

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

A significant premise of this work is that the “parable”¹ of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is an allegory in which Christ crystallizes the full Bible message. This vivid story is a microcosmic presentation of what is expressed macrocosmically by the full Bible account. Both speak eloquently of the human condition. But it was only after discovering the anthroposophical understanding of Rudolf Steiner that I came to see both accounts of outgoing and return as expressions of the human being’s own evolutionary journey, itself macrocosmic. In both we see the theme of two sons, one of whom leaves home, loses the original inheritance, comes to self-knowledge, and returns home transformed. One account consists of some seventeen verses, the other of an entire canon.

The origin of the human being was in the spiritual world untold expanses of time and timelessness ago. Leaving home, it descended farther and farther into matter in a long process of solidification or densification. This descent, if left alone, would have doomed human beings, but at the right time it was arrested and reversed by the Christ, whose descent and incarnation on Earth made human beings’ re-ascent possible. The Bible, when seen in anthroposophical light, tells us of this journey. All of its parts then fit together beautifully, seeming contradictions are resolved, and otherwise perplexing passages radiate new splendor—as does the larger whole, now connected, closed into an effulgent orb like the Sun.

The following are but a sampling of the dramatic new understandings of scripture that come with anthroposophical insight:

1 Modern theology has often taken the position that this scripture is a parable, as distinguished from an allegory, and that as a parable it can have only one meaning. In such cases, that meaning is normally taken to be an illustration of the nature of the Heavenly Father’s divine love. That is certainly not here denied, but such love is seen as being simply part of the meaning the much larger allegorical picture presents.

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1. The essential structure of the human being, and how it is disclosed in scripture over and over again;
2. The meaning and enormous significance of Isaiah 6, especially of Isaiah's mandate, quoted in all Gospels, the conclusion of Acts, and in Romans, to tell the people that they would see but not see, hear but not hear, and not understand;
3. The disappearance of the many apparent discrepancies between the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, and the relationship of these birth stories to each other;
4. The meaning and significance of the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, which have otherwise thus far been unexplained and, by apparent consensus, generally ignored by theology;
5. The meaning and significance of the virgin birth, the immaculate conception, and the perpetual virginity of Mary;
6. The meaning and significance of the passage about the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple, and of the Simeon and Anna passages that precede it;
7. The distinction between Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus Christ, and when the former became the latter;
8. The unity of Gen 1–3, which is a single, sequential account of the human being's creation, not two separate accounts from different sources (normally called the "Yahwist," or "Y," and "Elohist," or "E"); and the meaning of the numerous seeming instances, there and later, of dual stories in an amazingly different light;
9. Why the documentary hypothesis of the synoptic Gospels is also without a significant basis in truth;
10. The reason for the superior status of the Gospel of John, and the identity of its author;
11. Why the apparent discrepancies between the four Gospel accounts, and especially between the synoptics and John, are not in fact such;
12. The difference between "the law" that Christ spoke of fulfilling in Matt 5:17 and what is pointed to as "the law" in the Old Testament, and how the latter is merely a passing shadow image of the former;

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13. A portrait of the three New Testament John beings (exclusive of John Mark and Peter's father), namely, the Apostle John (son of Zebedee), the disciple whom Jesus loved, and the Baptist, and their relationship to each other and to the authorship of the Johannine corpus;
14. For the first time in theological history, a rational and consistent explanation of the Apocalypse of John and its authorship, showing not a book reflecting persecution, but one reflecting past and future human evolution;
15. The nature and consequence of the forgiveness of one's sins by Christ and/or by his disciples (then or now);
16. The higher meaning of the "parable" of the "Prodigal Son";
17. The meaning of Paul's "first and second Adam," and how they are reflected in Luke's Nativity account;
18. The scope and meaning of Paul's foreseen redemption of all creation spoken of in Rom 8:19-23;
19. The meaning of the "fading splendor" of Moses' face and the shortcomings and ultimate end of all written scripture (2 Cor 3);
20. For the first time, the true meaning of the Mystery of Golgotha and how it has worked for the salvation of the human being and of the other kingdoms;
21. The nature of the resurrection, and of the second coming of Christ, and when and under what circumstances each occurs;
22. The human being's relationship to the stars and other heavenly bodies, and how this is disclosed in scripture.
23. The extensive scriptural manifestation of the truth that each person has lived and will live many times before attaining the necessary perfection, and where and how the truth of karma and reincarnation is reflected, and why it was not to be taught by the church until present times;
24. The distinctly different meaning, in such areas as function, term and effect, of the important but heretofore theologically baffling and generally avoided topics "judgment of the Father" and "judgment of the Son";
25. The significance of the ancient "four elements," their relationship to the "four ethers," why some characteristic of "fire" is

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generally present in the Bible whenever a spiritual being is directly perceived by a human being, and why Christ came to cast fire upon the Earth;

26. The course of the human being's spiritual journey between one life and the next incarnation, and how it is reflected in scripture;
27. The true nature of the relationship between male and female, and how it changes;
28. The true nature of the reality of evolution, and of the fact that animals are a byproduct of humanity's evolutionary descent and that the human being is not evolved from any animal;
29. The nature and significance of such misunderstood works as the Song of Solomon, Jonah and Job;
30. A better understanding of the unity of the apparently bipartite or tripartite book of Isaiah.
31. The higher meaning of the phrase "born again," and its relationship to the path that "few find;"
32. The identification, nature and function of the various levels of the spiritual Hierarchies between the human being and the Trinity, of which the Angels are the lowest and the Seraphim the highest, and how these are reflected in the human being and in all creation;
33. Profuse evidence, not heretofore generally recognized, that Paul is indeed the author of the book of Hebrews; and
34. An understanding of why, even though individual acceptance of Christ is essential, there is no such thing as individual salvation apart from that of the rest of humanity and eventually of all the kingdoms of creation.

To repeat, this list is only a sampling. The revelations go far beyond these examples, but they will suffice for now.

From the perspective of human development, a thousand years from now Rudolf Steiner will be looked upon as the evolutionary equivalent of Abraham.² Such, at least, is my belief. These two led humanity, so to speak, at times respectively equidistant from the incarnation of the Christ, the former during the human being's

2 See fn 3 and related texts in "Second Coming."

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parabolic descent from the spirit world, the latter during its struggle to reascend thereto. Each served as the faithful agent of the Christ. The essential work of each was a remarkable departure, primarily of a spiritual nature, from his “homeland” (Gen 12:1-3; Matt 19:27-29; Mark 10:28-30; Luke 18:28-30), without large entourage or notable fanfare.

No thinking reader will accept the above uncritically, nor should such be done. It is only presented here to suggest the scope of newness and magnitude represented by the works of Rudolf Steiner. But how can this be, when even to this date, the name of Steiner hardly sparks any recognition, at least in the English-speaking world? There are at least four reasons for the lack of recognition: 1: His teachings do not fit neatly with much ecclesiastical dogma; 2: His works are so extensive and interrelated that great commitment of time and effort is necessary to comprehend them; 3: The world conditions were not conducive to the spread of a German’s spiritual teachings beyond the borders of Europe’s two world wars involving his country, separated by the direst economic conditions in his native land in the twenties, and then worldwide in the thirties, followed after World War II by the greatest explosion of materialism the world has ever known; and 4: Not until 1965 were even small volume printings of any of his works available in English, and even now perhaps less than a third of the number of his total works can be purchased in the English language, and only if one knows where.³

While to a very large degree Rudolf Steiner’s powerful revelations carry within themselves the unique conviction of authority, particularly for those highly conversant with both scripture and phenomena, sooner or later the serious student must look intensely into his life story to evaluate the sources of his insight. Extensive

3 The diminutive exposure of the United States to Steiner’s works is disclosed by the figures. According to a recent pamphlet by Christopher Bamford and Michael Dobson, the roots of the Anthroposophic Press (the principal source of Steiner’s works in the United States) go back to 1916. But by 1965, the cumulative sales of the Press from inception were only \$1,500. By 1981 sales had increased to a level of \$200,000 annually, still a pittance considering the volume of Steiner’s work and the relatively small number of books which such volume could represent. While larger now, our groaning times demand far more.

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biographical resources for that search are available. The following paragraphs taken from the Introduction by Christopher Bamford to the recent *Anthroposophy in Everyday Life* (AEL) will serve as a brief sketch of Steiner and the milieu into which he was placed:

A major task facing humanity as it moves into the new millennium is that of uniting spiritual and practical life.

In the Middle Ages—the time of Christendom—science, art, religion, and society were still to a great extent united. Untold monks and nuns labored and loved mightily for the sake of God and the world. Their lives of prayer and devotion, centered around the Eucharist, kept the interior flame of worship burning brightly. Radiating outward, the spiritual consequences of their steadfastness resonated throughout the landscape, impregnating villages, towns, and cities with a sense of the divine presence in the world.

At this time, too, great Cathedrals and humble churches alike filled ordinary people with the understanding that every aspect of life participated in God's purpose. Scholars, philosophers, scientists, and artisans—all of whom contributed to the creation of a sacramental vision of the world in which each thing and every human act were imbued with spiritual significance—gathered around these Houses of the Spirit, amplifying its effectiveness.

This pervasive sense of the sacred also existed in earlier, pre-Christian times, when the priests and hierophants of the ancient Mystery Centers and Temples coordinated human culture in a way that permitted the spirit to realize itself in the manner appropriate to the moment. But, with the rise of the Modern Age, a powerful cleft was driven between human beings, nature, and the divine. We may call the process “secularization.” Religion and spiritual life became increasingly marginalized. Instead of spiritual realities, human beings pursued this-worldly ends, such as comfort and wealth. Thus, gradually, the thread connecting saints and esoteric masters with the general life of humanity was broken; meaning fragmented; and the sacramental relation of human beings to each other and the cosmos ceased to function. Materialism in its many guises (positivism, Darwinism, Marxism, etc.) now became the guiding principle in science and society. Religion and culture

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(religion and the state) were separated and spiritual, religious life became a question of individual responsibility.

This was a heavy burden to bear for individuals who had not only to create a spiritual life for themselves, but increasingly had to do so in opposition to the very quarters from which help might have been expected. For, as society plunged into materialism, the Churches, not wishing to be left out, joined willingly in the descent. There were, of course, exceptions to this tendency, but such generally was the situation at the beginning of the twentieth century when Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) began to teach, initially under the auspices of the Theosophical Society.

As a natural clairvoyant, of great spiritual gifts, Steiner began his journey by assimilating the best of what the culture of his time had to offer. He chose for himself a scientific-technical education. At the same time, realizing the need to transform our present consciousness so that it might become a vehicle of spiritual knowledge, he undertook a phenomenological study of the processes by which we come to know—what is called “epistemology.” Up against the pervasive influence of the philosopher Kant, who maintained that we could never truly know anything in itself but only our own forms of thought, Steiner knew from his own experience as a free spiritual being that the possibility of brain-free thinking lay within the capacity of human beings who thus could know truly and fully the world’s actual spiritual reality. In two central early works—*Truth and Knowledge* [TK] and *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path* [originally, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, and then in America, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* (PSA)]—he laid the ground for what he would accomplish in the future. He was greatly helped in this work of preparation by prolonged study and meditation on the scientific works of Goethe, which he was asked to edit for a new edition of the Complete Works—the Kurschner “*Deutschen Nationaalliterature*” edition. From this, too, a series of fundamental, groundbreaking texts resulted [*Goethean Science* (GS), *Goethe’s World View* (GWV) and *The Science of Knowing* (SK)].

During this period, though already initiated into his spiritual task, Steiner was still very much a free thinker of his time. Then, as he wrote in his *Autobiography* [*The Course of My*

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Life (CML)], “shortly before the turn of the century,” a profound experience was given to him: an experience that “culminated in my standing in the spiritual presence of the Mystery of Golgotha in a most profound and solemn festival of knowledge.” This experience marked a call. Shortly thereafter, he left the literary and philosophical world of letters and joined his destiny to the movement for the renewal of spiritual knowledge in our time.

The tasks lying before him were manifold. In order to undertake them, he realized that, acting wholly and freely out of the spirit, he would also have to connect himself horizontally with the various traditions flowing together to herald the possibility of a “new age of light.”

He linked himself first to the Theosophical Society founded by H. p Blavatsky, becoming the Secretary of the German Section. From the very beginning, he made complete independence and autonomy the condition of his taking on this task. Thus, as an independent spiritual teacher, working within the Theosophical Society, Steiner began to lecture freely from his own experience on spiritual matters. At the same time, he began to work more esoterically—transforming the legacy of masonic, hermetic, and esoteric Christian streams and taking on esoteric students. From this period (1904-1910) date what would become the basic texts of Anthroposophy [*Christianity as Mystical Fact* (CMF), *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment* (KHW), *Theosophy* (THSY) and *Occult Science, An Outline* (OS) and the previously published PSA]. But Anthroposophy itself, under that name, would not arise as a separate, independent spiritual movement until 1913 when, as a result of the controversy surrounding the young Krishnamurti—whether he was, or was not, the reincarnation of Christ [Steiner himself denying such]—Steiner split permanently from the Adyar theosophists.

From the beginning, Steiner saw his task as the rescue of humanity from materialism and secularism. He knew that for evolution—the divine work of the Gods—to continue in an organic, healthy direction, the world and human beings—which are essentially not two, but one—must once again be seen and lived as the profound spiritual reality they are. The task of Anthroposophy, he recognized, could not proceed

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piecemeal, but called for a renewal of culture as a whole—a bringing together of science, religion, and art in a sacred unity. It was in this sense that Steiner described the work of Anthroposophy as the renewal of the ancient Mysteries. But renewal here does not mean repetition. The old must die away for the new to come into being. But it cannot simply be replaced by something already known, no matter how illustrious or well tested. Rather, something new must be created. But such a new revelation can no longer be received passively from the Gods, as was the case in previous epochs. It must now be created by, in, and through human beings.

Two basic ideas pervade Steiner's work, namely, the essential nature of the human being, and the evolution of consciousness. Subsumed particularly under the second is the reality, indeed the absolute necessity, of karma and reincarnation. That the reality of karma and reincarnation is sensed by such a large segment of Western humanity today is merely evidence of the spiritual stirrings of our time. But what is generally said about it must be extensively modified and expanded to come into harmony with anthroposophical understanding. When this is done, it shall be seen to be not only in complete harmony with the Bible story but expressed in and inexorably demanded thereby. Indeed, both "basic ideas" are profusely manifested by the scriptural account as radically new insight into its meaning takes shape. One who comprehends such insight can take new hope for humanity and for the universal power of the essential Christian message.

In anthroposophical understanding, the human being, in its most condensed portrayal, is threefold, made up of body, soul and spirit. The "body" is then seen to be made up of three interpenetrating elements or "sheaths"—in fact to be "*Three Bodies*"—namely, physical, etheric (also called life) and astral (manifesting as sense, passion and the like). Only the physical can be seen by the sensual eye, and this only because the spiritual physical form has been filled out by mineral substance. (Implicit in this statement is the first hint of what is theologically known as "the resurrection body," the spiritually physical form emptied of its mineral substance). The other two "bodies" can be known from their manifestations, but

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are actually more real than the physical. We humans have physical bodies in common with the mineral kingdom, etheric (life) bodies in common with the plant kingdom, and astral bodies in common with the animal kingdom. Thus, insofar as their earthly presence is concerned, the animal is composed also of three “bodies,” the plant of two, and the mineral of only one. It is only through coming to a fuller understanding of these three “bodies” that many scriptural mysteries can be understood.

There is, however, a fourth element that makes the human being unique as the crown of creation. It is the Ego, or the “I Am,” the self-consciousness that enables each human being to say “I” and to have a sense of continuity of that “I.” The Ego here is not the Jungian ego, which is the Personality; the Jungian term for the Individuality is the Self. In anthroposophy, the Ego or “I Am” is the eternal *Individuality*, the “burning bush” as we shall see, while the *Personality* is its embodiment in a particular incarnation. A Personality is unique in the sense of never having lived before nor ever living again after this life, but the Individuality manifests again and again in appropriate Personality-form during the course of its own evolutionary perfection.

The human Ego is the “soul” in the body-soul-spirit makeup. The soul is the mediator between body and spirit, receiving impressions from the outer world through the body and reshaping them through the three human activities of thinking, feeling and willing. Actually, each element is itself again threefold so that, in its largest presentation, the human being is ninefold. The eternal soul, being central, is enabled by taking into itself the Christ to work from life to life in the evolutionary task of perfecting, one by one, its lower three bodies into its higher three components that compose the perfected human spirit. At this eventual point, one has attained to the resurrection in the ultimate sense, having returned full cycle to the point from which the human journey began in the spiritual world. We said at the outset that Christ condensed the sixty-six or so books of the Bible into seventeen verses in the account of the Prodigal Son. He then condenses the human journey from seventeen to a single verse in Matt 13:33, “The kingdom of heaven is like

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leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

The development of the higher human components requires many lifetimes on Earth. After death, the physical body dissolves into the mineral world, the etheric body into the etheric world, and, after a period of purification (sometimes described as “judgment,” “burning,” “refiner’s fire” or terms of similar import), the astral body into the astral world. But an extract is saved from the etheric and astral bodies, the transformed fruit of the experiences of the immediate past life. This unites with the immortal Ego. Together they become a “Seed” that now begins a sojourn in the world of spirit, where its spiritual elements will be built up. There, in accordance with the extract or fruit of the past life the Ego, with the help of spiritual beings, creates an archetype of a new human being, the Personality it can become in its next earthly life. Thus the destiny or karma of the next life is determined by the accumulated fruits of an Ego’s past lives on Earth. And through its deeds on Earth, a human being can evolve more and more into a spiritual being. Because an individual’s actions also have an outer effect on other human beings and on the life of the Earth, these deeds also contribute to the spiritual evolution of humanity as a whole.

As indicated, inherent in this whole out-and-back journey of the Prodigal Son is a changing human consciousness. In its earliest condition of consciousness, the human being dwelled in the spiritual world with, was interpenetrated by, and felt itself at one with the Hierarchies (the “Heavenly Host”). What is described by Moses as the “fall” from the “garden” was infection of the human astral body, before the entry of the Ego and moral responsibility, with the Luciferic urge for sensual experience and knowledge. From this point, ever so slowly over vast eras the human being descended into materiality, and the spiritual world “hid its face” more and more. At the outset, memory was near perfect but individual intellect did not exist. As the human Ego approached the three bodies, conscious communion with the Hierarchies faded and human beings began to associate, first in families, then in tribes or groups. Individual identification did not exist separate from these. Memories and loving relationships were carried by the blood lines. Only gradually

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did tribal consciousness give way to individual consciousness. Its announcement was most dramatic to Moses on Mt. Sinai: "I Am the I Am." But Moses scarcely comprehended what was happening. He still represented the fading light of ancient clairvoyance, or, as Paul said, his was a "fading splendor." The seraphim painfully revealed to Isaiah that the ancient ability to "see, hear and understand" was disappearing, to return only after long ages of torment. Still, he, along with Jeremiah, the Gospel writers and Paul, realized that the day would come when a new insight would be given directly to each human being. This could not happen unless the descent of humanity were arrested and reversed, a deed that could only be accomplished by the incarnation of the Christ on Earth and the shedding of his blood before humanity had hardened beyond redemption.

The loss of consciousness is additionally expressed by the end of ancient prophecy—vision was darkened, and awareness of the eternal nature of the individual Ego was lost. It was essential that for two millennia humanity forget the reality of its nature in order to concentrate on the importance of each individual life on Earth. But those who gave us the scriptures were themselves aware of the recurring lives of the individual Ego, and buried this knowledge within the scriptures themselves in such a way that it would be uncovered and recognized when the time was right. For humanity was not, at the time of Christ, ready for all that would be later revealed.

Commensurate with the fading of ancient clairvoyance and memory capacity, human intelligence increased. But it was an intelligence associated with the material world, shut off from the direct revelation of spiritual consciousness. This change of consciousness was accompanied by the development of individual identity in place of fading group identity. Egoism was born and flowered, and will be the cause of much tragedy still. Recognition of the true nature of the Christ and of human salvation is imperative for those who would escape its clutches. The purpose of anthroposophy is to enable that recognition and to encourage the pursuit of its demands. As yet, that goal is still in the distance, but there is evidence of spiritual readiness among much of humanity.

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Far from being a book from minds crazed by persecution, and likely having no direct relation thereto, St. John's Apocalypse is shown by anthroposophy to be not only a recapitulation of the creation, but a picture of what lies ahead in the evolution of humanity on the return leg of its journey. Those who understand and follow the Christ in his crucifixion of the flesh will again gain clairvoyance, but this time with Individuality infused by the Christ so that once again it will become possible to unite not only with all of humanity, but indeed with all of creation and eventually in full consciousness with the Hierarchies. The redeemed of humanity will then become the "gods" spoken of by the prophets and by the Christ.