

3. From Arthur to Parzival

Extract from a lecture given in Torquay on 21 August 1924

Returning now to the origins of the Parzival saga, which has close connections with Arthurian legends yet represents an important departure from them, Steiner here highlights the nature of this distinction as the new 'earthing' of cosmic intelligence in human evolution. Arthurian Christianity looks out into the spirit in nature and the cosmos, whereas the Christianity of the Grail is one sought primarily within human beings. Just as Christ fully rooted spiritual worlds in earthly reality, so the Grail principle is that of an embodied and fully grounded spirit working through human hearts.

When conferring in council, King Arthur occupied the central seat with the 12 ranged in a circle round him; and over each hung a zodiac symbol, as emblem to show under which cosmic influence they stood. It was from this place that European civilization emanated. It was here that Arthur and his 12 absorbed from the sun the forces they needed to conduct their great campaigns throughout the rest of Europe, and to drive out from people the ancient demonic powers still widespread in the European population of the time. These 12 companions, led by King Arthur, battled to secure outer civilization.

If we ask ourselves how these 12 felt, what they felt themselves to be, we can only understand the nature of their fraternity if we return to what I just characterized. People did not feel intelligence to be dwelling inside them. They did not say: 'I work out my thoughts and intelligent ideas', but

instead experienced intelligence as revelation, and sought such revelation through a group such as I described, a group of 12 or 13, together drawing in from without the intelligence they needed to form imperuses which would inform and affect civilization. And likewise they felt themselves as serving the power which we can call by the Christian and Hebrew name of Michael.⁴ The whole configuration of King Arthur's castle shows that the group of 12 under King Arthur's leadership is a Michael community, from the time when Michael still dispensed cosmic intelligence.

Yes, this community is in fact what has held out longest to safeguard Michael's dominion over cosmic intelligence. And one can say that as we look out today over the ruins of Arthur's castle we can feel, preserved in the Akashic records, a sense of stones tumbling down still from what were once mighty castle gates; and as these stones fall down we can feel something like an earthly image of the lapse of intelligence, of cosmic intelligence, from the hands of Michael into the hearts and minds of human beings.

And alongside this Arthur-Michael stream, another, contrary stream arises at the place to which Christianity in more inward form had fled for refuge. This is the Grail stream, described in the legend of Parzival. In this Grail stream, too, we find 12 surrounding one figure, but now in a way that specifically takes account of the fact that intelligence, thoughts of an intelligent kind, no longer flow down from heaven to earth, but that what now flows down conducts itself in relation to earthly thoughts like the holy fool Parzival. This is what now flows down from the heavens, and intelligence is now only regarded as arising in the earthly domain.

Over here, in the north, stands Arthur's castle, where

people keep the flame of cosmic intelligence alive, and desire to integrate the intelligence of the universe with earthly civilization. And on the other hand there stands, as contrast to it, the Grail castle where intelligence is no longer invoked from the heavens but where the realization has dawned that human wisdom and heavenly wisdom are worlds apart. From this other castle in the south there streams out what can pour into the intelligence that has lapsed from the heavens.

And so, if we really penetrate what was happening here we can see in these ancient times—which also reach right into the period when the Mystery of Golgotha occurs over in Asia—the most fervent efforts undertaken by the Arthur principle on the one hand to safeguard Michael's cosmic dominion over intelligence, and on the other, starting in Spain, the Grail principle with its efforts to locate intelligence on earth in future, so that it does not need to stream down from the heavens. The whole Grail legend draws its breath from the sense of what I have just expressed.

And so, by studying these two streams in relation to each other, we find the great problem which, one can say, the historical situation posed for people at this time: the continuing reverberations of the Arthur principle, and those of the Grail principle. The problem was this: how does a human being such as Parzival, and indeed, how does Michael himself find the path from the Arthurian champions, who desire to secure Michael's dominion, to the Grail champions, who wish to forge his path into human hearts and minds so that he can grasp hold of intelligence there? And then the great problem of our own age stands clear and whole before us: Michael's new dominion obliges us to grasp hold of Christianity in a deeper sense. In the two contrasting castles—the one whose ruins we can see at Tintagel, and the other castle

less easily seen by human eyes because it is surrounded by '60 leagues of impenetrable forest' on all sides—we find this problem inscribed in mighty form: how is Michael to kindle the impetus for grasping the truth of Christianity?

It would not be right to overlook the fact that the knights of King Arthur fought for Christ and in harmony with the Christ impulse. But we should remember that they still sought Christ in the sun, and did not wish to give up seeking Him there. Fighting their Michaelic battles for the Christ who works down in the rays of the sun is precisely what gave them the sense of carrying the heavens down to earth. In the Grail stream the Christ impetus worked in a quite different way, in full awareness that it had descended to earth and must be borne in human hearts, and unite the sun with human, earthly evolution. [...]

Extract from a lecture given in Torquay on 27 August 1924

Elaborating on the same theme, Steiner now shows how these two 'streams'—the Arthurian, nature stream and the inner Grail stream—work towards each other historically and finally meet in the ninth century, so that, as it were, picture and inner reality merge in the heart of Europe; or, one could also say, the image finds its reality and is thereby greatly enhanced and invigorated. It is from this convergence also that the Parsival epic develops in Europe, as the symbolic journey from a cosmic but naive wisdom (Parsival is also called the 'holy fool') to a conscious grasp of the spirit in our lives and actions.

The date Steiner mentions is one he refers to elsewhere as being extremely important, for it also witnessed the ecumenical council meeting of that year at which the Church fathers, in Steiner's

phrase, 'abolished the spirit'. The doctrine of the trinity of body, soul and spirit was thus replaced with a body-soul duality. Yet the Parsival saga surreptitiously works against this new, truncating doctrine in highlighting the deeds of its three prime, mutually interacting and enhancing figures, Parsival, Gawain and Feirefiz. In the penultimate section of this book we will see how these three embody essential powers of the soul.

Thus from the West working eastwards we have the Mystery of Golgotha as something legible in nature to those who could read it, as the science, we can call it, of the more highly schooled knights of the Round Table; and from the East working its way westwards we have the stream—not now legible in wind and waves, in air and water, not configured in mountains and sunshine, but instead a stream radiating through the blood of human beings and their hearts, and grasping hold of their blood—which was passing from Palestine through Greece to Italy and Spain.

And so we can say that this passes through nature on the one hand and through the blood on the other, through human hearts. These two streams move towards each other: the one that still weaves within nature, that is still present today in the whole pagan stream, bearing the pre-Christian, pagan Christ, who as sun being was spread abroad before the Mystery of Golgotha by people such as the knights of the Round Table—but also by many others. This stream also bears the pre-Christian Christ into the world during the time of the Mystery of Golgotha. And to a large extent this all emanated from the stream we can summarize as the Arthurian. One can still encounter these things today: pagan Christianity that does not directly connect with the historical event at Golgotha.

And rising to meet this is the Christianity which connects

with the Mystery of Golgotha, passing through human blood, through human hearts and souls. So we have two streams which flow towards each other: the pre-Christian Christ stream, which I will call etherealized, and the Christian Christ stream. The one later became known as the Arthur stream, while the other came to be known as the Grail stream. Both later converged: they did so within Europe and primarily also in the world of spirit.

How can we characterize this movement? The Christ who descended through the Mystery of Golgotha entered human hearts. In human hearts themselves He passed from East to West, from Palestine through Greece and Italy to Spain. Grail Christianity spread abroad through human blood, through human hearts, and Christ advanced from East to West.

This migration, as it were, was met by the spirit-ether image of the Christ coming from the West, taking its impetus from the Mystery of Golgotha but still bearing within it the Christ of the sun mysteries.

A sublime and wonderful phenomenon was unfolding here behind the scenes of world history. From the West, pagan Christianity, Arthur Christianity, which also appeared under other names and in other guises, was advancing. And from the East, Christ was passing westwards in human hearts. These two converged: the actual Christ who had descended to earth encountered His image, flowing towards Him from West to East. This convergence and encounter occurred in 869. Until this point we have clearly differentiated a stream in the North and passing through Central Europe which bore the Christ within it as sun hero—whether one called Him Baldur or some other name. Under the blazon of Christ as sun hero, the Arthurian knights spread their culture.

The other stream, inwardly rooted in the heart and later becoming the Grail stream, can be found more in the South and coming from the East, and bears the true and actual Christ within it. The stream coming from the West bears towards Him what one can call a cosmic picture.

In the ninth century, then, occurred the encounter and convergence of the Christ with Himself, with His own image: the Christ as brother of the human being and the Christ as sun hero, present only as image.

4. The Grail as Human Potential

Excerpt from chapter 6 of *Occult Science, 'Present and Future Evolution of the World and Mankind'*

Enhancement and conscious harmonizing of the three powers of thinking, feeling and will—closely connected with the trinity of spirit, soul and body referred to in the commentary on the previous section—is here seen as intimately connected with the Grail. Central to this enhancement are the efforts each individual makes out of himself in the course of self-development. In other words, we can see the Grail, in this sense, as the knowledge awaiting us if we can raise ourselves to it by working upon ourselves. The Grail is thus not the passive 'object' of a quest, but a potential we all bear within us.

But in the place [of ancient initiation knowledge] there developed what may be called an increasingly stronger influx into human souls of the knowledge gained through modern supersensible consciousness. The 'hidden knowledge' flows, although quite unnoticed at the beginning, into the mode of thinking of people of this period. It is self-evident that, up to the present, intellectual forces reject this knowledge. But what must happen will happen in spite of all temporary rejection. The 'hidden knowledge' which takes hold of mankind now and will take hold of it increasingly in the future, may be called symbolically 'the wisdom of the Grail'. By understanding the deeper meaning of this symbol, as it appears in legend and myth, we shall find that it is a significant image of the nature of what has been described as knowledge of the new initiation founded on the Christ

mystery. Modern initiates may therefore also be called 'initiates of the Grail'. The way into the supersensible worlds, the first stages of which have been described in this book, leads to the 'science of the Grail'. [...] What may be known through imagination, inspiration, and intuition about higher worlds in connection with the Christ mystery will increasingly permeate humanity's life of thought, feeling, and will. The 'concealed knowledge of the Grail' will be revealed; and as an inner force it will increasingly permeate human life. [...]

The highest imaginable ideal of human evolution results from 'knowledge of the Grail': the spiritualization that we acquire through our own efforts. This spiritualization appears finally as a result of the harmony that we develop [...] between the acquired powers of intellect and feeling, and knowledge of the supersensible worlds. [...] The human spirit elevates itself to the tremendous impressions of its outer world and first divines and afterwards recognizes spiritual beings behind these impressions; the human heart develops a sense of the boundless sublimity of the spiritual realm.