

INTRODUCTION

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Think about these things, for they are matters of great importance.

Lecture Twelve

Behold I make all things new. Revelations 21:5

Not unexpectedly, in the vast range of Rudolf Steiner's Collected Works (more than 360 volumes), unacknowledged jewels of all kinds often lie hidden in plain sight, awaiting only our discovery of them. Frequently such ignored treasures are to be found in humbler pastures—"routine" lectures to members, for instance—that suddenly astonish us by their freshness, intimacy, insights, and directness of expression. Reading them, besides being transformed and inspired, we come to know Steiner in a different way: to sense the human being himself and the way that the passionate conviction of his heart bears moving witness to his great love of humanity and the Earth, as well as to his compassionate care for the all-too-human individuals who make up his students, the members of the Anthroposophical Society.

Put in another way: in the Collected Works, there are first of all the basic texts, which lay the essential, necessary foundations for any future work. Out of these arise the manifold peaks of spiritual research, whose profound insights penetrate to the very essence of spiritual reality. Less read are the more esoteric valleys, explored by hardier souls, which unveil the invisible forces at work in the hidden crannies of human and cosmic evolution. Finally, lying in between these, are many other lectures and lecture courses, to which, sadly, too few people have attended, for frequently they contain a kind of wisdom not found elsewhere; and sometimes, as in the present case, have a translucency and conviction that gives them extraordinary transformational power. In such cases, it is nearly always the context—the living, earthly reality—that accounts for their power. Rudolf Steiner is faced with a situation and he must rise to it.

In the present instance, the situation is complex. It is, in some sense, a moment of overlapping crises. Among these, two above all stand out. First, the revelatory and world-changing nature of the recently ended conflict (World War I), which made it a spiritual and ethical necessity for Anthroposophy and the Anthroposophical Society itself to change and turn outward; and second, the related phenomenon of the sudden influx of young people born around the turn of the century—the end of the Kali Yuga—who embodied the spiritual capacities able to respond, as older people were not, to what the Archangel Michael had made available since 1879. These factors implicitly and explicitly frame the message of *What Is Necessary in These Urgent Times*.

The lectures themselves were given to members of the Anthroposophical Society in Dornach, Switzerland, during January and February 1920, a mere eighteen months after the war had limped to its conclusion. The great symbolic “Temple of Anthroposophy,” the first Goetheanum, which would burn down over New Year 1922-23, was nearing completion, but still needed funding and continued effort. Attending the lectures were older members who lived in the community, as well as some younger people, workers on the building, and visitors from far and wide, including a contingent of English members, whom Steiner several times addresses directly and who were visiting for the first time since the end of the war.

The war, in fact, overshadows all else. As both symptom and reality, it was the first phenomenon underlying these lectures, for it defined that present moment, the great crisis. It framed it. Its very scale had left an immense void—a sense of meaninglessness that put all previous understandings into question. After all, almost ten million people had died during the conflict: six thousand a day, for fifteen hundred days; and the duplicity of the Versailles Peace Treaty had made the apparent uselessness of the carnage even worse. It seemed to confirm the pervasive feeling that Western civilization as it had been was over: bankrupt. Thus, although no one knew how to bring it about, unconsciously many people recognized that all things had now to be made new and that the old ways of doing things was over.

Europe, and particularly Germany and Central Europe—what remained of the old Hapsburg Empire—was traumatized and

disoriented. No one knew where to turn. Social, economic, and political chaos reigned. In desperation, seeking the illusion of certainties, people everywhere turned to competing ideologies, which soon began to take the place of clear, independent thinking. Three of these, above all, vied for supremacy. Marxist communism, which seemed to promise a new, international program for universal social justice; Anglo-American capitalism, which, while offering freedom (which communism seemed to deny), did so only on the condition of embracing an even more fervid materialism; and fascism, nascent in France, Italy, and (most perniciously) Germany, which seemed to offer a viable, even familiar, if conservative alternative, one that promised to safeguard and even enhance the older nationalistic values of family, nation, and traditional ways of life.

At the same time, more thoughtful observers well understood that the war had revealed more than simply the folly of “statesmen,” national ambitions, and existing ideologies. Those who could read more deeply into the signs of the times saw clearly that modern Western values—the very values that had seemed in the nineteenth century to ensure endless progress into a material paradise—had not just been called into question, but shown up for what they truly were: a sham.

Among those who saw what was at issue, Rudolf Steiner was perhaps the most prescient. Already, in 1917, in anticipation of the inevitable, long-expected peace, he had met in Berlin with a well-placed German diplomat, Otto von Lerchenfeld, to prepare a plan to be instituted upon the termination of hostilities. Together they prepared two “Memoranda” outlining a radically new approach to the nation’s political, economic, and cultural life, one that would never allow a similar conflict to arise.

The Memoranda argued that the time of the unitary, centralized, militarized, national-political state—the dead weight of which had led to the conflict—was over. Peace and justice required a radical re-thinking and re-ordering of society. *Culturally*, it was imperative that individual, spiritual freedom be protected, supported, encouraged, and enhanced in all possible ways. Spiritual or cultural freedom is, after all, the source of all future, evolutionary good in the form of new ideas that come to expression through art, science, philosophy, and other

transformative pursuits. *Economically*, too, freedom was also necessary for the circulation, production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services: not spiritual freedom, but *freedom in community*, that is, freedom of association. Finally, *politically*, the separate and distinct freedoms of cultural and economic life required as their basis the essential freedom assured by equality under the law. All of which is to say that, just as the human is a threefold being of body, soul, and spirit and composed of three systems—a metabolic system, a respiratory/circulatory system, and a nerve-sense system—with three functions (willing, feeling, and thinking), so also human society, too, is a threefold organism. Thus, Steiner gave new meaning to the motto of the French Revolution, “*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*”—“Freedom” in the spiritual-cultural sphere, “Equality” in the legal-rights sphere, and “Fraternity” (or association) in the economic sphere.

Although the Memoranda were read in the highest circles, in the press of events surrounding the end of hostilities, nothing came of them at an official level. Once the war was over, however, and the ensuing chaos set in, it was clear to Steiner that what they contained must be taken up. This meant that Anthroposophy would have to transform itself. It would have to engage its mission in a new way. It had done so before. During the first, “Theosophical,” phase, the esoteric foundations had been laid. Once these were established, new art forms (drama, eurythmy, architecture, painting, and sculpture) had been created to bring the fruits of esotericism into culture in artistic form. But now, with the stakes extraordinarily high, the spiritual world called for initiation knowledge to engage and permeate society in a larger sense. A consequence of this would be a much more open face for Anthroposophy, which, as the years unfolded, would be increasingly in the glare of public scrutiny.

The years following 1918 thus witnessed a proliferation of social initiatives, whose success would depend both on Rudolf Steiner’s ability to convince the public and on the ability of Anthroposophists to follow him. The epistemology and insights of spiritual science would have to be translated into accessible, jargon-free language that ordinary people through the exercise of healthy thinking could understand. At the same time, everyone concerned would have to

develop the presence of mind to act with dedication and responsibility. It would be a struggle on two fronts, internal and external. Both would prove difficult.

The difficulties began already in 1919, which saw the beginning of the work to make “The Movement for the Threefolding of the Social Organism” into a popular, political movement. The Association for the Threefold Social Organism was formed. Cultural and spiritual renewal was the order of the day. Books and lectures were published. Steiner traveled indefatigably, giving public lectures to large numbers of people. All this effort fell initially on fertile soil. Eighty thousand copies of *Towards Social Renewal* were sold in the first year. Soon, however, it would become clear that Steiner’s effort to transform society would fail. While his and his collaborators’ heroic labors (almost daily meetings with workers, managers, and owners, as well as finance ministers and other powerful people) had some initial success, in the long run the odds were against them. There was too much confusion and too many competing philosophies and ideologies.

Yet, growing out of the Threefold Social Movement, the first Waldorf school was born. Among the first to heed the call for social renewal had been Emil Molt, owner and director of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart. In April 1919, Steiner talked to the factory workers about the threefold social order. Following his talk, Molt asked Steiner whether he would take on the establishment and leadership of a school for the worker’s children: in September, the first Waldorf school opened its doors. Thus, the threefold seed germinated the foundation of cultural renewal through education. At the same time, other initiatives—exemplary of the threefold idea—were also planned.

The year of these lectures, 1920, also saw the creation of other “model institutions,” public corporations that exemplified the threefold principles. Businesses were formed to promote economic and spiritual undertakings. Meanwhile, as the Waldorf school continued to develop, Rudolf Steiner, understanding education to be the key to cultural transformation, expanded his lecturing activity to include cultural renewal in a larger sense, including the renewal of the natural sciences, as well as the traditional academic disciplines. Practical efforts were also undertaken to renew the sciences themselves. Laboratories

were created. Medicine, too, was seen as central and, at the request of doctors, Steiner gave the first medical course (thus initiating what would become anthroposophical medicine). “University” or higher education, liberal arts courses, too, were initiated.

Despite all this activity, however, not all was well. Chaos in the social world was rising to dangerous levels. The businesses took up much more of Steiner’s time than he anticipated. Though it had been easy to raise investment capital in his name, it did not take long for the economic future of the companies to begin to look dim. At the same time, hardly a week went by without some public attack on Anthroposophy and on Steiner personally. Considerable time had to be taken up in responding. More consequentially still, an undercurrent of misunderstanding (even lack of understanding) began to rumble through the Anthroposophical Society, especially among older members, who were more fixed in their ways, and less able to adapt to the changing circumstances and the new approach to spiritual science that these demanded.

Here we may note that a second phenomenon, related to the war but in a sense separate from it, had begun to intrude into these “new circumstances”—a clue to which has already been presented in the turn toward spiritual-scientific courses oriented toward “University” education. With the war’s end, a whole new generation of highly idealistic, intelligent young people had begun to turn to Anthroposophy for an answer to the social-political, cultural-educational, and spiritual chaos that they saw stemmed directly from the inertia of materialist, sclerotic, habitual, soulless, and dead thinking that, as they understood it, stifled all creativity, spirituality, and true communion.

Unlike the “homeless souls” who joined Steiner in 1900, when he started teaching, this new generation came to Anthroposophy innocently, out of their hearts’ needs, without any connection either to traditional esotericism or to the remarkable spiritual happenings of the last third of the nineteenth century. They knew little if anything about Spiritualism, Theosophy, Masonry, Ritual Magic, or any of the other movements from which the first Anthroposophists were drawn. Therefore, they did not think of themselves primarily as aspirant “occultists.” If they were anything, they were spiritually open *activists*. They sought to become spiritual, social, scientific, and

philosophical *pioneers*. They wanted to change the world and change themselves. They saw that if it were allowed to continue unchecked, “life as usual” would result only in the progressive dehumanization of humanity, the destruction of the Earth, and the alienation of the gods—and the consequent loss of any and all transcendent purpose to life. They understood—as we do still today—that a radical change in human “being” was necessary.

To them, the older generation of Anthroposophists seemed to come entirely from another world, another culture, with which they could find little shared ground—and the feeling was mutual.

Naturally, however, Steiner welcomed the opportunity to speak to the new generation. He had been waiting for this moment, for these young people, all his life. Whatever and whoever else he was, Steiner himself had always possessed a radical side. Like these young people who were now coming to him, he had no patience for conventional values and conventional thinking. Conventionality—synonymous with sleep—was one of the few things that irritated him. He saw conventionality as a symptom of a potentially fatal disease, one carried preeminently by the bourgeoisie, whose unthinking espousal of egotism, utility, and comfort as primary virtues dominated not only social and cultural life, but also and above all, academic, artistic, scientific, and even religious life.

Steiner, after all, had always sought to lay the ground for a *global transformation* that would overcome all egotistic divides: between subject and object, self and other, individual and community, spirit and matter, nature and cosmos, and cosmos and divinity. As *The Philosophy of Freedom* (1894) makes very clear, he never separated the necessary epistemological transformation in *how we know* (monism or non-dualism) from either the ethical transformation of *how we act* (ethical individualism) or its social consequences in *how we live together* (basically, a kind of anarchism). It does not take much to read Steiner’s non-dualist, individualist, quasi-anarchist philosophy between the lines of his biography. One finds his radical affinities delineated quite explicitly in his *Autobiography* as he unfolds his sympathies: with Nietzsche’s “transvaluation of all values;” Max Stirner’s radical individualism, as well as the “individualistic anarchism” of his friend

and fellow Stirnerian J. H. Mackay; and, finally, his commitment to teaching at the leftist Worker's College.

However, when the spiritual world graciously offered him the opportunity to work through Theosophy, Steiner had to temper this social-cultural side of his mission. Certainly, the vast and initiatory field of opportunity opened up by Theosophy (and the other esoteric movements that flowed into it) more than compensated for what he had to give up in terms of social activism. Yet, we can be sure that when young people, drawn to Anthroposophy out of the same radical, activist mood of soul that more than forty years before had led him to it, he was enormously heartened, as is evident in his total commitment to working with them.

What is remarkable is that from Steiner's beginning to teach in 1900, it took about twenty years for a new generation of young people to be drawn to him. Those who came to him in 1918–1922 were born at about the time that he began to teach. This was not a coincidence. For Steiner, 1900 marked a supremely important moment in human evolution: the end of the Kali Yuga, the Dark Age. Those born after that date were different from those born before it. To be able to grasp his teaching truly as he intended it, a person, in fact, would ideally have to have grown to maturity in the post-Kali Yuga period when, on a higher turn of the evolutionary spiral, the return to a new Age of Light would already be in process and humanity would begin crossing what he called "the threshold into the spiritual world." Therefore, when those whose destiny it was to do so stood before him, he understood with perfect clarity that here were people truly prepared to receive his teaching. The older members would just have to struggle to keep up. But there is more to it than that.

For, coincident with these changes, and integral to our ability to deal with them, there was a second cosmic-spiritual phenomenon that is central both to the particular lectures printed here and to Anthroposophy in general: namely, the accession to the regency of evolving human consciousness by the archangel Michael, which occurred according to the traditional teaching (and was confirmed by Rudolf Steiner) in November 1879.

Steiner therefore had always taught that we now live in the "Michael Age." During the period of these lectures, however, and

coincident with the arrival of a new generation of students, he began to place his own striving and the deepest meaning of the teaching and practice of Anthroposophy explicitly and even with the force of a vow under the sign and aegis of the archangel Michael. Michael, he taught, is the spirit of inner strength, making it possible for human beings to go beyond the duality of an abstract spirituality on the one hand and a literalized material world on the other in order to see *matter penetrated everywhere by spirit*.

All this was very much in Steiner's mind and heart at this time (1920) as he sought to welcome the new "Michaelites"—the new generation—and help the older members adjust to the new reality. Indeed, immediately before the series of lectures printed here (i.e., during November and December of 1919), Steiner gave the lectures to members in Dornach, *The Mission of the Archangel Michael* (CW 194).

As he was doing so, in the universities and colleges in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, anthroposophical student groups were springing into being. To receive these "Michaelites," by summer of 1920, a Union for Anthroposophical College Work would be founded and "college" courses held in the Goetheanum. All this youthful activity was not well received by the older members, who felt the foundations of their world and their understanding of Anthroposophy shaking. For Steiner, who saw the influx of new life as "epoch-making in the Anthroposophical Society," this resistance on the part of older members proved to be a problem. He would have to do all he could to bring them into the new way of thinking.

This was easier said than done. The conflict between the older members and the new, young people was real. The young people prized their freedom and independence. They wanted to pursue the "free spiritual life" offered by Anthroposophy in their own way and did not shy away from expressing their dissatisfaction and unhappiness with the mood, tenor, and spirit of the Anthroposophical Society as they found it. Indeed, very soon, they sought to organize their own society, and already by March 1920 (just after the lectures printed here) they circulated a "Call for the Foundation of a Youth Branch." In April of that same year, one of their members, Otto Palmer, made their case at the Goetheanum. He began quite bluntly:

If you want to understand this movement rightly, you must see it above all as a protest that has come alive among the youth against the old life of the branches In fact, something in the youth feels the need not to see Anthroposophy as a mere Sunday afternoon decoration. Rather, it wants to lead what we are given in Anthroposophy into life and translate it into practice.

As these lectures demonstrate, Rudolf Steiner could not agree more.

Against this complex background, then, Rudolf Steiner continues his “Michael” lectures, speaking to members in the new, direct “Michaelic” manner, seeking to build a bridge to the rising consciousness, to the new way of doing Anthroposophy, by addressing, in perhaps a general way, but with great earnestness and with heartfelt passion, “What is necessary in these urgent times.” His purpose is, in a manner of speaking, a call: Awake! Face reality! Act! Clearly, what was necessary then (in 1920) is still necessary now. The external conditions may have changed, but it takes little imagination to see that the crisis for human consciousness remains essentially the same.

All the immediate contextual themes, mentioned above, reverberate in what he has to say. The tone is relaxed and intimate. Steiner is talking to his friends, his students: one senses the love he feels for those he is addressing and for the suffering human beings on whose behalf he is doing so. Beyond and above that—indeed, permeating all he says—is his commitment to the greater evolutionary necessity that humanity consciously and dedicatedly accept the responsibility the spiritual world places upon it.

As he tells it—and history continues to demonstrate—the situation is critical. Action and a new inner determination are called for. Yet Steiner never loses his sense of humor or his compassion and equilibrium. His tone is continuously warm. In this he is helped by the fact that, unlike the better known, more tightly focused lecture courses, which build their insights in an almost architectonic way, the lectures here are looser and have a more conversational tone. Daily matters are dealt with, as well as high questions of initiation science. There is a sense of improvisation. Rather than following a strictly predetermined

path, Rudolf Steiner speaks directly from his heart, from what concerns him—which is what he feels should also concern his listeners.

We may say then that Steiner is not here speaking from “initiation consciousness,” but from the clear waking consciousness of an initiate. There is a great value in this, and it would be quite wrong to have the impression that Rudolf Steiner is not as serious as in his “great” lecture courses. Far from it, he is most serious, even earnest, and he has a theme—indeed a double theme—which, simply stated, is the critical importance for our time of spiritual, initiation knowledge—that is, of Anthroposophy. This knowledge must become existential. It must become social understanding. It must be acted upon. It cannot remain either a theory or system, or simply a matter of “inner” experiences, but must become living knowledge, the ongoing context of our lives, not just a once-a-week devotion.

The message thus is clear. We must learn not just to pay lip service to spiritual reality, but to act out of it, knowing that, as human beings, we are an integral part of an evolving spiritual cosmos that demands no less of us. Because this is so—and this is an important teaching, too—as he circles around different aspects of his themes, he always places his call to action in an evolutionary, historical context. In fact, he does so to such an extent, and with such insistency, that we may say that the pressing need to act *consciously* out of our historical, evolutionary moment constitutes a third theme. Such a historically awake, contextual response in terms of our actual lives—as the lectures stress repeatedly—is the only basis upon which humanity can avert the dangers that now threaten the entire course of evolution.

In these lectures, then, Rudolf Steiner has deep concerns, and he wants to share them, to wake up his listeners, his friends, to what is truly important. At the same time, precisely because he is with friends, he will not hesitate to interrupt the flow of his message and speak directly about what is on his mind—such as fundraising and how to deal with attacks on Anthroposophy. Thus, much ground is covered, and many themes central to Anthroposophy are brought together.

Steiner begins by stressing the importance of spiritual or “initiation” knowledge throughout the course of human history, and especially at

times of crisis when ordinary (habitual, automatic) human thinking cannot rise to the questions that humanity faces. Initiates of such knowledge are always present. They are with us today, though many people “balk when they hear of the necessity of incorporating initiation science into our contemporary consciousness.” However, initiation consciousness is not all the same—there is a difference between East and West—and not all initiation consciousness is pure, or unaffected by time and place.

Generally speaking, for instance, the new “humanitarian ideal,” then, as still today, emerging in the consciousness of the Anglo-Saxon West, may be viewed as being inspired by such initiatory sources. At the same time, we can also sense another, less pure motive working behind this ideal: that of world domination by the English-speaking peoples and Anglo-American culture. To recognize this, Steiner says, is to face reality—which is what the times require. Yet most people prefer to bury their head in the sand.

The same is true with regard to what emanates from the East. Rabindranath Tagore, a great mystical poet, may espouse radical ideals and write beautiful verses, but he is not an initiate. Eastern initiates, in fact, do not speak. They work in silence. Yet they too have a goal. Their goal is to end earthly civilization: that is, to tear souls from the reincarnational cycle so that they pursue their further evolution solely in the spiritual world. But such a goal, however, is clearly antithetical to the deed of Christ, which forever united the earthly and the spiritual.

Such quandaries remain unknown to most people. At the same time, most people are equally unaware that much of what is good in any culture arises instinctually from the unconscious. Therefore, at the boundaries of the East, in Germany, for instance, Goethe, Fichte, Schiller, Hegel, Herder, and so on—aristocrats of the spirit, bearers of civilization—are ignored. They are hardly known or read. Germans, like everyone else, are losing their “instincts”—instincts, which geniuses like Goethe separated from traditional culture, so that now they lie fallow, unfructified by the spirit. The same is true of Eastern Europe proper, where in Russia an ossified orthodoxy still holds sway. In other words, human beings everywhere are asleep. The situation is dire. As Steiner

says prophetically, Asia too could well fall prey to Western dominance, thereby strengthening the urge to escape from the Earth.

Thus “we stand in the midst of various forces.” But what do we have to confront them with? Our spiritual life is razor thin; it is nothing but rhetoric. To work together socially, as human beings, we have only intellectualism (judgmentalism) and emotionalism (basically animalistic drives). Both of these remove us from reality. But *it is precisely the task of spiritual science to awaken us to reality, to bring us to a true understanding of life!* To do so, however, we must understand the Earth and the human being in their whole spiritual-evolutionary context. Without such a holistic vision, nothing can be understood: neither society, nor the war, nor capitalism, nor the human future.

Continuing, Steiner turns next to two major forces disrupting human life and turning it away from reality: the pervasive presence of illusions and the ever-present possibility of degeneration into wickedness or evil. Both are related to the mystery of illness and death; both require a spiritual perspective to be understood. To do so, however, we distinguish *life* from *consciousness* as we know it, which arose only relatively late in our evolution. The farther back we go, in fact, the more life-processes are active, and the dreamier and less “conscious” consciousness is. Indeed, prior to the previous, pre-earthly phase of evolution—called by Steiner the “Moon phase”—there was no consciousness except that of dreamless sleep.

Consciousness, as we know it, comes about through the head—“head-processes”—which are actually death-processes that, while we live, only the life processes in the rest of the organism are able to counteract. Death is thus a necessity for consciousness: “an essential and fundamental law.” To understand this, as Steiner explains, we must understand the relationship of the Sun-Earth sphere and the Moon sphere and its forces. In our head, we are Moon beings; with the rest of our body, Sun beings. For, although Moon forces created our head, it receives everything from the Sun. In other words: “The human being’s center is a creation of the Moon, into which the Sun flows. The rest of the human organism is a creation of the Sun, in which Moon forces are at work.” What this means is that soul-spiritually we are cosmic beings, but because of the Moon forces (which are infused with luciferic

powers) we occlude that reality. This gives rise to the capacity for illusion. Yet, without this capacity for illusion—which is also the capacity for mental pictures and imaginations—consciousness is not possible. We would not be able to separate ourselves from, and then re-unite in consciousness, with our organism, which is our earthly task. Hence, illusion, like death, is necessary.

Up to this point Steiner has made little mention of the Earth. He has been dealing with the interaction of Sun and Moon—with nearly everything deriving from the Sun and processed as consciousness through the Moon. He has spoken, too, of the Sun-Earth sphere. But actually the Earth is “a kind of interpolation,” working in what comes to us from the Sun, so that we are not entirely Sun beings. What difference, then, does the Earth make? It makes us *independent*. Such is the function of gravity. But gravity must be tempered: we cannot only be pulled down. That is, the Sun saves us from becoming entirely one with the Earth. Were we to do so, we would become like wild beasts. To become independent, we need to have the Earth, but at the same time, it opens us up to the possibility of wickedness, the possibility of the overcoming of which lies with the capacities that we receive from the side of the “Sun.” Nevertheless, necessarily, the possibility—the temptation—to wickedness exists. Just as we need the capacity for illusion to become intelligent, so too we need the capacity of wickedness to become independent. But that is not all. The evolutionary insertion of will, without which we could not fulfill our human task, gives us a new power. It gives us the possibility of transforming illusion into lying, and wickedness into evil.

Such truths, Steiner says, are important, and without them no accurate picture of the human being is possible. Without knowing and acting out of them in a new way, no new social or human order can be imagined. Too long human beings have acted out of what is old, fixed, and habitual: now everything must be made new. And, for this to happen, Steiner says, we must take into account the Mystery of Golgotha, which represents a critical rupture or turning point in the evolution of the human being as a Sun-Earth and Moon being.

Up to Golgotha, because of the near-universal “openness” of the head organization of human beings, cultures had a unified character.

“Ancient wisdom”—accessed through the “open heads” of initiates and less powerfully by ordinary people—permeated humanity, connecting it to the cosmos. Ancient wisdom was cosmic knowledge. It taught little about human beings themselves, for they had not fully arrived at independent Earth-consciousness. Then, approaching Golgotha, divine revelation was given to the ancient Hebrew people. This revelation, addressed to the whole human bodily organization, rather than the head, was focused on the human: how Israel could best serve Yahweh. In other words, according to Steiner, humanity was addressed; but only collectively, not yet individually. This meant that, when the Mystery of Golgotha occurred, “pagan” or ancient wisdom could grasp the cosmic aspect, which gave rise to Gnosticism; while the Hebrew tradition could understand the collective-human aspect, which then formed the notion of the Church, which in turn led to that of the nation. But, as yet, no way of understanding the individual aspect was available. That would come only with the evolution of the Christian Mystery—for whose sake, from one point of view, Anthroposophy came into being.

After all, the Mystery of Golgotha demonstrated (as *An Outline of Esoteric Science* also showed) that cosmic and human evolutions are one; and that knowledge of the cosmos or nature and knowledge of the human being are similarly one, and they culminate in the individual human being. To take account of this reality obviously not only transforms the nature of the sciences, but also of culture and society generally—for if you take the individual, not the collective, as primary, then power has no place. As Steiner puts it:

When one human being stands before another, it is impossible to find anything on the basis of power; it is only possible to find something on the basis of things that can develop in the human being, so that the other person has some worth. We all have a worth to discover and develop within ourselves that will allow us to accomplish something for the sake of humanity; and each of us must simultaneously develop within ourselves a receptivity that allows us to recognize this worth in others.

In other words: instead of power, receptivity and trust are primary. This is how the meaning of the Mystery of Golgotha is built up. “It

must be built on what Christ said: Everything that you do to another, you do to me. The Christ came into the midst of humanity so that every individual human being would be able to recognize the worth of all other human beings.” To realize this, which is the meaning of spiritual life, we must be able to free ourselves all from exterior, worldly powers. And to accomplish this, we must learn to separate thinking and speaking, so that we are no longer mindlessly filled with “empty phrases,” “word husks,” but speak to one another in fresh words crafted from the direct intuition of wordless thinking. Then we will be able to recognize the spiritual gift that is another human being.

As always, Steiner relates these insights to the larger evolutionary movements of which they are a part. With great vigor and freshness, he repeatedly adduces phenomena to buttress his argument that now everything must be made new—that old forms and ways of thinking, old attitudes and assumptions, some of which go back millennia, must be let go of if the human-cosmic-divine enterprise is to flourish and fulfill its proper end. He tells us for instance how human spiritual-and-physical plasticity has changed over time: how in the ancient Indian epoch (8167-5567 B.C.E.), human beings continued to develop into their fifties, and how progressively this was gradually reduced until now we no longer develop after our twenty-eighth year. In other words, our heads have become increasingly hardened, or as he puts it “mummified,” so that now a different means—a purely spiritual means—of spiritual knowing is necessary. But it is not only how we think we know that depends on a malleability that we no longer possess; our social thinking suffers from the same barren atavism. Just as *The Philosophy of Freedom* outlined a new way of knowing out of the spirit, a radical new social structure—the Threefold Social order—must now be created out of the spirit. Just how radical it is, is suggested by the remark that “this threefold social order will create its own states and borders....”

But people are all asleep! We, too, must make ourselves anew; or we will remain perpetually twenty-seven-year-olds. Today, we must make ourselves into what—less consciously—we were by nature in past ages. To do this, we cannot go back, but must recreate ourselves out of the spirit. And our spiritual lives must penetrate all aspects of

life. Anthroposophy cannot be a Sunday-only observance. It must fill every moment of every day.

On the one hand, this is easy: “There exists a spiritual revelation, a supersensory revelation—and we need only turn ourselves toward it.” On the other, it is extraordinarily difficult because the dead weight of habit and the past all mitigate against it. Yet it must be done—and done individually, one by one. This is new. Previously, initiation science worked through the collective. For this reason, as Steiner insists, now “initiation science always centers absolutely on the individual.” It can only gain ground by addressing each individual and appealing to his or her powers of conviction. Thus addressed, the true work of cooperation can begin. We can begin to act not by rote and dead phrase, but out of the spirit. Here, again, trust becomes “the most important social motive of the future. If we cannot learn to trust each other as individuals, “humanity will fall into the abyss.” As Steiner puts it, “There is no third path.” Either we learn to trust one another, or we fall into a path that can lead only to the war of all against all. Anything else is simply an abstraction. Only radical trust in each other and the spiritual world can free us from the bonds of habit and dead speech. Again, as Steiner says, “The necessary task of forging a true place for thought in the world must nowadays begin in a battle with language.” Simply stated, we must learn to think before we speak, and to realize that thinking and speaking are different activities and that speaking must serve, and be continuously formed and reformed—in, by, and through thinking.

Again, this is easier said than done, and requires, above all, that we grasp and existentially realize that we are spiritual beings, who, in addition to incarnated lives on Earth between birth and death, experience life in another form between death and a new birth. Indeed, our lives in the “spiritual” world have a significant consequence on our subsequent earthly lives. From this it follows, as became increasingly important to Steiner, that our earthly lives—and earthly life as a whole—are constantly “acted in” from the spiritual world by discarnate beings, including deceased human beings (the “dead”) and various members of the angelic hierarchies. Finally, indeed, as Steiner puts it: “these powers that stream from the spiritual world are the one

and only thing that will make it possible to understand all of humanity and the entire course of human evolution on Earth.” More than that: we ourselves live with two thirds of our being in the spiritual world; only one third lives on Earth.

It is critical, then, that we maintain the right balance between the Earth and the spiritual worlds. We need to strive in a lively, sensitive way in-between the two. Here, of course, what Steiner calls the luciferic and ahrimanic temptations come into play: Lucifer would draw us away from the Earth; Ahriman would bind us too tightly to it. Our destiny is to become conscious soul-spiritual beings, which we may say requires us to accomplish the difficult task of learning to care for the Earth for the sake of Heaven, the school for which is the life between death and a new birth, about which only initiation science can teach us. However, it is one thing to have such insights; it is another to be able to translate them into the language of healthy human understanding. At the same time, to understand what is said, *we, too, must develop healthy human understanding*. As Steiner says, “People could have plenty of these experiences if they wanted to. They are out there. People are simply not using their healthy human understanding to arrive at them.”

Healthy understanding, healthy logic, is in the end the power of truth that will unveil the spiritual world; but, if we let error and falsehood enter, that spiritual world will disappear and understanding will fail. Our words must say what we mean, and mean what we say. At the same time, and perhaps above all, we must learn to trust, which, Steiner stresses again, is the primary virtue.

At another level, we need to realize that thinking is bound to a physical body only as long as we are embodied. Once we leave the physical body, “our thinking lives in the light.” But most people today are used to thinking only in relation to the reflected physical world. They know only the reflected body and the reflected “I,” because they have only an objectifying, instrumental consciousness. To begin to overcome this “false consciousness,” in addition to trust—in fact, as a way of developing it—we must begin to take a selfless interest (to be distinguished from curiosity, which is egotistic) in everything. This, coupled with a healthy understanding that

we live in and from a spiritual world from which we receive even our own being as a gift, can go a long way to transforming human life on Earth. At the same time, as Steiner repeatedly stresses, we must become aware of the extent to which our thinking is not only habitual—that is dead—but thoroughly permeated with unwilled, unconscious, dreamlike, Moon-derived, hence luciferic, illusory elements, which, above all, conceal from us the future-creating potential of our thinking. Thinking only of present utility, we fall into the counter-temptation of Ahriman and thereby make things worse by cooperating in Ahriman's collaboration with Lucifer. Only inner development—in the direction of the Christ, of “making all things new” out of conscious spiritual knowledge—can work against this tendency. Otherwise, things will just fall farther apart, and we can only keep futilely gluing them back together.

At this point the question arises of what Anthroposophy—with its Movement for a Threefold Social Order—is doing getting mixed up in politics. On the contrary, Steiner insists, it is demanding precisely the opposite: that spiritual life no longer “be connected to politics at all.” Threefolding calls only for a political system in which spiritual, cultural life can be free and independent, and give itself its own form. Legal, cultural-spiritual, and economic spheres have so interpenetrated each other in modern societies that they constitute virtually a single entity dominated by the most powerful forces, today increasingly those of the economic sphere. But once, for instance, the spiritual-cultural sphere is separated out, it can become its own organism, supporting itself in freedom, and thus becoming entirely dependent on human beings' direct relation to the spirit: it can become truly human and work for a human future out of the spirit. The same is true of economic life: separated, it will necessarily develop in the direction of association and “brotherhood” in a truly human way. And if this occurs, the middle sphere of public rights will likewise be based on truly universal all-human values. In this way, gradually, egotism—the influences of Lucifer and Ahriman—in all spheres will slowly be overcome, and humanity will be able to fulfill its mission as the bridge between the spiritual and the earthly worlds: clear, healthy thinking, feeling, and willing will once again be possible.

But for this to happen, human beings—and Anthroposophists first of all—must develop the openness and independence of mind and heart that—unprejudiced by old habits of thought—can recognize how outmoded and inadequate the political, economic, and spiritual structures inherited from the past have become.

To demonstrate one way of thinking about this, in a dense and allusive lecture—lecture nine—Steiner turns in a more esoteric and historical direction. Usually, we think of history as unfolding at significant transformative moments through the impact of “great” individuals and such indeed, at first glance, is the case. Francis Bacon, William Shakespeare, and Jacob Boehme—for instance—were apparently very different individuals whose work initiated a significant and ongoing transformation in modern consciousness. Their influence is self-evident. But that is only half the story, because, in fact, as Steiner puts it, such individuals are often “simply the means and paths through which certain driving spiritual forces reach from the spiritual world into the Earth’s history.” They are the “doorway through which such forces enter world history” and “leaps” in consciousness occur. This is to say we cannot understand our present moment, if we do not take into account the leap that inaugurated what Steiner calls “the age of the consciousness soul”: that is, the leap that began our contemporary, modern scientific “observer-consciousness,” which is evolving into what is now generally recognized as its next, “post-modern” stage, within which, of course, many—now outdated or decadent—“modern” traits necessarily still exist.

Modernity, in this sense, is clearly determined first of all by the entry into consciousness of “scientific thinking”—experimentation, “nature on the rack,” the value-free study of the material and, biologically speaking, dead world, and hence the radical separation of “science” from the spiritual or religious viewpoint which became isolated, abstracted and therefore remained unchanged. Here Bacon, for instance, is often considered critical. But, viewed from a larger vantage point, Bacon—and thus the attitude of modern science—is, in fact, only symptomatic of a larger shift of perspective away from human reality and toward an abstracted morality of usefulness or utility. In other words, as Steiner puts it, in historical change, it is not

the literal content of what an individual says that is important, but the spirit out of which it comes. As if to demonstrate this, he then unfolds the manifold and in some sense disastrous consequences of the Baconian or scientific spirit in different fields—including the religious and political—at the same time showing how its reception differed in Western and Central Europe. It is an interesting and instructive story, but not in itself surprising.

The surprise comes when Steiner turns to Shakespeare, Boehme, and the largely today unknown Jesuit poet Jacobus Baldus (Jakob Bald) and asserts that however different they may seem they all share the same inspiration. More concretely, they all stem from the “same initiated person”—the same initiate. These three who, as Steiner shows, shaped early modern consciousness in so many ways stem from the same one initiate, whose identity he here leaves unclear. Other lectures however make it clear that he is referring to King James I. Readers wishing to further explore this mystery, which is clearly related to the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy, should read Richard Ramsbotham’s *Who Wrote Bacon?—William Shakespeare, Francis Bacon and James the First: A Mystery for the Twenty-first Century* (London: Temple Lodge, 2004).

Steiner’s point in these lectures is that the impulses that these figures transmitted have atrophied and sickened, that “it is time for a new understanding,” especially with regard to the Mystery of Golgotha.

For as always in Rudolf Steiner, a new understanding of Christ is critical to the possibility of a new impulse entering earthly life. Indeed, he likens the crisis of our time to that occurring at the end of the Roman Empire when, following Constantine and out of the soul possibilities of the time, Christianity began to spread and ancient thought to decline. At that moment, then, a certain view of the Christ and the Christian Mystery was formulated—a view that generally speaking still prevails, even though, as it spread westward into and across Europe, it was modified, for whatever changes it received were once again out of “old imaginations” and so it remained more or less the same. All these imaginations are now obsolete. In a word, we need something new—not just in Christianity but in all things, for anachronistic, archaic notions dominate the entire world we live

in—spiritual, economic, and political (just consider the question of national boundaries). Though this condition is general, in the case of our relation to Christ—which is the heart of Christianity—it is worse, since the Protestant Reformation further falsified the situation by its over-emphasis on individual, indeed egotistic, inner experiences. Today, immersion in one's inner life, which was still quite appropriate to mystics like Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler in the Middle Ages, is no longer sufficient. The "Christ within" must now be fully complemented by the Christ who said, "When two or more are gathered together in my name I am with them." Steiner is very clear about this:

When someone is alone, the Christ is not there. You cannot find the Christ without first feeling a connection to collective humanity. You must seek the Christ on a path that brings you together with all of humankind.... Being contented solely with one's own inner experiences leads one away from the Christ-impulse... This is precisely the great misfortune of the present moment, that people do not have any interest in collective humanity (not just individual human beings). We only come to really know ourselves when we first understand human beings as such.

"But," he continues, "we cannot understand the human being as such without seeking its origin in the more-than-earthly." Without such knowledge as is presented in *An Outline of Esoteric Science*, which shows the divine-cosmic-spiritual origin and nature of humanity, no true social life is possible and, likewise, no true renewal of Christianity. What is needed is knowledge of human beings as a single being, coeval in a sense with the cosmos, and hence the intimate coworkers and friends of the spiritual and divine, evolutionarily reincarnating, with lives on both sides of the threshold of death, in both the spiritual and the earthly worlds. Without such self-knowledge, which is excluded from our educational system, any program of reform is illusory. To effect any real change, then, we need a vision of the course of human evolution such as initiation science provides. Such is the new spiritual impulse that is seeking "to enter the very

foundation of our civilized world.” Yet precisely this impulse is under threat from the egotism of nationalisms still conceived essentially as bloodlines. Blood relations certainly taught humanity the beginnings of love—kinship love—but that time is over. Christ did not appear on Earth for any particular national group of this kind: he came for the sake of all humankind. To begin to receive him, then, we too must begin to take an interest in all human affairs. We can no longer be concerned only with our own souls. Indeed, as Steiner puts it in words as relevant now as when he spoke them: “Self-interest is the great misfortune of our times and the solution will only come if people, having experienced the awful things that have occurred in the last few years, truly say to themselves: we must take an interest in the affairs of all humankind.”

In other words, our spiritual lives—to the extent that we have them—have become “removed and abstract,” disconnected from the reality of our practical lives. Spirituality has become a “Sunday” affair, as if day-to-day life were somehow unworthy, whereas in fact spiritual life has no real value if we do not take it into the everyday, practical world. This is precisely what Anthroposophy means: bringing the spiritual into the practical, for example through the Threefold Social Order. Anthroposophists must therefore “become practical in the most eminent sense of the word, and yet they must also still be able to look into the spiritual world.” The two paths are not mutually exclusive. Together, they allow us to face reality—the truth about what is going on—in a conscious way; only a realistic and conscious approach to the problems facing humanity can hope to solve them. Spiritual reality can only be successfully approached in this way: with clear, healthy, thinking human consciousness and a willingness to face the facts. This may not be easy, but, as Steiner says, the alternative is fear and escapism of one form or another.

Stated thus, one may agree and yet not quite see the way forward. And so, as he does so often in these lectures, Steiner gives the task a historical, evolutionary frame. He points first to the different ways in which ancient (Atlantean) wisdom was transmitted and received in the East and in the West. In the East, it was taken up primarily into the soul, but in the West it was absorbed primarily through the

body and the brain. Western European peoples understood that the body could take up the spirit—indeed, that the body was spiritual. This was how they first took up Christianity. But gradually they lost this ability and with it Christianity—and the Christ-impulse itself—gradually got lost too, while, at the same, the memory of the body led the European peoples increasingly into materialism. Thus, in the West we now have to find a new way to the spirit and to Christ. This is a historical, evolutionary necessity. It is what we are called to. But to find this new way to the spirit requires that we begin to meet each other out of a full knowledge of the human being as taught by initiation science. We must begin to act out of a spiritual understanding of the connection of the earthly and the supra-earthly worlds.

In other words, we must become aware again, as the ancients were, that human beings are cosmic beings and belong to the cosmos. We must let go of the “self-knowledge” that “exists in the incubator of one’s own beloved ‘I,’” and realize ourselves as “universal beings.” We must begin to understand our so-called higher soul faculties—memory, intelligence, and sense perception—differently and see them clearly both in their experiential, phenomenological reality and in their evolutionary course. Steiner (in lectures thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen) lays the ground for us to do so in simple direct language and carefully chosen examples, charged with insights. Perhaps he has said these things before—in fact, he certainly has—but for this reader at least, here they have a clarity and immediacy that allows them to penetrate consciousness in a different way. Deep, practical soul questions are planted that could last a lifetime.

The questions are practical because they call for practical application, for the overriding concern that motivates Rudolf Steiner’s every word in these lectures is the need—individually, socially, and politically, as well as spiritually—for concerted action: to make it new! Initiation science calls us to make a new world. This new world must be cosmopolitan, person-to-person—at once Earth- and Heaven-centered. It must overcome and transform old, ingrained, egotistic habits, such as nationalism. It must finally overcome the dangerous, exclusivist, separatist tendencies of bloodlines, which are now compounded by the arbitrary, historical drawing of national

borders. Associations, affinities, cultures must form naturally out of human relationships open to and permeated by participation in and by the spiritual worlds. Above all, this new world must eschew greed and selfishness. It must leave behind the automatisms of egotistic power and dominance. Therefore, most poignantly and relevantly, Steiner ends with three lectures on “imperialism.” In these, he is addressing especially the English members of his audience, because it is already clear to him that Anglo-American, free market capitalism will be the vehicle of a “new” imperialism, the dangers of which threaten the healthy evolution of a new global, cosmopolitan—that is, “Michaelic”—polity in multiple ways. If anything demonstrates conclusively the contemporary relevance of these lectures, this is it. Rudolf Steiner is talking to us, today, in the twenty-first century. We ignore his words at our peril.