, and especially to working collaboratively.¹³ Chris refers to this development as "a second birth of Steiner's teaching, unencumbered by the contextual theosophical trappings with which he began." Steiner was also conscious of the change of archangelic regency from Gabriel (who reigned from 1525 until 1879) to the regency of Michael, an archangel with the mission to lead humanity to greater freedom of thought and action.

12 It has long seemed to me regrettable that the section of the School of Spiritual Science for members 18 to 30 years of age is called "Youth Section." The same deaf ear is at work concerning the primary ritual of the Christian Community as the Act of Consecration of *Man*. It is past time for anthroposophists to pay attention to contemporary English usage.

13 Karl König, founder of Camphill, describes a group of young idealists who formed "Wandering Bird, a Free German Youth Group" in Oct. 1913. König writes that they longed for a new world "but nothing came of it." One-third were killed in World War I. The group that came to Steiner were born after 1900. See Karl König, *The Mystery of John and the Cycle of the Year*, edited by Gregg Davis (TWT Publications, 2000), 91.

Just as it is possible to read dozens, perhaps hundreds, of lectures without a reference to Sophia, most of Steiner's lectures do not refer to the Archangel Michael, but, when, he turns his attention to Sophia or Archangel Michael, he makes a compelling case for their importance. Chris Bamford is particularly effective in support of Steiner's devotion to Sophia (as in the book, *Isis Mary Sophia: Her Mission and Ours*) and Michael (*The Archangel Michael: His Mission and Ours*). Whereas some spiritual teachers emphasize divinity and humanity (or humanity and Earth) without much emphasis on intermediary spiritual beings, Steiner emphasizes the significance of Sophia and the Archangel Michael as intermediaries between Christ and humanity.

According to Steiner, Michael has the demanding task of opposing Lucifer and Ahriman, and especially Ahriman's legions devoted to the dulling of human consciousness. Iconographically, Michael appears with a sword to indicate the need to slay materialism and automatic, so-called thinking. It was precisely dull thinking combined with economic aggression that led to the war that bled Europe for four years. The young idealists who came to Steiner for spiritual direction in 1922 were determined to change the world order. Steiner in effect urged them to do so with the sword and shield of Michael. Two years later, those young adults who put themselves individually and as a group under Rudolf Steiner's influence would have been able to hear him speak of the Archangel Michael.

The Healing Process: Spirit, Nature, and Our Bodies

Rudolf Steiner was not invited to speak at conferences of academics, whether those of philosophers, theologians, or historians, but he was invited to speak to physicians and farmers. His lectures to physicians led to the creation of anthroposophically extended medicine, and his lectures to farmers led to the creation of the biodynamic method of agriculture. In both initiatives Steiner extended sciences from a humanistic to a cosmic framework. Chris recounts the founding of the anthroposophic approach to medicine in 1920:

During the period from 1918 to his death in 1925, Rudolf Steiner initiated many of the movements of spiritual renewal and cultural transformation for which he is justly well known. While all of these were certainly equally important to him, and equally important for any kind of truly renewing cultural and social transformation, the field of medicine and the living human being had a quite special place in his heart.

Drawing on the wisdom tradition of alchemical and Paracelsian medicine, yet always speaking directly from his own knowledge, experience, and research, Steiner reframed medicine and the art of healing in a truly spiritual and cosmic context, all the while remaining firmly rooted in the realities of physiology and contemporary scientific findings. Something had been truly inaugurated—”anthropomorphically extended medicine” was born.

Love and Its Meaning in the World

Steiner’s lectures on love are prevalent and defining throughout his career. His first book, *Christianity as Mystical Fact* (1902) includes several pages of “The Mystery of Love” and his profoundly moving last address, while he was ill and unlikely to recover:

Take the word of Love of the Will of Worlds
Into your soul’s aspiring, actively.

As this volume shows, Steiner lectured on love in relation to reverence, the mission of Earth, Buddha on love and compassion, freedom, and the soul’s capacity. Chris asserts that “love is the very heart and ground of all his teaching, the foundation of all he did, and all he hoped that we would do.

Love of humanity (the living and the so-called dead), the Earth, the cosmos, and the Divine motivated all that he accomplished, his enormous life work.”

CONCLUSION

It seems fitting that this introduction to Chris Bamford's several dozen introductions to the writings and lectures of Rudolf Steiner should conclude on the theme of love. Steiner embodied and taught love; Chris engaged Steiner and returned the love—hundreds of thousands of words in front of fifty volumes over forty years. Love is not too strong a word for the engagement of Christopher Bamford with the life, mission, and work of Rudolf Steiner.



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PUBLICATIONS

As editor:

Radhakrishnan

The Essential Aurobindo

Six Pillars: Sri Aurobindo's Major Works

The New Essential Steiner

Classics from the Journal for Anthroposophy (10 vols.)

Rudolf Steiner, *The Bhagavad Gita and the West*

American Philosophy and Rudolf Steiner

Philo-Sophia: Wisdom Goddess Traditions (with Debashish Banerji)

As author:

Steiner and Kindred Spirits

CHRISTOPHER BAMFORD'S INTRODUCTIONS TO RUDOLF STEINER'S WORKS

CW = volume number in The Collected Works of Rudolf Steiner
Introductions to titles in bold are included in this volume

- Approaching the Mystery of Golgotha* (2006, CW 152)
- The Archangel Michael: His Mission and Ours* (1994, collection)
- Artistic Sensitivity as a Spiritual Approach to Knowing Life and the World* (2018, CW 161)
- Autobiography: Chapters in the Course of My Life, 1861–1907*** (2000, CW 28)
- Becoming the Archangel Michael's Companions: Rudolf Steiner's Challenge to the Younger Generation*** (2006, CW 217)
- Calendar 1912–1913: Facsimile edition of the original book containing the calendar created by Rudolf Steiner for the year 1912–1913* (2004, CW 40)
- The Christian Mystery: Early Lectures* (published in 1998, 2017, collection)
- Christianity as Mystical Fact: And the Mysteries of Antiquity*** (2006, CW 8)
- Communicating Anthroposophy: The Course for Speakers to Promote the Idea of Threefolding* (2015, CW 338)
- The Connection between the Living and the Dead* (2017, CW 168)
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- Death as Metamorphosis of Life: Including "What Does the Angel Do in our Astral Body?" and "How Do I Find Christ?"* (2008, CW 182)
- The Education of the Child: And Early Lectures on Education* (1996, CW 293, 66)
- The Effects of Esoteric Development* (1997, CW 145)
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- Esoteric Lessons 1910–1912: From the Esoteric School, vol. 2* (2012, CW 266/2)

- Esoteric Lessons 1913–1923: From the Esoteric School*, vol 3 (2008, CW 266/3)
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- Freemasonry and Ritual Work: The Misraim Service* (2007, CW 265)
- From the History and Contents of the First Section of the Esoteric School, 1904–1914: Letters, Documents, and Lectures* (2010, CW 264)
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- Introducing Anthroposophical Medicine* (2010, CW 312)
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- The Kingdom of Childhood: Introductory Talks on Waldorf Education* (1995, CW 311)
- Love and Its Meaning in the World* (1998, collection)
- Mantric Sayings: Meditations 1903–1925* (2015, CW 268)
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- Our Dead: Memorial, Funeral, and Cremation Addresses 1906–1924* (2011, CW 261)
- Reimagining Academic Studies: Science, Philosophy, Education, Social Science, Theology, Theory of Language* (2015, CW 81)
- Rethinking Economics: Lectures and Seminars on World Economics* (2013, CW 340/341)
- Reverse Ritual: Spiritual Knowledge Is True Communion* (2001, CW 219)