

THE PROBLEM OF JESUS & CHRIST IN EARLIER TIMES

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IN MY LECTURE YESTERDAY, I tried to indicate an important fact related to the Christ problem as a whole—a fact that is no doubt surprising. A great store of wisdom has in fact disappeared, and it is known today only through a few fragments. From one of these fragments, I cited certain passages to you yesterday from the beginning of the Book of Jeû.² We must indeed ask ourselves now if it possible that a store of wisdom that once existed can disappear completely. In other words, can the reasons for such a disappearance be completely external? You will recall the analogy I used: I said that it is possible to imagine that everything we publish today and that all our existing writings have been burned, so that only the writings of our opponents remain, and posterity can be

1. From *Die geistige Vereinigung der Menschheit durch den Christus-Impuls*, 13 lectures in Dornach, 1915–1916 (GA 165). This translation was generously published in *Anthroposophic News Sheet*, General Anthroposophical Society, Dornach, Feb. 1936 (kindly supplied by Rudolf Steiner Library, Ghent, NY). This edited version copyright © 2004 SteinerBooks.

2. The two books of Jeû are contained in the Bruce Codex. The first is considered speculative and cosmological, the second practical and related to overcoming the hostile world powers and securing salvation by practicing certain rites. The latter book is called “The Book of the Great Logos according to the mystery.” See G.R.S. Mead’s introduction to *Pistis Sophia* (Spiritual Science Library, 1984, p. xxxv). The Bruce Codex was translated into German by C. Schmidt in 1892 and is probably the source quoted by Rudolf Steiner.

reconstructed only from those records and not from what we have said. This is quite possibly what did occur. Nevertheless, this hypothesis cannot be sustained as-is and without qualification. Even if all the writings were to disappear, many of us would still be alive—at least, we could assume this possibility—and we know the content of those writings and would be able to communicate those truths without the help of the works of our adversaries, so that the store of wisdom would continue to grow and spread, in spite of everything.

To bring about a complete disappearance, it would in fact be necessary to eradicate, to a certain extent, the capacity to understand our writings, the ability to preserve them, and the possibility of communicating them from generation to generation. This must be what occurred at that time. It must have happened that people lost the capacity to understand such teachings as the Gnosis of Valentinus, for example, or the content of the Pistis Sophia manuscript, or the Book of Jeû, and so on. In fact, this is what happened.

We must vividly imagine to ourselves that, based on the broad foundation, so to speak, of that ancient inheritance—which had already fulfilled its purpose in the form of a primitive clairvoyance that then gradually grew dim and faded away—a higher form of knowledge evolved. It was nurtured by only the few who were initiated into the Mysteries, yet it was a widespread knowledge nevertheless. And we must imagine further that it was because of the gradual paralysis of the capacity to understand such things that this knowledge was not just forgotten, but it eventually disappeared. People simply no longer had the capacity to understand such teachings. Only this could bring about such a complete loss of a treasure of wisdom.

Thus, we may indeed say that, when we look back at the time just before the period following the Mystery of Golgotha, we can see how ancient capacities disappear, far and wide, and how

something new develops out of entirely new and fresh forces. We may say without hesitation that, as human evolution approached the Mystery of Golgotha, we can see a gradual darkening and disappearance of a certain view and way of thinking, which had a spiritual quality and would have enabled human beings to understand the coming of Christ into the world as a spiritual being. But this form of knowledge, as we said, had disappeared.

As a result, at the very time when the Christ united with earthly evolution, humankind lost the kind of knowledge that might have enabled people to understand, in a true and profound way, the nature of the Christ being. This is a very important fact. Furthermore, I have already indicated, several times, something very significant. I stated that the announcement of Christ's coming was not itself a new revelation, made known through the Mystery of Golgotha; in the Mysteries, the Christ had already been mentioned as the "coming one." There were special teachings in the Mysteries that proclaimed the coming of Christ. One viewed the Christ being, of course, in the light of a past spiritual wisdom, but these Mysteries had gradually degenerated, so that, when the Christ did come, people were less able than ever to speak, as human beings, about the Christ. This is evident not only from all that I have just explained, but also from what remained alive in the souls of those who tried to conceive of the Christ Mystery out of a fresh, new impulse.

Thus, during the very first centuries of the Christian era, we find great spirits arising, such as Clemens of Alexandria, for example, and Origenes—very lofty spirits, both of them. If we want to describe them from one perspective—Clemens, as well as Origenes, who came after the Gnostics when Gnosis itself was already waning—we must say that they did in fact strive for this knowledge. They asked themselves: What is the truth behind the Mystery of Golgotha? On the one hand, we are concerned with the Christ (they still knew this, of course); the Christ can be

understood only as a spiritual being connected with spiritual and suprasensory impulses. This Christ descends from cosmic spiritual spheres. They could no longer comprehend how the ancient Gnosis had been able to understand the Christ, but they knew that he could be understood, as a spiritual being, only through spiritual faculties. This was what they knew about the Christ.

On the other hand, they viewed Jesus as a historical personality. For them, the coming of Jesus was a historical fact. They might have said: A number of years ago, in a certain part of the Middle East, a man named Jesus was born; he carried the Christ, and God lived in that human being. For them, this was the great problem. They thought: During the course of historical evolution, we are concerned with a historical personality; but in the realm of spiritual knowledge, we are concerned with the Christ. How should we conceive the union of these two? Thus we see great spirits like Clemens of Alexandria and Origenes working and struggling with the problem of how the Christ could have lived in the man Jesus.

Now, let us first consider Clemens of Alexandria, the head of the catechetical school of Alexandria, where those who wished to become Christian teachers were trained. When we consider this significant individual, we find something in his teachings that we may describe in this way: The Christ belongs, of course, to the forces that participated in the creation of the earth; he belongs to the spiritual world; he entered earthly evolution through the body of Jesus of Nazareth. In this way, Clemens of Alexandria looked up, first of all, to the Christ as a spiritual being and tried to comprehend him in spiritual realms. But Clemens also knew something else, which we have emphasized often—that the Christ had, in fact, always existed for human beings, but not in the earthly sphere. The only ones who could reach him were those who had developed, through the Mysteries, forces that enabled them to leave the physical body. When human beings left their physical bodies

through forces acquired in the Mysteries and ventured into the spiritual realms, they were able to recognize the Christ and felt that he was the “coming one.” Clemens of Alexandria knew this. He knew that the ancient Mysteries spoke of the Christ as the coming one, who was not yet united with earthly evolution. He expressed this by saying that human beings were, of course, inspired to expect the Christ.

Clemens of Alexandria went so far as to say that, especially at two particular points in the spiritual evolution of humanity, something was nurtured as a kind of preparation for Christ’s coming. He said, on the other hand, that this took place through Moses and the prophets. What came into the world through Moses and the prophets, said Clemens, was a preparation—humankind first needed to become acquainted with what came through Moses and the prophets, so that they might, through personal experience, come to feel they had found the Christ. This was the concept they had to form.

So we see that Clemens knew nothing about the old Gnostic wisdom—or, at least, he did not use it. But Clemens designated what entered human capacity through Moses and the prophets as a “preparation.” Then, as the second turning point, or “preparation” (and this is very significant), Clemens placed Greek philosophy—Plato and Aristotle—at the side of Moses and the prophets. He said, approximately, that Moses and the prophets as well as the philosophers prepared humanity for the event that took place with the Mystery of Golgotha.

Origenes said, on the other hand, that we are dealing with the Christ—the Christ who can be grasped as a spiritual being with the aid of spiritual forces. And we are dealing with the historical Jesus, who in fact once existed as a real person in the sensory world. How can these two be united, the God and the human being? How does the “God human” come to be? Origenes, accordingly, constructed a view that said: It is impossible for a god, without preparation, to

live within an ordinary physical human body; a specially prepared soul, therefore, must have lived in Jesus so that his soul could mediate between God and the human being and might united the God, as a pure spiritual being, with physicality.

Thus, Origenes brought in the soul element and, within Jesus Christ, distinguished between the God, the pure Pnuma-being of pure spirit being—the psyche, or soul—and the physical body of Jesus of Nazareth. He tried to imagine how the Christ could dwell within Jesus of Nazareth. He no longer possessed the early Gnosis, which would enable him to imagine the dwelling of Christ on earth and the union of the Christ with earthly evolution. It was necessary to make up an understanding out of completely new and fresh elements, and his efforts went toward achieving this. So we see that, right at the time when Christ as a real being united with earthly evolution, human beings had the greatest possible difficulty in understanding this fact; the capacity for such understanding had never been so limited.

Clemens of Alexandria still preserved at least some idea of why this was so. He wondered what it was that inspired humankind in the ancient Mysteries. He thought that they were inspired through the Christ's influence, although from suprasensory worlds while they were out of their physical bodies. Clemens of Alexandria expressed this clearly when he said that Christ sent the angels to humankind. Indeed, he said openly that, when the Old Testament mentions the appearance of an angel, this means that the angel was sent by the Christ. He states explicitly that, when Yahweh appears to Moses as the burning bush, it is in reality the Christ who appears in this earthly, soul-spiritual manifestation. Clemens of Alexandria thus states clearly that, in the past, before the Mystery of Golgotha, the Christ appeared to human beings through angels. If people developed the capacity to understand the message of the angel, they were capable of standing as disembodied initiates in the presence of the Christ and in the presence of the spiritual world.

Thus Clemens of Alexandria was still able to go as far as this. Further, he said—and this was also part of the knowledge retained by Clemens—that clearly, over the course of time, the Christ passed from the nature of angel to the “Son nature”; he became “Son.” Previously, he was able to manifest and reveal himself through angels or as a host, or multitude, of angels. When it so pleased him, he appeared to one person in one angelic form, and to another as a different angel. Thus he appeared to human beings in many and various forms. Later, however, he appeared in the one form as the “Son.”

Here we come to a very important element, which I must ask you to note carefully, because it is extremely important. Clemens of Alexandria still held to the view that the Christ already existed *before* the Mystery of Golgotha in the spiritual realms. The Christ had already reached the point where he could reveal himself through angels, or messengers. But now, he came even further by being able to fulfill himself as the Son. His ability to fulfill his mission as the Son has the greatest imaginable importance. What was it that now entered human understanding?

When we go through the entire ancient Gnosis, we find a peculiar trait. If, for example, I were to outline it in the form of a diagram, I might say something like this: The Gnosis conceives, in evolution, the existence of a human “person” as proceeding from the Father—from the primal Father, the so-called Stillness, or primal Spirit. These ancient Gnostics indicated thirty different stages, and named them “Aeons,” and now I could name thirty of these. And then comes the second current, or stream. Whereas the first stream is spiritual, they also spoke of a second stream that belongs to the realm of soul. Within these streams they saw the Christ and the Sophia as the two principal Aeons, and as the source of all being. Then there were numerous other Aeons besides. Moreover, the Gnostics indicated yet a third stream—that of the Demiurge and matter. These all united and formed

humankind. It is possible to form such an outline out of the way those Gnostics thought. Such concepts as theirs are not entirely unreal, because human beings are complicated. In a lecture once, I explained how many groups, or stages, containing seven parts make up the human being, our friends were very surprised to hear that so many differentiations must be looked for in the human being.³ Yet it is just these differentiations that remind us of what the Gnostics, from their perspective, knew already.

On the other hand, we always find, when we approach the Gnosis, one particular point that impresses us—that the concept of time plays a very minor role. Gnostic ideas may be expressed spatially; the role of time as an idea is unimportant. Or we could say that Gnostic understanding is not capable of understanding it completely. And to this extent we may indeed call it progress from the Gnosis to Clemens of Alexandria. Although the whole encompassing fullness of spiritual wisdom had been lost, it was nevertheless a step forward that led to Clemens of Alexandria, since he brought the concept of time into the evolution of the Christ. He taught that the Christ had already existed earlier—that he had previously revealed himself through angels and later on as the Son; this was his evolutionary course.

Thus, the concept of development, or evolution, was introduced. This, you can see, is the significant point. Indeed, we cannot emphasize too often that the development of civilization in the West occurred in order to bring an understanding of the concept of time to the human worldview in the right way. This is what is so important, so radically important—to view the course of evolution and to realize that the Christ was first able to manifest only through angels, and that afterward, when he passed through

3. This reference is to a course of lectures by Rudolf Steiner in Oslo, Norway, June 2–12, 1912, *Man in the Light of Occultism, Theosophy, and Philosophy*, Rudolf Steiner Press, 1964 (GA 137).

the Mystery of Golgotha, he is able to manifest as the Son. Through the angels, he is the messenger of something outside the world. It is true that it permeates the world completely, but to understand it correctly, we must nevertheless recognize that it comes from outside the world, as the messenger. Later, however, he appears as Son; he imbues all things.

Just as the Son is one blood—one with the Father in the physical world—we must also conceive the spirit as one and the same being with the Father in the spiritual world. To be a Son is something other than being merely an angel. So, when this being reveals itself as Son, it is an evolutionary progress, in contrast to the earlier manifestations, whereby he was able to appear only as an angel, or messenger. There was, as it were, a kind of understanding of the Christ that went further than the understanding of the ancient Gnosis. Yet, the effects of the Gnosis were needed in order to say even what Clemens could say. When the Gnosis gradually disappeared altogether, it was no longer possible to say even what Clemens of Alexandria and Origenes had said. People became increasingly familiar with those impulses that belonged to a later period: purely materialistic impulses.

So it came about that the teachings of Origenes were condemned. They were pronounced heretical. The element in them that caused them to be declared heretical was the fact that people wished to renounce any form of understanding that came from humanity itself and its own forces. This was what they wanted to renounce; they felt that such an understanding was no longer possible. And how do matters appear to us now? What aspect must they assume for us? We see, in fact, that an ancient form of spiritual wisdom had established itself extensively on the foundation of ancient clairvoyance. It was there, but it gradually disappeared. Contained in this spiritual wisdom—though it dealt with a supra-sensory being—was wisdom related to the Christ. Just at the time when the Christ descended to earth, however, the wisdom had

disappeared. The real Christ was now united with the earth; knowledge about the Christ, however, had disappeared by this time.

Here you have an example, on a grand scale, that I must ask you to please consider in the right way. We can cast our glance over the earth that was known to humanity at that time—the earth as it was before the Mystery of Golgotha. The further back we go, the more knowledge we find about the Christ, who must be thought of as existent in suprasensory realms. The farther back we go, the more knowledge we find, but it is knowledge that can be communicated only through angels. This constitutes evolution. This knowledge, this view of Christ, is made known to many people. The Christ lived as the inspiration of many human beings: *evolution*.

This knowledge slowly fades away and disappears, and its influence weakens. And in one being, Jesus of Nazareth, we find everything concentrated that had previously been distributed among many. Imagine, in the course of evolution, a drop of the inner being of the Christ as living in a priest of the Mysteries, another drop in a second priest, yet another drop in a third, and so on. In the case of each of these initiates, you would find that, when he went out of his body—when his spirit abandoned his body—he had some portion of the Christ within him. The Christ is thus multiplied in them. All of this disappears, because everything that had once been distributed is drawn together and concentrated in a single point, in the body of Jesus of Nazareth: *involution*.

Involution is the very principle or being that was taken away from all the others and appeared in one body. Thus, we see that what had lived in evolution in a distributed form had to disappear from the earth by becoming concentrated into one point—the body of Jesus of Nazareth. This is the important fact. Evolution ceases within the most significant involution. Now begins the time, therefore, when the Christ himself lives with the earth, but when the knowledge of the Christ no longer lives in the earth;

knowledge of the Christ must evolve anew.

At this point, the very difficulties we spoke of appeared. On the one hand, we have Jesus of Nazareth, and on the other, we have the Christ. Keep in mind that the ancient wisdom concerning the connections of things in human beings themselves were now completely lost. During that entire period, there was no longer the slightest knowledge of anything concerning humankind. Not until now are we beginning again to differentiate in the human being our physical body, ether body, sentient soul, and so on. Only now are we beginning this. Now, in a single individual, we again differentiate between the physical earthly part, which continues the line of heredity, and the higher spiritual part, which has descended again from spiritual worlds.

Origenes did not know this, nor did Clemens of Alexandria. They did not know about the spiritual soul and the physical part in each individual human being who walks on the earth. This was why they found it so difficult to understand the single members of the being of Jesus Christ. The knowledge related to the Christ became more and more at variance, and it is infinitely important for an understanding of our own age to realize how all of this, in turn, influences our own time, inasmuch as it was necessary for the knowledge of spiritual science to appear today. It is extremely important to keep in mind this separation of Jesus and the Christ. This is a very serious and important matter. And we encounter in a myriad of forms.

The Christmas event was entirely unknown at that time. It entered human hearts only gradually. This was the outer aspect: People came to know in images what had occurred in Palestine; only gradually, with the aid of dramatic performances, did they begin to form an idea of what took place there. This was the aspect, I might say, of the Jesus Mystery. We have seen the Christmas plays performed for us here. We could still feel something of the Christ in one of them, the second. And we could feel

Jesus in his purity of form in the first play, which is so primitive and simple. We could say that the child Jesus—the first appearance of “Jesus”—gradually conquered human hearts. Around the middle of the Middle Ages, we find that people began to look up to the child; before then, Christians participated in the Mass and heard about the Mystery of Christ. They heard that he had passed through the experience of death, about St. Paul’s teachings, and so on, but the Bible, as we know, was not allowed to become popular; it was kept entirely in the hands of the priests. Believers were expected to participate in the Mass, which was, moreover, celebrated in Latin. But there was no real participation in the events of the holy rite itself. The essence of the Gospels conquered human hearts and souls only very gradually. So it happened that only after the middle of the Middle Ages could such plays portraying the appearance of Jesus and so on be given to ordinary people. Today, the actual view that we maintain is that the Mystery of Golgotha once took place and that, after that event, people knew something of this Mystery of Golgotha. Yet, what they really knew was simply this: Christ had died on the cross; it was mainly the Easter event that people felt.

We must keep in mind that all of this took place at the same time when mystics such as Tauler, Meister Eckhardt, and others were seeking the Christ through mysticism. Thus, on the one hand, we have the first appearance of the Christmas plays; Jesus is sought in the most external form possible—in the form of a direct physical portrayal—whereas the mystics sought the Christ. They worked to develop the could to such an extent that they could experience the Christ arising within them; they sought to apprehend the Christ in completely changed form, within the soul, a Christ far removed from the world, existing as pure spirit. Mysticism, on the one hand, and the Christmas plays on the other—Jesus and the Christ being sought simultaneously along two different and widely separated paths. What was a theoretical difficulty

in the case of Origenes—the impossibility of uniting the Christ with Jesus—appears directly before us out in the villages. There, among the simple folk, Jesus is shown as a child, whereas the deep-natured mystics looked for the Christ by trying to guide their own souls to an inner experience—to inner contact, so to speak—of the Christ.

But where can we find the connecting link? Where is it? Events follow their course, side by side. Just consider the wide gulf between the childlike gaze of the villagers and what they see in the Christmas plays and the deep mysticism of a Meister Eckhardt or a Johannes Tauler. And yet, the beginnings of these Christmas plays actually appear at the same time. In fact, mysticism also continues to live. And today, in our own time, just think what the whole event of the Mystery of Golgotha has become for many theologians. Among the most advanced theologians, what is it that draws their attention? They consider that, once upon a time, at the beginning of our era, a man was born in Nazareth, or Bethlehem, or somewhere else—a chosen one, chosen especially to experience gradually within himself the human connection with the spiritual world. He was a noble man, the noblest of all—so noble, in fact, that one might say that he was almost . . . but here, you see, they are somewhat at a loss. Here they are not so sure of themselves. What is there to add to the fact that he was viewed absolutely as a god during the evolutionary course of Christianity? And so they turn backward and forward, until all the theories and teachings of Euken and Harnack come along. Isn't it true that they cannot understand it at all, yet they wish, in one way or another, to appear smart and to be able to view Jesus as something special—and to be able to conceive of the Christ. Then they consult the Gospels, and as modern persons, of course, they are ashamed to admit the truth of the miracles, so they struck out whatever can be struck out, and construct from the Gospels something as natural as possible—something that may be explained away.

Then we come to the event of Jerusalem and the death on the cross. Theologians can pursue things as far as this death, you see, but they are unable to go so far as the resurrection. And then we see examples such as Harnack's statement that this resurrection, the grave from which Jesus Christ supposedly arose—indeed, this Easter Mystery—allows us to penetrate only the knowledge that this Easter Mystery took place in the garden, near the Place of the Skulls. It was there that the Easter Mystery arose, and the idea of the resurrection comes from there. We are expected to hold to this, without concerning ourselves with what actually occurred there, because the conviction of the resurrection proceeded from there.

This is indeed very strange, is it not? If you read Harnack's book *The Essence of Christianity*, you will find this extraordinary idea of the resurrection. I once pointed this out in a certain city at a meeting of the Giordano Bruno Union by saying that this is a strange thought indeed. If you wish to solve the problem of the resurrection with such a statement, it is better to leave the actual event untouched and to point out simply that the resurrection belief—the belief in the Easter Mystery—arose from that grave. A certain gentleman who was present objected by saying that Harnack could not have written this, since this would in fact be almost Roman Catholic—a Roman Catholic superstition. It would be no different than believing that the holy garment of Treves had some hidden meaning. This would indeed be superstition, and Harnack could not have written it. Yet it is a fact that he did write it, and since I did not have the book handy, I had no choice but to send that gentleman a post card the next day, stating that the passage could be found on such and such a page. This is the sort of thing that leads to many difficulties. People are at a loss when they try to find the path leading from Jesus to the Christ. Someone once said to me, "We modern theologians can no longer do anything with a Christology. The only thing that is of any real use to us is a 'Jesuology.'" And it was that same person, not I, who added this

statement: "What a pity that the name *Jesuits* is already taken, since the followers of modern theology really ought to be called 'Jesuits.'" Please note that it was not I who said this, but a modern theologian.

Now this is one side of the historical picture. The other side is this: A number of modern theologians are, in turn, holding more to the Christ. They study the Gospels, but they do not interpret certain passages in the Gospels, as do the other theologians I've mentioned. They do not speak of what one is able to believe, as a rational person might believe about another human being, even if that human being is divine. Yet, when describing this individual as a divine being, they are not at all clear in their minds about how far they should go in their application of divine status. "A noble man," they say, more noble than Socrates, certainly, but here they go no further.

Thus we have the one class of people, the "Jesuologians," since it would be difficult indeed to apply to them the name theologians. The word *theology* means "wisdom of God," but it is just this godly element that they wish to eliminate. And then there is the other group, who take things more seriously and who find, after studying certain Gospel passages, that it is impossible to view the one who pronounced such words as an ordinary human being. There are passages in the Gospels, as we know, that cannot, if we are honest, be so lightly attributed to a mere human being. Furthermore, such people take the story of the resurrection seriously. They consider themselves "Christologians," in contrast to the "Jesuologians." At the same time, they come to yet another conclusion. For example, just read the book *Ecce Deus*, among others. In this book, they say, "If you read the Gospels honestly, it is impossible to believe that they refer to an ordinary human being. They speak of a God—of a true and real God." Hence, these people, for their part, lose Jesus; they lose him very seriously, because here they say, "Throughout the Gospels, certainly, we find the mention of God; but God can-

not possibly have existed—in fact, he could not have lived on earth. Therefore, we must hold on to the Christ. But the Christ is the one of whom people have said that he never lived on earth.” Christology without Jesuology; this is the other direction. Yet these two directions find no way to unite. This is true today; those who speak of the Christ have lost Jesus, and those who speak of Jesus have lost the Christ. Christ has become an unreal god, and Jesus an unreal man. And it would have to continue this way, inevitably, if something new could not be added.

The new element to be added must be spiritual science, which is capable of understanding anew how the Christ could live in Jesus. In fact, one of the most important points in the spiritual scientific teaching is this: It can lead us to understand how the Christ, by way of the two Jesus children, could actually become the one who assumed the position at the center of earthly and human evolution. Spiritual science can do this, because it has a new vision of what the human being really is and how the spirit, soul, and body are united in the human being. Consequently, if we build on this, we can understand once again how the Christ united with Jesus. This is complicated, of course, and it is not easy to understand. Nevertheless, it can be understood. You will thus be able to see how what humankind has lost can, with the help of spiritual science, be built up again from its original source. This is also true of our comprehension of the Mystery of Golgotha. When the Christ appeared in the world, it was impossible for people to understand him. Such understanding can be acquired only gradually. His achievements took the form of actual facts. The points of departure that can lead us to an understanding can be found everywhere. Even the simplest Christmas play can help us find such points.

What do such plays show us? So far as the Paradise Plays are concerned, the following fact is placed before us: A human being enters the world, and we realize, merely through incidental occurrences, that this human being is Jesus. We enter the world as chil-

dren. I said that the Paradise Play—the beginning of earthly evolution—was connected with this, the Mystery of Golgotha.

Certainly, we must consider the fact that, at the beginning of earthly evolution, human beings were exposed to luciferic temptation. Consequently, their normal progress of evolution was changed. Thus we are faced, symbolically, with Adam cast out of paradise; his being is other than what it was destined to be before luciferic temptation. How does this manifest? Imagine that Lucifer had never approached humankind, and that human beings had lived without the luciferic impulse. In that case, human beings would have lived in a different way in their ether body. When we pass through the portal of death, we still retain our ether body, and then we cast it off. Nevertheless, this ether body more or less continues its existence. As a result of luciferic temptation, it carries the impressions of everything we do and think. We know that human beings die; that they pass through the portal of death; that the physical body is surrendered to the elements; that, after a few days, the ether body detaches itself from the human being; and that human beings then continue along whatever path they must take. At the same time, in this etheric part are the impressions of what the ether body had become as a result of thinking, feeling, and actions, in an inevitable accordance with luciferic temptation.

Now imagine the earth. The human physical body enters this earth; it is given over to the earthly elements, but the ether body remains connected with the earth. Thus, we have the ether bodies of human beings; they are present in the atmosphere of the earth. And they are different from what they would have been had the luciferic temptation never taken place. Everything I've said thus far about ether bodies in general refers, of course, to these ether bodies. But what I am saying today also refers to them. So we may repeat: Human beings are embedded in the earth; what we leave behind on the earth—all that our ether body has become during earthly life—has become more dry, more “woody,” than it would

have become had the luciferic temptation not occurred. More wood-like, drier—in fact, this difference does exist. Imagine that the luciferic temptation had never taken place; after death, human beings would leave behind a far more rejuvenated ether body, a much “greener” ether body, as it were. Because of the luciferic temptation, human beings leave behind a far more dried-up ether body than would have otherwise been the case.

This was expressed in the legend that tells us a dried-up Tree of Paradise arose from Adam’s grave. But what lives in the earth actually lived before the Mystery of Golgotha in the human ether body, infected by Lucifer. It was precisely this element into which the body of Jesus of Nazareth entered as a healer, or as a “phantom,” as I explained in my lectures at Karlsruhe.⁴ Imagine that Adam’s grave—Adam surrendered as a physical body to the earthly elements. Arising from his grave is the dried-up ether body, the representative of the human past that was infected by Lucifer and remains intact after death. This is, at the same time, the tree upon which one may be crucified. In fact, such a crucifixion actually does take place when the “phantom” of Jesus of Nazareth remains behind on earth after the Mystery of Golgotha, and through it unites with the earth. This is expressed in the legend that tells us this tree was handed down from generation to generation and became, in turn, the cross on Golgotha. This is a pictorial view that corresponds to the fact—that, through the crucifixion, the phantom of Jesus of Nazareth united with what lived in the earth etherically, as a totality of ether bodies infected by Lucifer. Those bodies were, of course, scattered, rarified, and dissolved, but they were nevertheless existent in the form of forces. This is very significant and infinitely profound fact that we must keep in mind, and it illuminates for us the mysteries of the earth.

4. Steiner refers to his 11 lectures in Karlsruhe, October 4–14, 1911 (GA 131), *From Jesus to Christ*, Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 1973.

But what is it, in fact, that brings about our connection with the ether body infected by Lucifer? It is the fact that we enter the physical world as children. We still do not, of course, find the whole answer in that point where one becomes a child, because if we look with the right feeling, we see in the child a being free of Lucifer. And if we are able to do this—to look at a child with the right feeling, seeing how one enters the world—we can see the human relationship to the Christ.

This, it was expected, would be the feeling experienced by those seeing Jesus thus portrayed in the Christmas plays: They were expected to feel what I have described in the first pages of my little book on the progress of the human being and humanity.⁵ There I spoke of the first three years of human life and about our entrance into the world. If the same thing that permeates the human being during those first years were to permeate one in the middle of life (as I mentioned in the book), one would have some idea of the way the Christ lived in Jesus. This opportunity to see something in children that is not yet infected by Lucifer is also possible when we see the Christmas plays.

Now let's consider what all of this means. It is indeed tremendously important when we look at the child. In that little book I explained that during our earliest years we are far wiser than we are later on—although unconsciously—because we must then build up the body; later, we can no longer do that. We are far smarter and wiser than we are later on, and we are much better at penetrating our human nature, but we do not yet possess the Luciferic element. In working on ourselves inwardly in this way, during our earliest infancy—before that time we can recall later on—we work

5. See *The Spiritual Guidance of the Individual and Humanity: Some Results of Spiritual-Scientific Research into Human History and Development*, written in 1911 from 3 lectures, Copenhagen, June 1911 (GA 15), Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, NY, 1991.

on the most delicate shaping of the body, and we work according to infinitely wise laws. Once Lucifer and Ahriman have permeated our knowledge later on, we haven't the faintest notion of those laws. While we are at work within this infant being, we are free of everything we enter later on, when we experience the world through the body; we are still unhampered by all differences, even by the difference of the sexes. We do not live during early infancy within the male or female element; we are not yet involved in the differences created by social position and race; we are not yet involved in national differences. We are human beings, pure and simple. We are then, in reality, within the same element inhabited by those who face one another in war, impelled by something they experience externally for the first time: hatred.

The fact that it is possible for human beings in the world to face one another in hatred, just because they belong to different nationalities, is something that develops through forces into which we enter through the connection with our physical body. Before acquiring such a connection through the physical body, children still live in an element that transcends all national and social differences. They live in an element where all souls could live, no matter where they were born on earth. Consider this: Human beings may face one another as bitter enemies and kill one another, yet those who have killed may pass through the portal of death, mutually united in the Christ who belongs to them all, the Christ in whom they live, if they have remained unaffected by the differences that exist among humankind. What makes people face one another in hatred is something that they acquire only through the physical body; but this has no connection whatsoever with what lies outside the physical body.

Our age has much to learn—*especially* this age. It must find its way back to veneration for the infant Jesus, when he is portrayed as a child and not yet as one who has entered the element that brings differences among human beings, leading them into conflict and

strife. It is only when their experiences change human beings from the child, about whom we are told at Christmas, that war and strife arise. It is human beings themselves who are portrayed in the Christmas play, human beings as they really are in their connection with cosmic powers—but portrayed in such a way that it reveals, in a unique way and on the physical level, something that does not become involved in strife; it is something that may even be carried, in a similar way, in the hearts of those who are fighting a physical battle to the death with one another.

It is profoundly significant that this is presented to humankind in particular relation to the “Nathan” Jesus Child. We connect with the side of our being, so to speak, through which we enter the world, without the slightest trace of discrimination, because we have not yet become involved in distinguishing nationality and so forth. We develop such discrimination only through our life in connection with the physical body. The Jesus idea, which is expressed fully only in the Jesus child, unites with the Christ idea, which is fulfilled when human beings are able to clearly recognize the spiritual also in Jesus as a man, when he was between thirty and thirty-three years of age—in other words, the Christ being. In a twofold way, through the “Nathan” Jesus and the “Solomon” Jesus, a body is prepared, which is able to remain apart from all that causes discrimination among human beings. The Christ is able to reveal himself only in such a body.⁶

Thus we see, according to spiritual science (and I have explained this in a similar way in my little book on the progress of the individual and humanity), the coalescence of the Jesus idea and the Christ idea. This is the greatest, most meaningful human need

6. For more about Steiner's views on the two Jesus children, see his course of 10 lectures in Basel, September 1909 (GA 114): *According to Luke: The Gospel of Compassion and Love Revealed*, Anthroposophic Press, Great Barrington, MA, 2001.

of our time. Until now, human beings have had a Christmas festival and an Easter festival, but these two festivals remained unrelated. Easter is a Christ festival, and Christmas a Jesus festival. Easter and Christmas eventually become related as we gain the ability to understand how the Christ and Jesus are interrelated. It is spiritual science that builds the bridge between the Christmas festival and the Easter festival. From the simple "Shepherd Play," a bridge will lead us to the finest attainable comprehension if we cultivate spiritual science to the degree that we have the mentality of the shepherds rather than that of the innkeepers. The contrast between materialism and spiritualism is wonderfully described in the characters of the innkeepers and the shepherds. In fact, the great problem of our time is whether we wish to be innkeepers or shepherds. Many of today's events may be traced to the fact that people prefer to be innkeepers. The innkeeper nature is widespread in the world today; we must again work to become the shepherds. Naturally, there are many disbelievers, even among the shepherds. When one of the shepherds says, "I think I see a light yonder" (which means, "I perceive something of a spiritual nature."), there will always be another shepherd who will be slow to agree, saying it is just a fantasy.

There is one detail, however, that must not be ignored. Of course, we must be able to distinguish between the nature of an innkeeper and a shepherd; after all, don't innkeepers surround us on all sides? Wherever we go, they surround us, yet we convince ourselves that we are shepherds. This is natural, but we must not ignore this: We must investigate, at least in a small way, the innkeeper's nature within ourselves, and not view ourselves too certainly as the shepherds. We must occasionally ask ourselves, "Are we already able to see the approaching light, which will proclaim what must come through the new spiritual science?" We should cultivate inwardly everything that can keep alive the inner feeling for celebrating Christmas in our hearts through this new spiritual

direction; this feeling will help us seek the light in the midst of darkness. We must seek and truly be willing to seek, however, in the right way. While we are seeking, we must truly have the feeling that we cannot reach our goal by trying only once; we must return again and again as the shepherds did, for they promised that they could come again and would not be satisfied to come only once. This is a fact; yet, people can become shepherds if they can begin now to develop within themselves the side of their nature that is not derived from earthly experience—if they can find, instead, a connection with what they brought to earth with them in their innermost being from the heavenly realms. People today stand far too firmly within the “house” where they can get what the innkeeper has to offer—what was brought from the earthly realms, and this can be evaluated only through earthly discrimination. On the other hand, those who still have a certain relationship with everything spiritual that surges and pulses through the world—those who have kept their shepherd nature—will be able to find the paths; they are able to discover that, in reality, ordinary knowledge finds only the outer appearance. People will gradually begin to understand Christmas when they learn to distinguish the innkeeper’s nature from that of the shepherd, and when they come to realize how predominant the innkeeper’s nature is today.

There is still much to be learned through the simple Christmas play, and because of this it seems to me a good idea to cultivate among us and to experience the Christmas mystery in this simplest of all forms. There are many and diverse hard battles ahead, my dear friends. They must be faced in the near future by just this sort of spiritual scientific work. To find the path, we must truly learn to be shepherds through spiritual understanding of the Christmas mystery—possessing all the humility of the shepherds, but at the same time, all the wisdom in seeking that belongs to the shepherds who are united with the universe. Let us engrave this in our hearts and souls at this Christmastime, so that we may

continue to become seeking shepherds, and so that we may eventually learn to find what is holy within the human soul, just as it was found in the ordinary, everyday atmosphere of the simple folk. I have explained how this most sacred form of Christmas play arose, little by little, out of a carnival holiday mood, not from any sort of holy recreation. If we look for the spiritual in connection with what the Christmas plays show us, we find it in the right way as shepherds, not as innkeepers who have already lost their connection with the Christmas child, just as the play shows us symbolically. This is sorely needed in our age, when materialism has conquered such broad and far-reaching areas of life, both outer and within the human life of feeling. There, a spiritual worldview finds it difficult even to rediscover the right words—in contrast to the misused words that people use to express themselves—so that it may say what the right words mean.