

## 7. The Questioning Stance of Soul

Extract from a lecture given in Berlin on 6 January 1914

*The relationship between questions and answers can be resolved in a number of ways, for instance by a refusal to countenance the uncertainties of doubt, and pressing on instead to an answer at all costs; or, more uncomfortably, by choosing to seek patiently in the space that opens up between them, 'entertaining' doubts and allowing their resolution through a slow process of growth and increasing understanding. Here, in connection with Parzival's failure to ask the right question at the Grail castle, Steiner discusses the differences between a more materialistic or more spiritual stance of soul in relation to questions and answers. Rilke once wrote: 'Be patient towards all that is unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves . . . live the questions now. Perhaps you will gradually, without noticing it, live at last some distant day into the answers.'<sup>10</sup> Materialism, suggests Steiner, is unwilling to pose the really fundamental questions because it thinks it has all the answers already.*

In the first place we have to consider how Parzival, several centuries after the Mystery of Golgotha, marks an important step in the working of the Christ event in a human soul.

Parzival was the son of a knight-errant and the lady Herzeleide. The knight departed before Parzival was even born, leaving his mother to suffer pain and torment before he ever arrived on earth. She wanted to protect her son from everything connected with knightly virtues and from developing one's powers by being a knight. She brought him up in such a

way that he knew nothing of the outside world or of what it might offer. He grew up in isolation in the wilds of nature, knowing only what nature could teach. His mother wanted him to know nothing of what normally unfolds between knights and amongst other people. The story even relates that he knew nothing of the religious ideas current in the world. His mother told him only that God exists and underlies everything. He wished to serve God, but he knew no more than this: that he might serve God. Everything else was kept hidden from him. However, the urge to be a knight<sup>11</sup> was so powerful that one day he felt urged to leave his mother, and set forth into the world to seek his destiny. After many wanderings he came to the Grail castle. The best description of what happened there—in relation to what we can gather from the spiritual record of these events—is found in Chrétien de Troyes,<sup>12</sup> who was also a source for Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.<sup>13</sup> We learn that in his wanderings, Parzival one day arrived at a wooded region by a shore where two men were fishing. At his request they showed him the way to the castle of the Fisher King. On reaching the castle he entered and saw a weak, sick man lying on a couch. The man gave him a sword, that of his niece. Parzival also saw a squire enter with a lance from which blood was dripping onto the squire's hands. Then a maiden carrying a golden chalice entered, the light from which shone brighter than all other lights in the hall. A meal was served. Each time another course was served, the chalice was carried past Parzival into the next room, where the Fisher King's father was nourished by it.

To Parzival all this seemed a marvel; but earlier on in his wanderings, a knight had advised him not to ask many questions. He therefore did not ask about what he saw here,

though he intended to the following morning. Yet when he woke the next day, the castle was deserted. He called out but no one came. He thought the knights had gone hunting and wanted to follow them. In the castle yard he found his horse saddled and ready. He rode off but had to be quick to get over the drawbridge: his horse had to leap the gap when the drawbridge was pulled up as he rode over it. He saw no sign of the knights however.

Of course we know what this was about: Parzival had not asked the question he should have. The most wondrous thing appeared before him, but he asked nothing. He was repeatedly told that part of his mission was to ask about the wondrous things he encountered. When he did not ask, it slowly dawned on him that this failure had caused a kind of ill fate. Thus we see an individual brought up in isolation from the culture of the world, supposed to know nothing about it, who was meant to ask about the mysteries of the Grail when these came before him: but to ask in a virginal way, as a soul not affected or influenced by the culture of the day. Why was he to ask in this way? I have suggested on a number of occasions that the Christ impulse led to a deed that humanity was not immediately able to understand. On the one hand, therefore, the fact that the Christ had streamed into the aura of the earth has had an ongoing effect irrespective of what people might think or contend in all kinds of theological dogmas—it went on working regardless. And the western world took shape under the influence of this Christ impulse, which may be said to have worked on human souls at a profound level, behind the scenes of history. If this impulse had acted only insofar as people understood it and disputed about it, it would not have contributed much to human evolution. But at the