

## 1. Christian Catharsis: the Purified Soul

Extract from a lecture given in Hamburg on 18 May 1908

*The suggestion below that we should be 'fertilized by what streams into us from the world of spirit' rather than focusing exclusively on our own inner processes, is a fitting prelude to the Grail theme. We can cleanse or purify ourselves so that we open to the influx of powers in the cosmos, developing and enhancing our nature through them. The related theme of sexuality as 'given' human experience that can be raised to a conscious spiritual sphere, and ultimately transformed, is also one that will recur throughout this book. Here we find the purified, receptive human soul embodied in the figure of the mother of Jesus (known as the 'Virgin Sophia' in the esoteric tradition), and can thus make an immediate and direct connection with the life and deed of Christ, which is essential for understanding the Grail and our human response to it. The Gospel of St John also clearly has an intimate connection with the originating Word or Logos, and we will later see how Steiner connects the Grail quest with the life-creating potential inherent in human utterance.*

We must understand that when a person has attained this [Rosicrucian] initiation he is fundamentally quite different from the person he was before it. While formerly he was only associated with the things of the physical world, he now acquires the possibility likewise of associating with events and beings of the world of spirit. This presupposes that we acquire knowledge in a much more real way than in that abstract, dry, prosaic sense in which we usually refer to knowledge. A person who acquires spiritual knowledge finds

the process to be something quite different—a complete realization of that beautiful expression ‘Know thyself’. The most dangerous thing in the realm of knowledge, however, is to misunderstand these words; and nowadays this occurs all too frequently. Many construe them to mean that they should no longer look about the physical world but should gaze into their own inner being and seek there for everything spiritual. This is a very mistaken understanding of the saying, for that is not at all what it means. We must clearly understand that true higher knowledge is also an evolution from one standpoint which the human being has attained to another he had not previously reached. If we practise self-knowledge only by brooding on ourselves, we see only what we already possess. We acquire nothing new by this process, but only knowledge of our own lower self in the present meaning of that word. This inner nature is only one aspect necessary for knowledge, and must be complemented by the other aspect. Without both there is no real knowledge. Through our inner nature we can develop organs by which we gain knowledge. But just as the eye, as an external sense organ, would not perceive the sun by gazing into itself, but only by looking outwards to the sun, so the inner perceptive organs must gaze outwards, or in other words into an external spiritual realm in order to actually perceive. The concept of ‘knowledge’ had a much deeper, more real meaning in former ages. When we read in the Bible that Abraham or some other patriarch ‘knew his wife’ we soon find that this means fertilization and reproduction. If you consider the words ‘Know thyself’ in Greek, they do not mean that you should stare into your own inner being but that you should be fertilized by what streams into you from the world of spirit. [...]

Two things are necessary for this to happen: firstly a self-preparation through catharsis and illumination, and secondly an opening of our inner being freely to the world of spirit. Here we may liken our inner nature to the female aspect, and the outer content of the spiritual world to the male. The inner being must be made sensitive and receptive to the higher self. When this happens, the higher human self streams into us from the world of spirit. We can ask where this higher human self is. Is it somewhere within us as individuals? No, it is not. On Saturn, Sun and Moon,<sup>2</sup> the higher self was diffused over the entire cosmos. At that time the cosmic I was spread out across all humankind; but now we have to permit it to work upon us, upon our previously prepared inner nature. This means that our inner human nature—the astral body—must be cleansed, purified and ennobled and must undergo catharsis. Then the spirit can stream into us from without, illuminating us. This will happen when our astral body has undergone a catharsis that develops inner organs of perception. [...]

This cleansed, purified astral body which, at the moment of illumination, bears within it none of the impure impressions of the physical world but only the organs of perception of the spiritual world, is called the 'pure, chaste, wise virgin Sophia' in esoteric Christianity. Through all we receive as pupils in catharsis, we cleanse and purify the astral body so that it transforms into the virgin Sophia. And when the virgin Sophia meets the cosmic I, the universal I which causes illumination, the pupil is surrounded by light, by spiritual light. In esoteric Christianity this second power that approaches the virgin Sophia is called the 'Holy Spirit'. In line with esoteric Christianity, therefore, it is true to say that through his processes of initiation the Christian esotericist

purifies and cleanses his astral body; he makes his astral body into the virgin Sophia and is illumined from above—one might call it ‘overshadowed’—by the Holy Spirit, the cosmic, universal I. Someone thus illumined—who in other words, in terms of esoteric Christianity, has received the ‘Holy Spirit’ into himself—speaks in a different way from then on. How does he speak? When he speaks of Saturn, Sun and Moon evolutionary stages, or the different aspects of the human being, or the processes of cosmic evolution, he is not expressing *his own* opinion. *His* views do not come into consideration at all. When such a person speaks about Saturn, it is Saturn itself that speaks through him. When he speaks of the sun, the spiritual being of the sun speaks through him. He is the instrument. His personal ego has been eclipsed—which means that at such moments it has become impersonal and the cosmic, universal I is using his ego as its instrument to speak through. [...]

Thus we have acquired two concepts, and found their spiritual significance. We have learned to know the nature of the virgin Sophia, which is the purified astral body, and the nature of the ‘Holy Spirit’, the cosmic universal I, which the virgin Sophia receives and which can then speak out of this purified astral body. There is something still more to be attained—a still higher stage: the ability to help someone else, to give him the impetus to accomplish both of these. At our stage of evolution people can receive the virgin Sophia (the purified astral body) and the Holy Spirit (illumination) in the manner described, but only Christ Jesus could give to the earth what was necessary to accomplish this. He has implanted in the spiritual part of the earth the forces which make it possible for this to happen at all. [...]

The events in Palestine not only have to do with the highly

evolved individuality of Jesus of Nazareth, who had passed through many incarnations and developed so highly that he needed such an extraordinary mother as the virgin Sophia, but also with a second mystery. When Jesus of Nazareth was 30 years old, what he had so far experienced enabled him to perform an exceptional action. We know that the human being consists of physical, etheric and astral bodies and I.<sup>3</sup> This fourfold human being is the earthly human being we know. But at a certain stage of evolution, at a particular moment, a person can withdraw his I or ego from the three bodies and abandon them, leaving them intact and entirely uninjured. This I then enters the worlds of spirit and the three bodies remain behind [...] and because the three bodies are so highly developed by the I that lived in them, they are fit instruments for a still higher being who now takes possession of them. In the thirtieth year of Jesus of Nazareth's life, the being we call Christ took possession of his physical, etheric and astral bodies. [...]

The corporeality of Jesus of Nazareth, from which he withdrew, was so mature and perfect that the sun Logos, the being of the six Elohim, which we have described as the being of the sun, was able to penetrate it. It could incarnate for three years in this corporeality, could become flesh. The sun Logos who can shine into human beings through illumination, the sun Logos Himself, the Holy Spirit, entered. The universal I, the cosmic I entered; and from then on, for three years, the sun Logos spoke through the body of Jesus. Christ speaks through the body of Jesus during these three years. This event is indicated in the Gospel of St John and also in the other Gospels as the descent of the dove, of the Holy Spirit, upon Jesus of Nazareth. At that moment, esoteric Christianity tells us that the I of Jesus of Nazareth left his



body, and that from then on the Christ is in him, speaking, teaching and working through him. This is the first event that happens, according to the Gospel of St John. We now have the Christ within the astral, etheric and physical bodies of Jesus of Nazareth. There he worked as has been described, until the Mystery of Golgotha took place. What occurred at Golgotha? Let us consider that important moment when the blood flowed from the wounds of the crucified saviour. To help you understand this I will compare it with something else.

Let us suppose we have here a vessel filled with water. In the water salt is dissolved and the water becomes quite transparent. Because we have warmed the water we have made a salt solution. Now let us cool the water. The salt precipitates and we see how it condenses below and forms a deposit at the bottom of the vessel. That is the process for someone who sees only with physical eyes. For a person who sees with spiritual eyes, something else is happening. While the salt is condensing below, the spirit of the salt streams up through the water, permeating it. The salt can only become condensed when the spirit of the salt has departed from it and become diffused into the water. Those who understand these things know that wherever condensation takes place a spiritualization also always occurs. What thus condenses below has its counterpart above in the spiritual, just as, in the case of salt, the salt spirit streams upwards and disseminates when the salt condenses and is precipitated below. Thus it was not only a physical process that took place when the blood flowed from the wounds of the saviour, but it was actually accompanied by a spiritual process: that is, the Holy Spirit which was received at the Jordan baptism united with the earth; the Christ Himself flowed into the very being of the earth. From

now on the earth was changed, and this is why, in earlier lectures, I told you that a person viewing the earth from a distant star would have observed its whole appearance altered by the Mystery of Golgotha. The sun Logos became a part of the earth, formed an alliance with it and became the spirit of the earth. He achieved this by entering the body of Jesus of Nazareth in his thirtieth year and remaining active there for three years, after which He continued to be embodied in the earth.

Now the important thing here is that this event must exert an effect on the true Christian; that it must give him something whereby he may gradually develop the beginnings of a purified astral body in the Christian sense. There had to be a power available to the Christian whereby he could make his astral body more and more like a virgin Sophia, and through it receive the Holy Spirit which was able to spread out over the entire earth, but which could not be received by anyone whose astral body did not resemble the virgin Sophia. What is this power? It consists in the fact of Christ Jesus entrusting to the 'disciple whom he loved'—the writer of the Gospel of St John—the mission of describing truly and faithfully, through his own illumination, the events in Palestine so that they might work upon human beings. If people allow what is written in the Gospel of St John to work sufficiently on them, their astral body will embark on the process of becoming a virgin Sophia, will become receptive to the Holy Spirit. Gradually, through the strength of this impulse emanating from the Gospel, it will first feel and perceive the true spirit. Jesus Christ entrusted this mission to the writer of the Gospel. You need only read it: The mother of Jesus—the virgin Sophia in esoteric Christianity—stands at the foot of the cross; and from the cross Christ says to the disciple whom He

loved: "Henceforth this is thy mother." And from this hour the disciple took her unto himself.' This means: The force which was in my astral body and made it capable of bearing the Holy Spirit, I now give to you; write down what this astral body has been able to acquire through its development. 'And the disciple took her unto himself' means that he wrote the Gospel of St John. And in this Gospel the writer concealed forces which develop the virgin Sophia. At the cross he was entrusted with the mission of receiving these forces as his mother and of being the true, authentic interpreter of the Messiah. This really means that if you live wholly in accordance with the Gospel of St John and understand it spiritually, it has the power to lead you to Christian catharsis, to give you the virgin Sophia. Then the Holy Spirit, united with the earth, will grant you illumination or what early Christianity calls *photismos*. And what the most intimate disciples experienced in Palestine was so powerful that from then on they possessed the capacity to perceive in the world of spirit. The most intimate disciples received this capacity. Perceiving in the spirit, in the Christian sense, means that we transform our astral body to such a degree through the power of the events in Palestine that what we see need not be before us in an external, physical and sensory way. [...] If we try to make into a feeling, into experience, what we can learn from spiritual science about the Gospel of St John, we shall then find that this Gospel is not a textbook but a force that can be active within our souls. [...]



## 2. The Birth of Higher Perception

Extract from a lecture given in Kassel on St John's day 1909

*Building further on the Gospel of St John, Steiner here identifies the Grail as the essence of potential higher life within us, which is rooted in the revitalizing deed of Christ. The image of the Rose Cross—the black wood from which red roses spring—is one of death in matter as a precondition for rejuvenation through the spirit, and here appears intimately connected with the Grail theme.*

When we behold, in the world around us, the various things which our eyes perceive and our hands touch, we observe how they arise and decay. We see how the flowers blossom and wither, and how the year's whole vegetation comes to life and dies away; and though there are things in the world such as mountains and rocks, apparently defying the ages, the proverb 'continual drops of water wear a stone' points to a premonition in the human soul that the very rocks and mountains, in all their majesty, are subject to the laws of the temporal world. We know that whatever is formed from the elements grows and decays; and this applies not only to our bodily form but also to the temporal self. Those who know how a spiritual world may be attained, however, are aware that though our eyes, ears, and other senses do not help with this, we may nevertheless enter the world of spirit through awakening, rebirth, initiation. And what is reborn?

When we look within ourselves, we can ultimately discover that within the inner self is the being we refer to as 'I'. The 'I' is distinguished, by virtue of its very name, from all things of the exterior world. To every exterior thing a name may be

applied from without. We can all call the table 'table', and the clock 'clock'. The word 'I', however, can never fall upon our ears from without if we ourselves are meant, for this word ('I') must be uttered from within. To every other being we are 'you'. This fact in itself enables us to distinguish between this ego being and all else within and around ourselves. But to this we must add something which spiritual investigators of all ages have repeatedly emphasized for the benefit of mankind, through their own experience: that within this 'I' another, a higher ego, is born, as the child is born of the mother.

When we consider the human being as he passes through life, we see him first as a child, clumsy in respect of his surroundings, and merely beholding things. Gradually and by degrees he learns to understand these things; we see how his intelligence awakens, how his will and intellect grow, and how he increases in strength and energy. But individuals can advance in another way too, developing further, beyond mundane realities; they can reach the point, so to speak, of finding a second I which, looking down upon the first, can say 'you' to it, even as the ordinary I says 'you' to the external world and to its own body.

Thus a distant ideal of the human soul can become actuality for those who follow guidance from the spiritual investigator and say to themselves: 'The self I have known hitherto is involved in the outer world and passes away with it. But a second self slumbers in me—a self of which people are often unaware, though it is as much united with the eternal as the first self is united with the transitory and the temporal.'

When this rebirth occurs, the higher I can behold a world of spirit in the same way that the lower I can perceive the

sensory world through the senses. This so-called awakening, rebirth, or initiation is the greatest event the human soul can experience, a view held also by those who called themselves Rosicrucians, whose emblem was the Rose Cross. They knew that this birth of the higher self—which can look down upon the lower self as someone looks upon the outer world—is intrinsically connected with the advent of Jesus Christ. That is to say: just as an individual human being can experience a new birth in the course of his life and development, a new birth for the whole of humanity took place through Christ Jesus. The individual experience of the birth of the higher I as an inner, mystic and spiritual event was enacted for the whole of humanity as a historical fact in the outer world through Christ Jesus in Palestine. [...]

The evangelists set themselves the task firstly of showing that Christ Jesus issues from the primal spirit of the world, indeed from God Himself. The divinity hitherto concealed in all mankind becomes pre-eminently manifest in Christ Jesus. This is the same God of whom it is said in the Gospel of St John that He was there in the beginning. And it was the aim of the evangelists to show that this God and no other was in Jesus of Nazareth. [...]

The Christians of St John, whose symbol was the Rose Cross, said that humanity's higher self, reborn through the Mystery of Golgotha, has been preserved intact. It was preserved by that exclusive community which developed within Rosicrucianism. This continuity is indicated symbolically in the legend of the sacred vessel called the 'Holy Grail', from which Christ Jesus ate and drank and in which the blood which flowed from His wounds was gathered by Joseph of Arimathea. This vessel, they say, was brought to Europe by

angels. A temple was built for it and the Rosicrucians became the guardians of its content: that is, of what constitutes the very essence of the reborn God. The mystery of the reborn God continued to be cultivated—the mystery of the reborn Grail. It is presented to us as a new Gospel. The wise and revered author of the Gospel of St John could say:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a God. The same that was in the beginning with God has been born again in Him whom we saw suffer and die upon Golgotha and who is risen again.*

The continuity of the divine principle through all ages and its resurrection is described by the writer of the Gospel of St John. But the narrators of such things knew that that which existed from the beginning is preserved unchanged:

*In the beginning was the mystery of the higher human I; the same was preserved in the Grail, and remained united with it. In the Grail lives the I which is united with the eternal and the immortal, even as the lower I is united with the transitory and mortal.*

Whoever knows the mystery of the Holy Grail knows that from the wood of the cross springs living, budding life, the immortal self symbolized by the roses sprouting from the dark wood of the cross. Thus the mystery of the Rose Cross may be regarded as a continuation of the Gospel of St John and, in this respect, we may truly speak the following words:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him and without Him was nothing made. In Him was life and the life was the light*

*of men. And the light shone in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. Only a few, in whom something lived that was not born of the flesh, comprehended the light that shone in the darkness. Then the light became flesh and dwelt among men in the likeness of Jesus of Nazareth.*

And we can then continue:

*And in Christ who dwelt in Jesus of Nazareth we see none other than the higher, divine self of all mankind, the God who came down to earth in Adam and was born again. This reborn human self was perpetuated as a sacred mystery; it was preserved in the symbol of the Rose Cross and is cultivated today as the mystery of the Holy Grail.*

The higher I which may be born in every human soul points to the rebirth of the divine I in the evolution of humanity through the events in Palestine. In the same way that the higher self can be born in every human being, the higher self of humanity as a whole was born in Palestine and is preserved and further developed behind the external symbol of the Rose Cross.

Thus we have the birth of the higher self in every individual human being, and a similar birth for humanity as a whole—the rebirth of the divine I. [. . .] A sharp distinction is needed here. We have a high initiate reborn as Jesus of Nazareth and, beyond this birth, something of significance in the spiritual world—something spiritual which will gradually develop the body until it becomes ripe for the spirit. When this point is reached, the event thus prepared is enacted. The Baptist approaches Jesus of Nazareth and a higher spirit descends upon him and unites with him; Christ enters the body of Jesus of Nazareth. John the Baptist, as the forerunner of Jesus of Nazareth, might well say: ‘I came into the world and



prepared the way for one mightier than I. I have preached that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and that people must change. I came among human beings and declared to them that a new impulse will enter mankind. As in spring the sun mounts higher in the heavens to proclaim the renewal of life, so I come to proclaim the new life which is the reborn self of humanity.'

When the human principle in Jesus of Nazareth had reached its highest development, and his body had become an expression of the spirit within him, he was ripe to receive the Christ in the baptism by John. His body had unfolded its full power, as the radiant sun on midsummer or St John's day. [...] The spirit was to be born out of the darkness, as the sun which increases in power and waxes strong till St John's day and then begins to wane. It was the Baptist's mission to proclaim this and to tell how the sun mounts on high with increasing splendour until the moment when he, the Baptist, could say: 'He who was announced by the prophets of old, the Son of the spiritual realms, born of the spirit, behold, He has appeared.' Up to this point John the Baptist was active. But, the way having once been prepared, when the days begin to shorten and the darkness again prevails, inner spirit light must shine forth ever more brightly, in the same way that Christ shines forth in Jesus of Nazareth.

John beheld the approach of Jesus of Nazareth, whose development he felt as his own increase, as the increase of the sun. 'I must henceforth decrease,' he said, 'as the sun decreases after Midsummer Day. But He, the spiritual sun, will increase and his light will shine forth out of the darkness.' [...] Thus was the universal I of humanity reborn, and the conditions fulfilled for the rebirth of the individual higher self in every human being.