



THE  
GOSPEL  
OF ST. JOHN

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RUDOLF STEINER

# The Gospel of St. John

**By Rudolf Steiner**

Notes from three lectures given in Berlin on the 19th and 26th  
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Notes

## **Introductory Note**

On the 12th and 13th of February, 1906, Rudolf Steiner gave two lectures in Cologne on “The Gospel of St. John as a Document Describing Initiation”, which are published in Volume 97 of the complete edition of the works of Rudolf Steiner in the original German under the title of “Das Christliche Mysterium”. A few days later in Berlin he also spoke about the John Gospel. It was originally intended to print these lectures in Volume 96 entitled “Ursprungs-impulse der Geisteswissenschaft”. For technical reasons they were held back for Volume 94 which is still in preparation and which will contain the eight lectures on the John Gospel given in Munich. Unfortunately the notes of these Berlin lectures are very scanty. Since they contain essential material concerning Christology, they should undoubtedly have a place in the complete edition. In view of the fact that the publication of Volume 94 will probably not appear in the immediate future, these three lectures are meanwhile printed in this form.

## **First Lecture**

Berlin, 19th February, 1906

Today and next time I am going to speak about the Gospel of St. John. I would mention that what I have to say will only really be comprehensible to those who are already somewhat familiar with spiritual science. It would, however, take us too far out of our way if we went into everything unfamiliar to non-theosophists. You are probably aware that latterly New Testament textual criticism has discredited the John Gospel as an historical source. It is said in theological circles — at least in advanced circles — that the first three gospels, the synoptic gospels, are the only documents relevant to the life of the founder of Christianity. They are called synoptic because they can be taken together to form a general picture of the life of Christ Jesus. On the other hand modern theologians try to interpret the John Gospel as a sort of poetic work, a confession of faith, the writings of a person portraying his feelings, his intimate religious life as it was born in him through the impact of Christianity. Thus the John Gospel could be considered as a devotional work, a deeply felt confession of faith, not as anything that could be taken as Christian historical facts.

But for everyone who immerses himself in the writings of the New Testament, one fact is indisputable: an immediate life flows from the John Gospel, and there is a conviction, a source of truth of a different nature to that proceeding from other religious writings. There is a certainty, which needs no outer confirmation. There is a feeling that comes over one

when one meets the John Gospel if one is sensitive to inner soul life and spiritual devotion. Only with the help of spiritual science can one understand why this is so. Many a time have I told you how spiritual science helps towards a more intimate connection with religious documents.

You all know that when one first meets the scriptures one adopts the attitude of a simple person and takes the facts as they are described, without criticism; one takes the bread of religious life from these sources and is satisfied with it.

Many people of our day who had this naive outlook and then became “clever”, became “enlightened”, noticed the contradictions in the gospels. Then they rejected the gospels and lost faith. They said: We cannot reconcile remaining faithful to these writings and seeking wisdom in them with our conscience and our sense of truth. This is the stage of the “clever” ones, the second stage.

Then there is the third way that people approach religious documents. They begin to explain them symbolically. They begin to see symbols and allegories in them. This is the way of freethinkers, especially in recent times.

Bruno Wille, the editor of the paper “Der Freidenker” (The Free Thinker), has now chosen this way. He has taken to explaining symbolically the Christ myth and the Bible in general. The really necessary way of development that man needs, an inner turning point, cannot follow from this. Those who are less ingenious will explain the scriptures less ingeniously. Others who are more ingenious will be better. Much will be read into it that springs from human ingenuity. The third way is thus a half believing, but arbitrary, attitude.

Then there is quite a different standpoint. One learns that there are realities pertaining to higher worlds, that besides our

world of the senses, there are soul-spiritual things, and that religious revelations are not concerned with the sense world but present facts of a higher world. Those who have gotten to know the realities of the astral world which lies behind our sense world, and of the devachanic (or mental world) which lies even deeper, will come to a new and higher understanding of religious sources. It is impossible to understand the John Gospel without rising to such higher worlds. The John Gospel is not a poetic work, nor a writing arising from mere religious fervour, but sets forth revelations from higher worlds that the writer of the gospel has received. It is something like this — I will briefly describe it. The supporting evidence I will not deal with today; perhaps I can go into it next time. The writer of the John Gospel learned, through experience in higher worlds, what took place at “the beginning of our era“ that related to the life of the founder of Christianity, and his acts.

Let me give you an example of the difference between just knowing, and truly comprehending. We have recently mentioned here that someone can be next to us, we can see what he looks like, but we need not necessarily really know him for what he is. I have told the story of the singer who, at an evening party sat between Mendelsohn and someone else she did not know. She got on very well with Mendelsohn, but towards the other guest, though he was very courteous, she felt an aversion. Afterwards she asked, “Who was that bore on my left?” The answer was, “It was the famous philosopher Hegel”. If the lady had been told previously that the great philosopher Hegel would be present at a party, that alone would probably have been enough for her to have accepted the invitation. But because he sat beside her unknown, he was a bore. This is the difference between seeing and understanding, between just knowing and comprehending.

He who was the founder of Christianity could not readily be recognised if one only possessed the ordinary intellect employed in the sense world. It needed that which the Christian mystics so often expressed in profound and beautiful language. This was what Angelus Silesius meant when he said:

If Christ were born in Bethlehem a thousand times  
And not in thee thyself; then art thou lost eternally.

There is an inner experience of Christ — there is the possibility to realize inwardly what took place outwardly as events in Palestine between the years 1 and 33 A.D. He who came into this world from higher worlds must be understood from a higher world. And he who portrayed Him most deeply had to raise himself to the two higher worlds we have mentioned, the astral and the devachanic, or mental worlds. This elevation of John, if we so name him, was the elevation into these two higher worlds. His Gospel reveals this to us.

The first twelve chapters contain John's experiences in the astral world. From chapter thirteen onwards it is his experiences in the devachanic, or mental world. He who wrote it down says of Christ (the words are not to be taken literally): Here on this earth He lived, here has He worked with divine powers, with occult powers. He has healed the sick, he has gone through everything from death to resurrection. It is impossible to understand these things with the ordinary intellect. Here on earth there is no science or learning by which one could really understand what occurred. But there is the possibility of rising to the higher worlds. There one can find the wisdom to understand Him who walked here on earth among us. Thus did the writer of the John Gospel rise to the two higher worlds and become initiated. It was an initiation, and the writer describes his initiation into the astral world and the devachanic, or mental world.



In olden times, in regions where man's body was still suited to these things, such an initiation took place as follows. The person had to go through a sort of sleep-state. What now takes several years in a modern European initiation — because the modern European can no longer go through the process I will describe — what today is achieved through long exercises of meditation and concentration, was achieved in a short time by some individuals, after the appropriate exercises of meditation and concentration. I particularly emphasise that anyone who really wishes to receive initiation must, in some form or other, face the two important experiences about to be described — though in a somewhat different way. He must go through a sort of sleep condition. To understand the nature of sleep, let us remind ourselves what takes place when one sleeps. One's higher bodies are then separated from one's lower bodies. Man consists of a physical body, which one can see with one's eyes. The second member is the etheric body which surrounds the physical body and which is much finer than the physical body. Currents and organs of wonderful variety and splendour are active in it. The etheric body contains the same organs as the physical body. It has a brain, heart, eyes etc. They represent the forces which formed the corresponding organs. It is as if one cooled water in a vessel until it becomes ice. In this way you should picture the arising of the physical organs through the densifying of the etheric organs. The etheric body extends only a little beyond the physical body.

The third member is the astral body. It is the bearer of desires, wishes, passions, etc. It permeates the physical body in the form of a cloud. There are colours — violent passions appear as lightning flashes. The peculiarities of temperament glide through the body in glowing points of varying intensity.

The whole inner man is expressed in a luminous form. This is the real ego of man, the bearer of the higher centre of his being. In normal sleep the physical and etheric bodies are lying in bed. They are closely united. The astral body and all the rest is separated. As long as one does not do anything particular one is unconscious when the astral body is outside the physical body. One is as unconscious as one would be in the physical world without eyes or ears. One could live as long as one liked in the physical world; if one had no eyes there would be no colours, if one had no ears there would be no sound. So it is when the astral body is outside the physical body. It is spread out in the soul world, but one does not see this world or become aware of it because one has no astral sense organs. They must gradually be formed. If a person does not practice exercises he remains unconscious in higher worlds. But if he does practice then he can attain consciousness in these higher worlds. When his astral body acquires organs he begins to see the astral world around him. Those of you who have often attended these lectures will know that there are seven such organs. They are called wheels, chakrams or lotus flowers. The two-petalled lotus flower lies between the eyes — between the eye-brows, the sixteen-petalled lies in the region of the larynx, the twelve-petalled lies in the heart region. If these organs are gradually developed one becomes clairvoyant in the astral world.

This astral vision is something quite different from physical sight. You can get some idea of astral vision if you think of the flow of dream life. In dreams we have symbolic pictures — true symbols. One sees symbols. One loses consciousness of what takes place here in the physical world, but one can experience in symbolic pictures such events as the life of Christ Jesus as John describes it from his own experience in the astral world. Descriptions of this nature form the content of the first twelve chapters of the John Gospel. Don't

misunderstand me. I know many will say: If all this is astral experience, then it is nothing real and what is told us of the founder of Christianity is not authentic. But this is not the case. It would be as if one denied that a man of flesh and blood could be a genius, because one cannot see genius. Although one learns the truth of Christ Jesus only on the astral plane, it is still a fact that he lived his life on the physical plane. We are dealing with symbols on the astral plane and outer reality on the physical plane. Nothing is taken away from the facts when we understand them more deeply in the sense of the John Gospel.

Initiation in the astral world is preceded by, and depends on what is called meditation. This means that the soul sinks into itself — I have often described it here. To reach a meditative experience one must make oneself blind and deaf to all sense impressions. Nothing must be able to disturb one. Cannons can go off without one being aware of it in one's inner life. One does not achieve this at once, but through constant practice one can attain this capacity. One must empty oneself also of all past experiences. Memory must be wiped out. The soul must be concerned only with itself and then out of its inner being there arise the eternal truths which are able — not only to awaken our understanding — but to release capacities which lie slumbering under a spell in our souls. These great eternal verities will rise up in man according to the maturity he has attained through his karma — the one, as Subba Row says, in seven incarnations, another in seventy years, another in seven years, others in seven months, seven days or seven hours.

John sets forth the means whereby his soul was led to perception on the astral plane. The formula he used for meditation stands at the beginning of his gospel. “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 this Word was not anything made that was made. In it was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.”

In these five sentences lie the eternal verities which loosed the spell in John's soul and brought forth the great visions. This is the form of the meditation. Those for whom the John Gospel is written should not read it like any other book. The first five sentences must be taken as a formula of meditation. Then one follows John on his way, and attempts to experience oneself what he experienced. This is the way to do it; so it is meant.

John says: Do what I have done. Let the great formula, “In the beginning was the Word” work in your souls and you will verify what is said in my first twelve chapters.

This alone can really help towards understanding the John Gospel. Thus is it intended and thus should it be used. I have often spoken of what the “Word” signifies. “In the beginning” is not a good translation. It should really read: Out of the primal forces emerged the Word. That is what it means: The Word came forth, came forth out of the primal forces. Thus “in the beginning” means: coming forth out of the primal forces.

When man is in this sleep condition he is no longer in the sense world. He moves into a soul world and in this soul world experiences what the sense world really is. The truth of the sense world is revealed. He starts out from these words derived from the sense world leading back to the primal forces, and rises up to the words of truth. Every truth has seven meanings. For the mystic, immersed in contemplation it has however this meaning: The knowledge, the Word which emerges, is not something that merely applies to yesterday and today, but this Word is eternal. This Word leads to God

because it was ever with God, because it is the very essence that God has planted into all things.

There is however, still another way of understanding this, and one acquires it if one returns day after day to the momentous words: “In the beginning was the Word”. When one begins to understand, not with the intellect, but with the heart, so that the heart becomes one with these words, then the power begins to work, and there begins the state of mind of which John speaks. He says it with great clarity: “All things were made by Him and without the Word was not anything made that was made”.

What do we find in this Word? We find life. What do we perceive through this life — through this light? We must take these religious texts quite literally if we want to attain higher knowledge. Where does this light shine? In the darkness of night. It comes to those who sleep. It comes to everyone who sleeps. But the darkness comprehended it not — until the ability develops to perceive it on the astral plane. Thus is the fifth verse to be understood literally. The astral light shines into the darkness of night but man does not normally see it, he must first learn to see.

As all this became reality for the writer of the John Gospel, the light dawned and he saw who He was, He whose disciple and apostle he was. Here on earth he had seen Him. Now he had found Him again on the astral plane, and he knew that He who had walked the earth in the flesh only differed in one respect from what lived in his own deepest inner self. In every single man there lives a divine man. In the distant future this divine man will arise resurrected in every man. As man stands before us today he is, in his outward appearance, to a greater or lesser extent, an expression of the inner divine man, and this inner divine man works constantly on the outer man.

Last Thursday [Public Lecture, Berlin, 15 Feb, 1906. "Reincarnation and Karma"] I already pointed out how one can illustrate this by a simple comparison. Look at a child. One could be tempted to say that these innocent features came from the father or mother, an uncle or an ancestor. However, everything within the child expresses itself in the features, in the gestures of the hands and in all its movements. What slumbers in the child strives to come to expression. Finally the individual emerges and the physiognomy becomes an expression of the individual soul, while previously it showed more of a family type. In primitive man the individual soul is usually still slumbering and has but a meagre existence. In the course of many incarnations and efforts the individual emerges, the soul acquires more power over the physical body, and the physiognomy takes on the imprint, or the expression of the inner man. An immature person expresses little of the power of the soul. Gradually man matures, and full maturity is reached when the inner word has become flesh completely — when the outer has become an exact imprint of the inner, so that the spirit shines through the flesh. This however, John only understood once his higher self had appeared clearly before his astral eyes. It stood in front of his astral eyes and he knew: This is I. Today have I experienced it on the astral plane. However it will gradually descend as it did in Him, who I followed. This is the deep relationship between Christ Jesus and the divine man that exists in every man. This is the deep inner experience of John.

The inner soul lives unconscious in man and he only becomes aware of it through the processes we have described.

What does it mean to say: something becomes conscious. Can we become conscious of something which lives within us? As long as it only lives within us we are not aware of it. Man is not aware of what he carries within him, what is subjective. I will use a crude comparison to make clear what I mean. You

all have a physical brain but you cannot see it. It would have to be taken out, and then you could see it. For the same reason, though there is a certain difference, you cannot see your higher self. It is the “I” within you. But it must come out if you are to see it, and this can only happen on the astral plane. When it is outside and confronts you, then spiritually, it is as if you had a physical brain on a platter and made it the object of your sense perception.

The writer of the John Gospel describes this process. His own higher ego appears before Him — his own higher ego, which in its fullness represents the Christ. When you know this you will be able to understand certain hints and truths in the John Gospel. You will be able to understand certain things quite well with the help of what I said up to now. In occult language one describes what this ego inhabits — the physical body, which it has built for itself to dwell in — as the temple. Thus one says: The soul dwells in the temple.

It is not altogether a painless procedure when for the first time the soul must leave the temple of the body so that it becomes visible outside of it. This leaving of the body is not without pain. All that forms this higher connection with the physical body are bands that are not so easy to loosen. Imagine that you are bound with fetters and you break loose. You would experience pain through this tearing apart. It is like a process of tearing apart when the astral body leaves the physical body when it leaves it, perceptibly. Leaving the body in sleep is different, one is not aware of it. If one leaves it consciously then one experiences pain.

When man begins to develop astral consciousness, things on the astral plane appear to him as in a mirror. The number 165 should not be read as 165 but as 561 — as reflected writing. Everything appears reversed on the astral plane. Even time is reversed. When you follow someone on the astral plane you

start, to begin with, from where he is. Then you go back to his birth. You can follow him on the physical plane forwards; on the astral plane backwards. Leaving the physical body is like this: It is as though we were leaving the temple of the physical body and were laid hold of from all sides. This is the occurrence which John wants to describe. He left his body in order to experience the Christ, his own higher divine self, confronting him. People around him have their astral bodies bound strongly to their physical bodies as if with fetters. Had John remained like them he would have continued to be fettered to his physical body. Now let us read how this occurrence is described pictorially and symbolically in the John Gospel, chapter 8, verses 58 and 59: “Jesus said unto them, verily, verily I say unto you: Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them”, through the hindrances. With this ends the eighth chapter. This is the passing out of the astral body from the physical body. The final act, leading to the leaving of the physical body and to higher vision, usually lasts three days. When these three days are up, one attains a consciousness on the astral plane comparable to that previously experienced on the physical plane. Then one is united with the higher world.

In occult language this union with the higher world is called the marriage of the soul with the powers of the higher world. When one has left the physical body, this appears to one as a mother would appear to a new-born child, were the child able to be conscious at birth. Thus the physical body confronts one, and the astral body can very well say to the physical body: This is my mother. When one has celebrated this marriage one can say this. One can look back on the former union. This can happen after three days. This is the occult procedure on the astral plane. In chapter 2, verse 1, it is stated: “And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of



Jesus was there”. This is the pictorial expression for what I have just said. It happened on the third day.

When a person enters the astral world, he finds himself in a region from which he can rise a step further into a still higher world — the mental, or devachanic world. This entry into the devachanic world can only be gained at the expense of the complete extinction, the death of the lower nature. He must go through the three days of death and then be awakened. Once he has attained vision of the astral plane and the pictures of the astral plane have confronted him, he is mature and ready to receive knowledge on the mental or devachanic plane. It is possible then to describe the awakening on the devachanic plane. To find oneself on the higher plane with conscious clarity of thought, this is the awakening of Lazarus.

John describes the awakening of Lazarus. Previously he has shown that through this chain of events one can enter the higher worlds. In chapter 10, verse 9, it is said: “I am the door: by me if any man enter in he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture”. This is the awakening of what was wrapped in sleep and is now awakened on the devachanic plane. John goes through it. John is Lazarus, and John means nothing more nor less than what is described in his first twelve chapters. He describes as an astral experience that he was awakened on the astral plane. Then followed the initiation for the devachanic plane. Three days he lay in the grave, and then he received the awakening. The raising of Lazarus is the awakening of John who wrote the gospel.

Read everything up to the chapter on the raising of Lazarus and you will find no mention of John anywhere. Consider Lazarus and John. It is said of John (John, ch. 13, v. 23): “Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.” Regarding Lazarus, you find the same words — that He loved him. It is the same person. He is not

mentioned previous to the awakening. He appears for the first time after he is “raised from the dead”. These are the enigmas hidden in the John Gospel. The disciple whom the Lord loved is he whom the Lord himself has initiated. The writer of the John Gospel was he whom the

Lord loved. How was he able to say this? Because he had been initiated, first on the astral plane and then on the devachanic plane. If one is able in this way to find the deeper meaning of the John Gospel, then will one be able to understand it in its true profundity, and then it becomes one of the greatest texts ever written. It is the description of the initiation into the depths of the inner life of the soul. It has been written so that everyone who reads it can follow the same path. And this one can do. Sentence for sentence, word for word, one can find within oneself, by rising to the higher plane, what is described in the John Gospel. It is not a biography of Christ Jesus but a biography of the developing human soul. And what is described is eternal and can take place in the heart of every human being. This text is an example and a model. Hence it has this living and awakening power which not only makes people into Christians but enables them to awaken to a higher reality. The John Gospel is not a profession of faith, but a text which really gives strength, and a self-supporting, independent higher life. This springs forth from the John Gospel, and he who does not merely want to understand it, but to *live* it, has truly comprehended it.

With these few words I could only touch on the contents. Next time we will go into certain details. Then you will see how every single sentence confirms what we have said today in general terms. Step by step you will then see that the John Gospel is not addressed merely to the human intellect, but to man's entire soul forces, and that real soul experience springs from it.

## **Second Lecture**

26 February, 1906

Last time I spoke about the first twelve chapters of the Gospel of St. John. We saw that the Lazarus miracle represents the initiation of a man into the spiritual world. Every sentence of the John Gospel directs one to the higher world. When we make it alive in us, we come to know the Christian initiation. Those who know other forms of occult training and are aware that there are other paths of initiation, also know that he who seeks the path today will be led along different ways. These are known to most of you. Those who have already some contact with spiritual life know that there is an esoteric side to our spiritual scientific strivings. The Christian initiation has similarities with other ways of initiation, but today this path can no longer be followed. He who would tread it must be led by the hand of an experienced teacher, but in view of our modern normal mode of life, it is questionable whether this path is still open. Let us again call to mind the Lazarus miracle in connection with the Christian initiation.

We will start from the normal state of sleep. What happens when a person sleeps? In man we have the physical body, etheric body, astral body and ego. What happens occultly, when a person sleeps? The physical and etheric bodies remain in bed. The astral body, together with the ego, rises out and floats over them in the form of a ring, in the case of an undeveloped personality, and later, in the form of the physical body. The astral body is not inactive. It has something to do. When the person is awake, the astral body penetrates and

interweaves the physical body. When it is outside, it works on the physical body, protecting and caring for it. The relation of the astral body to the physical body, is like that of a workman to his machine, but with the difference that in this case the workman is in the machine, he ensouls the various parts, and makes them move. This resemblance of worker to machine applies even better when the person lies asleep. The astral body then works from outside. What does it do? It makes good the damage suffered by the physical body during the day. So one can see the disadvantages for people who sleep badly. Beings belonging to the third elemental kingdom have an influence on the astral body. Beings belonging to the second elemental kingdom get at the etheric body and those belonging to the first elemental kingdom get access to the physical body to destroy it. Only when the astral body works on the physical body during sleep are these destructive processes made good.

Just to know this does not have any influence. When however, a person begins to work on his spiritual development, he must also create the necessary conditions for the astral body to work upon the physical. Meditation influences the work of the astral body upon the physical and etheric bodies during the night. Only beneficent beings must be allowed access to the human being . . . He who seeks initiation must achieve the utmost calm. This includes the avoidance of all stimulants, especially alcohol. Other requirements for any higher striving are control of thought, a morally blameless life, the effort not to be swayed to and fro by every feeling, be it pain or joy, but to maintain balance in the soul. This makes it possible for good beings to be active when the astral body works on the physical and etheric bodies during sleep.

In the initiation described in the John Gospel, the astral body, together with the etheric body, leaves the physical body. This latter remains as though dead. This is what is meant when it is

said that Lazarus lay three days in the grave. The Lazarus miracle is thus the scene of an initiation. The astral and etheric bodies need to be led back into the physical body. This the master brings to pass. The disciple is now an 'arisen one' who can remember the experiences in the higher worlds. This is possible for everyone. However what, in the old days, was a process lasting three and a half days takes place in a different manner today. The experience is the same, but it is achieved by different methods.

The pupil of the Christian initiation has to undergo seven trials. They were not only physical but spiritual experiences.

Those who had undergone them knew that real experiences are possible outside of the body. At the first stage the pupil experiences how man has become what he is. This was achieved through a train of thought as follows: The plant must have a mineral soil. Minerals are of lower rank than plants. But the plant must bow down and say, "To thee oh stone, though thou art lower than me, I owe my existence, my life". The animal is of higher rank than the plant. It breathes oxygen and exhales carbon dioxide. The plant exhales the oxygen. The animal must say to the plant, "To thee oh plant, I humbly bow, for without thee I could not live." The same relation exists between the higher ranking human being and the lower kingdoms. He too must say to them, "If you were not there, I should not be." One must completely fill oneself with this feeling and bow oneself in all humility. Out of deeply felt experience of gratitude, one must be able to bow down before what is lower than oneself. This is *the washing of feet*, the first stage of a Christian initiation. Christ bows down before the disciples and washes their feet. What is here experienced, represents a symbol of the higher world. He who is able to live spiritually in the higher world, who has achieved this deep feeling that Lazarus had, he experiences *the washing of feet* in the higher world. He who experiences humiliation in the

physical world, goes through *the washing of feet* in a higher world. This is the sign that he has reached the first stage on the way to initiation. In his body, this is expressed by the feeling that all his muscles are newly strengthened. When the muscles become steeled after the feeling of humiliation, this signifies the first stage of initiation.

The second stage of the Christian initiation is the *scourging* and smiting. One must learn to bear calmly what formerly hurt one — to take upon oneself the suffering of the world. This too finds expression in the higher world. The strength acquired by the soul is symbolised as scourging and real blows. Then one day one feels a sort of prickling or stinging all over the body — a sign that one has stood the test. This is a real experience that a person goes through when he follows this path. The great mystics experienced it. Such a person has reached the second stage.

The third stage is the *crowning* with thorns. At this stage one does not only bear pain but also contempt from one's fellow men. One has to win the fortitude to bear the feeling of obliteration, when there is no one there to give one courage and strength except oneself — when one is considered entirely worthless, and yet one remains inwardly upright. Thus must it be experienced. This is felt in the spiritual world as the crowning with thorns. One sees oneself with the crown of thorns. Pains in the head will be felt in the physical body. Changes take place in the brain, something that later also becomes noticeable in the waking state.

The fourth stage is the *crucifixion*. Through this a person learns to feel his own body as a foreign object, something like a piece of wood. He no longer connects his ego with his body. In the spiritual world he sees himself with the cross on his back. With this the fourth stage is reached. Physically the stigmata appear. In the case of certain saints this is no myth.

It indicates that they have reached the fourth stage. Such saints are bearers of the cross.

If a person has got as far as this he comes to the fifth stage. This is the mystical *death*. The whole world appears as if covered with a veil. Everything around has lost its old value. While a person feels himself thus lost in darkness, suddenly the veil is rent and he begins to see the ultimate spiritual and original aim. He gazes into a quite new, world. At the same time he learns to recognise what lies at the bottom of the human soul. He becomes a second person by the side of himself and looks down on his lower self, which is separated from him. His body is the mother that he sees standing below him and the transformed lower self is the disciple who bears witness that Christ lives. Now the higher self can say to the lower self, "Behold thy mother!" (John, ch. 19, v 27)

When a person has gone through this fifth station he can progress to the sixth stage, the burial *and resurrection*. Everything pertaining to this planet becomes the body of the Christian mystic. He feels as though the whole earth was part of him. He has ceased to be a separate being. He is one with the whole life of the earth. Through burial he is inwardly bound with it. The grave becomes the source of his experience — man and animal, plant and rock around him become transparent. He has lost his own separate life, the higher life of the whole Earth . . .

The seventh stage is known as the *ascension into heaven*. It signifies that he is completely taken up into the spiritual world.

The John Gospel is a description of this Christian path of initiation. He who takes it as an account of an external happening does not understand it. It can only be comprehended if one has lived through it inwardly. This is

what Angelus Silesius means, when he says:

When thou dost rise above thyself and let God hold his sway:  
Then present in thy spirit is the ascension, for ever and for  
aye.

\*[Angelus Silesius, "The Cherubic Wanderer"]

As no creature can see the sunlight unless its eyes are opened  
so no one can understand the mystery of Golgotha, if they  
have not inwardly experienced it. Once one has come to such  
an inner experience, one can appreciate why the reckoning of  
time is divided into before and after Christ.

Christianity attains its real meaning when it is followed as an  
inner path. The John gospel is a document which can be lived  
sentence by sentence. If one has lived it, one knows that  
external criticism does not apply. All criticism vanishes, and  
every doubt disappears, if one knows that what is written is to  
be lived through and through. Every line can be lived  
inwardly. The Christian spirit has to be experienced in the  
depth of the soul. He who saw for himself how everything took  
place knows that he speaks the truth and says so. For he is the  
risen Lazarus.



## **Third Lecture**

5th March, 1906

What we have said so far about the Gospel of St. John has taken us deeply into the essence of Christianity, and has shown us what profound mystical power lies hidden within this Christian document. We have seen that it should not be read like a report of outer events, or an historical account, but a script engraved by life, so that every sentence re-lived, transforms something in us.

We have followed the seven stages of spiritual ascent in the life of St. John. Today we will add something which goes even deeper. A few examples will show that I have not forced an arbitrary meaning on the gospel, but that by means of occult teaching we are able to understand many things that otherwise would remain dark and unintelligible. First I will remind you of the seven stages of initiation which existed at the time of the birth of Christianity.

In the last lecture we came to know the Christian initiation, but it was not Christianity that first made initiation possible. At all times, ever since there were men as we know them on earth, it was possible to become an initiate — to ascend to higher stages of human existence. Through Christianity all these things became more inward. Since Christianity has provided us with such documents as the John Gospel — which only needs to be allowed to work and live in us — one can achieve much, and rise to spiritual heights. There were no such documents in pre-Christian times available. One had to

be introduced into hidden mystery temples, or centres, and according to the various peoples, the lower stages of initiation differed. In the higher stages national peculiarities were of no account, and they were the same for all peoples even in much older times.

I would like to describe the seven stages of initiation as they were practised in the Persian Mithras cult. It was a form of initiation that was cultivated in the whole of Asia Minor, in Greece and Rome, and even as far as the Danube basin it was practised far into the Christian era. For a long time it was possible to go through these stages even in the hidden cultic centres and temples in Egypt which were often built into the solid rock. They were only accessible to those who came to know them as morally advanced pupils and initiates after strict tests. The first grade was the “Raven”. As a raven the neophyte carried the knowledge acquired in the outer sense world into spiritual life. The idea of the raven has lingered in myths and sagas. There are the Ravens of Wotan, the ravens of Elijah, and in the German Barbarossa saga ravens are the intermediaries between the emperor under a spell in the mountain and the outer world. In the Mithraic mysteries “Raven” signified a grade of initiation.

The second grade was that of the “Occult One”. This was the name for someone who had already received some important occult secrets.

The third grade was that of the “Fighter”. These were initiates who felt their higher self to the extent that they understood sayings such as one finds in the second part of “Light on the Path”. \* [“Stand aside in the coming battle, and though thou fightest, be not thou the warrior.” *Light on the Path*, Mabel Collins, Theosophical University Press. Pasadena, California, 1971.] Only an initiate of the third grade can understand such sayings. This does not mean that the ordinary person cannot

reach a certain comprehension. Everyone has a higher self, and if one is able to abnegate one's lower self and make it a servant of the higher self then one can say in a certain sense: "Though thou fightest thou art not the fighter". But it is not until one has reached a particular stage of initiation that one really knows what this sentence signifies. What one formerly considered as higher interests become mere subsidiary interests, mere servants of the fighter.

The fourth grade was achieved when complete inner harmony and calm, equilibrium and strength are gained. This grade was called that of the "Lion". Such an initiate had so developed the occult life in himself that he could represent the occult not only with words but with deeds.

Meanwhile the consciousness of a person who has passed through these four stages of initiation extended further and further. He identified himself with ever larger groupings of people. All these names have a hidden meaning. For instance, the expression, "The Occult One". What is a human being as we see him in front of us? He is what is in him. As a Raven an initiate of the first grade — he tries to overcome what is only in him. Then his interests become wider. What people around him are, what they feel and what they will, becomes his own feeling and his own will. The terms were coined in times when there were still communities which were kindred enlarged families. How did one regard such a family? One said they were members of a soul-family tracing right back to a common ancestral pair — members of a hidden ego.

An initiate of the second grade, an "Occult One", had so ennobled his ego that it became the ego of his community; he made their interests his own. The occult entity of a human community was able to live in him. When the ego of such a human community became the ego of an individual initiate then this community became his dwelling place. The "Fighter"

fought for the larger community. In ancient Palestine one designated as a “Lion”, he who had raised himself up to encompass the consciousness, the ego, of a whole tribe. The “lion” of the tribe of Judah is the term applied to someone who had reached such a stage of initiation that he bore within himself the ego of the whole tribe.

The initiate of the fifth grade had so overcome his personality that he could take up the folk-soul. The folk-spirit lived in him. In Persia such an initiate was called a “Persian”. In Greece one would have called him a “Grecian”, if it had been the custom. What does this grade signify? For him everything individual has vanished and his consciousness has become one with the whole. This constitutes a higher state of consciousness.

Today it is different. Because of the splitting up of all communal groups we meet with quite different stages of initiation. But at the time of the birth of Christianity it still had a meaning when one spoke of souls initiated to the fifth grade. You can verify this in the John Gospel. Take the first chapter, verse 45:

“Philip findeth Nathanael and saith unto him: We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him: Can there any good thing out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him: Come and see Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him and saith of him: Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile!”

Nathanael is here acknowledged as an initiate of the fifth grade. This means that he had learned to know what for us men is the essence of life, the Tree of Life. Earlier in life one tastes of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. One partakes of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge the moment one is able to

say “I” to oneself. When the higher, the spiritual, in man awakens it can happen that God has to protect man. Jehovah was concerned lest man, after having eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, should also eat of the Tree of Life before he was ready for it. The initiate of the fifth grade learns what relieves this concern and what raises one beyond all death and all that is transitory. This is the spiritual element.

How can the spiritual element become established in man? For someone who has penetrated more deeply into Theosophy it is something which flows through the whole world. For him whose vision is able to penetrate into higher worlds, all that is, to begin with, a stage of inner development even on higher planes, is expressed at first on the astral plane as a picture. When a person has reached the fifth grade of initiation he always sees a picture on the astral plane, which formerly he had not seen — the picture of a tree, a finely branched, white tree. This picture on the astral plane, which is to be taken as a symbol of the fifth grade of initiation, is called the Tree of Life. He who had reached this point is said to have sat under the Tree of Life. Thus Buddha sat under the Bodhi Tree and Nathanael under the Fig Tree. These are terms for the picture on the astral plane. What is seen are reflections of inner — even bodily inner things. The Bodhi Tree is but the astral mirror image of the human nervous system. He who through initiation is able to direct his gaze inward, sees his inner life, even his bodily inner life, projected, reflected into the outer astral world. So you see what is intended in this chapter of the John Gospel.

Nathanael is addressed as one who knows. It is implied: We understand each other. “Jesus said unto him, ‘Before that, Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.’”

This means, we are brothers of the fifth grade of initiation. It is a recognition between initiates. "Nathanael answered and saith unto him, 'Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel.'" You see the recognition is complete. Jesus answered him, and said that it will become apparent that he is more than an initiate of the fifth grade. He said, "Because I said unto thee I saw thee under the fig tree, thou believest; thou shalt see greater things than these."

I would also like to draw your attention to the conversation with Nicodemus, which you will find in the third chapter. There we have the significant words, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." What does it mean to be born anew and to see the Kingdom of God? It means to have awakened the higher self, to be born so that the eternal core of one's being is awakened. What does it mean to enter the kingdom of heaven? It means to see not only the reflection of Devachan here on earth as we see it through our physical eyes, but to see this realm directly itself. He alone can do this who has not only been born for this physical world, but is born a second time.

Take what I have used as a comparison, but one which is more than a comparison. Take it literally. To be born means to proceed from an embryo to a stage at which one perceives the outer world with the senses. If one does not pass through an embryonic stage one can never be ready to be born. Those who know this stage also know that ordinary life is an embryonic stage for the higher life. This leads us deep into the meaning of ordinary life. It could be quite easy for someone who directs his gaze towards the spiritual world to become convinced that there is such a world and that man is a citizen of it. He could then proceed to disregard the physical world and to believe that one cannot depart from it quickly enough, and that one should mortify the flesh, the sooner to reach the

spiritual world. This shows ignorance. It is as senseless as if one would not allow the human embryo to mature but would bring it into the world at two months, and expect it to live there. Likewise for the higher world, one has to develop to become mature. Such is he who has developed his higher self. The physical world is the school. He who has developed his ego here is ready to enter the kingdom of heaven, which means to be born again. Man has to go through birth and death ever and again, until he has gained his full maturity in order to enter the spiritual world itself, so that he no longer needs physical organs. Thus we have to realise that everything we do by means of our eyes, ears and other senses is work done for the higher life.

Certainly, we have, frequently said that man must develop higher senses, that he must develop the chakrams or holy wheels, which enable him to enter the spiritual world and see it. But how does he come to obtain these holy wheels? Through his work on the physical plane. Here is the place of preparation. Our work here prepares the organs for a higher world. As the human being is prepared in the mother's body, so in the body of the great world mother — where we are while leading our physical life — is prepared what is necessary to make it possible for us to see and act in higher worlds. One is perfectly justified to speak of a higher world and to value it higher than our lower world, but we should only use these terms in a technical sense. All worlds are, basically, equally valid expressions of the highest principle, in different forms. We should not despise any world. In this way we learn to relate ourselves rightly towards both the lower and the higher worlds. This is the requirement for entering into the third chapter of the John Gospel.

It must be understood that Jesus speaks to Nicodemus of a genuine rebirth, and that, above all, he wishes to remind him that looked at in this way, the ordinary, everyday life must be

reborn as a higher life and recognised as such. He who reads this chapter really carefully will see that this is what is meant.

Many circles lay it against Theosophy that it teaches reincarnation — the gradual maturing of humanity through rebirth and repeated earth lives. It is said that Christianity knows nothing of this teaching of reincarnation. But actually in the John Gospel there is a clear indication that when he spoke intimately with his disciples, Jesus taught reincarnation. For instance, one can only make sense of the ninth chapter (the healing on the Sabbath of the man born blind) if one bases it on the idea of reincarnation. One must remember that he spoke in the language current at that time. In Greece it was then usual to speak of the power that permeates man's innermost being and leads it forward. For the Greeks and all other peoples of that time, the power that made man into man and caused him to develop was God. An outer God, a God in the next world, was unknown in those days. Therefore one called what lived in man, the God in man. Thus if one spoke of the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, it was the higher self that was meant. One can only understand the Old Testament if one appreciates this conception of God. Jesus too speaks of the God living in man when talking intimately to his disciples: "His disciples asked him, saying, 'Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.'"

These three sentences speak clearly enough. Neither had he sinned in his physical body, nor had his parents; therefore the Jewish law that God will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto so and so many generations does not hold good. But the works of God in man shall be made manifest, i.e. the self in man that passes through all his incarnations. These words which Jesus spoke to his disciples could not be clearer.



You know the orthodox explanation. Think, if someone meant what is supposed to be said here: The glory of God should be made manifest in a blind person. This presumes that it was arranged that someone should be blind so that Jesus could heal him and the glory of God be made manifest. Can this be reconciled with true Christianity? No. Christianity would be morally degraded. Interpreted theosophically, this image carries a truly beautiful and noble meaning.

It was always so when Jesus spoke intimately with his disciples. That it was so, is especially revealed in the scene known as the transfiguration. It is, however, not in the John Gospel. We find it in the seventeenth chapter of St. Matthew and in the ninth chapter of St. Mark. In St. John it is not to be found. The only reference that could have any relation to it is the passage in the twelfth chapter, verse 28: "Father glorify thy name.' Then came there a voice from heaven saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.'" And further in verse 31: "Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me.' Thus he said, signifying what death he should die. The people answered him, 'We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever, and how sayest thou: the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?' Then Jesus said unto them, 'Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.'"

We find the transfiguration scene in all the evangelists except St. John. This is significant. Let us clarify the meaning of this scene. What takes place? Jesus goes with three disciples Peter, James and John — up a mountain: this means into the inner sanctuary where one is initiated into higher worlds and where one also speaks in occult language. Then it is said: the master

took his disciples up into a mountain — it means that he went to that place where he expounded the parable to them. The disciples were carried up into a higher state of consciousness. They saw then that which is not transitory but eternal. Moses and Elias appear and Jesus himself with them. What does this mean? In occult science the word Elias means the same as El — the goal, the way. Moses is the spiritual scientific word for truth. By the fact that Elias, Moses and Jesus appear you have the fundamental Christian truth: I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus himself says — this is a fundamental Christian mystical truth — “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” (John, ch. 14, v. 6)

The important thing is that here the eternal is shown as against the temporal, and the disciples see into a world which lies beyond this world. Afterwards they said to the master, “All this should only have come to pass once Elias has come again.” Thus they spoke to him as though reincarnation was taken as a matter of course, as also in many other passages in the gospels. John asked, “Art thou Elias come again?” Then answered the master, “Elias is indeed come again — John the Baptist is Elias. But the people did not recognise him. Say it unto no man until I come again.” Here we have the general, religious, profound truth of reincarnation uttered in the intimate conversation between the master and his disciples. At the same time it is set down as a testament: “Say it unto no man until I come again.” This coming again refers to a much later time, the time when all men will recognise Christ through their higher comprehension. When this comes about then will He reappear to them.

Thus time is being prepared through the theosophical world conception. Christ will reappear in the world. The doctrine of reincarnation and karma as a generally accepted idea was to be laid aside until this time. At that time people should know nothing of reincarnation and karma, so that they were obliged

to take the life between birth and death as something of particular value and importance. Humanity had to pass through all stages of life experience. Up to the time of Christ, reincarnation was generally accepted. Life between birth and death was only a passing episode. But then man had to learn to take life on earth as something important. An extreme form of this teaching was the dogma of eternal punishment and eternal reward. This is an extreme form. What mattered was that each human individuality, each "God-man", should pass through one incarnation in which he knew nothing of reincarnation and karma and in which he appreciated the vital importance of life between birth and death.

If you read theosophical books you will find that the time between the two incarnations is fifteen to eighteen hundred years. This is about the same length of time as between the birth of Christ, and the present day. Those living then, appear again today. Because of this they are able again to accept the new teaching. Therefore, the theosophical outlook was really prepared on Mount Tabor by Christ Jesus. If we look at world history in broad lines, we should not think that we are dealing either with truth or with error which we can censure. It is not a question of absolute truth or error, but of what is right for man at any given time. If I sat here with a group of boys no more than ten years old, and set about teaching them higher mathematics, I would be teaching them truth and yet it would be folly. I must give a person what he needs, at any given stage of his development. It is not right for us today to say in retrospect, that the Christian teaching contained errors. No. In order to master the physical plane, one had to take this one life seriously. Certainly, the priestly sages of Chaldea taught great spiritual truths. They brought down a vast knowledge of the spiritual world, but they used the most primitive tools, and did not know how to use the forces of nature in everyday life. The physical plane had first to be mastered. To do this, man's

whole life of feeling must be directed towards it. Christianity had to prepare mankind to master the physical world. This was decreed, it is the testament from Mount Tabor. What lies behind this declaration is something wonderful.

If one penetrates deeper, one will find more and more. If we want to understand religious documents which came down to us from times which had true knowledge of spiritual life and not a materialistic way of thinking, we must realise that the mode of thought was so different, that if one spoke of man, one spoke in a completely different way.

Now I must tell you something which though easy to understand intellectually, is difficult for the man of today to grasp with his whole soul. The time when the gospels were written was the dawn of Christianity. One used names then in a way which I will now explain. One did not look to the outer physical man, but one saw something higher, the spiritual, shining through it. A name was not used as it is today, it had a significance. Suppose someone was called James (Jacobus). James really means water. Water is the spiritual scientific term for the soul element. If I call somebody James, I say that his soul shines through his body. With this, I signify that he belongs to the watery element. If I give the name James to an initiate, he is to me the symbol for water (Hebrew — Jam). James is nothing but the technical name for an initiate who especially governs the force of water in its occult sense.

Thus were the three disciples who were taken up to Mount Tabor called by their initiate names: James means water, Peter stands for earth, or rock (Hebrew — Jabascha), John signifies air (Ruach). Thus, John means he who has attained the higher self. This leads us deep into the secret doctrines. Transport yourself back into the time when man only possessed the lower principles — the third Root Race, the Lemurian epoch. Mankind did not then breath air, he

breathed through gills. Lungs and breathing through lungs developed later. This process coincided with the impregnation by the higher self. Air is, according to the hermetic principle, the lower which represents the higher — the higher self. If I call somebody John (Johannes), then he is one who has awakened his higher self, who governs the occult forces of air. Jesus is the one who governs the occult forces of fire (Nur). Thus you have in these four names, the representatives of earth, water, air and fire. They are the names of the four who ascended Mount Tabor.

Jam — James  
Nur Ruach  
Jesus Johannes  
Jabascha — Petrus

Think of these four together on the Mount of Transfiguration. There you have at the same time, the initiates who govern the four elements: fire, water, air and earth. What happened? It was made manifest spiritually that through the appearance of Jesus, the whole power of the elements was renewed in such a way that the life pulsing through the elements passed through a new, important phase of its development. This is the transfiguration seen occultly. If somebody goes through the transfiguration in this manner, if he has within himself the stages of water, earth and air, and even rises to the forces of fire, then he is a reawakened one, someone who has gone through the crucifixion. Thus, in the case of the other evangelists, this scene is but a preparation for the deeper initiation scene of the crucifixion itself. In the John Gospel, everything is already prepared. The preparatory scene does not appear, only the death on the Mount of Golgotha. Jam, Nur, Ruach, Jabascha — INRI — this is the meaning of the words on the cross.

One can go deeper and deeper into the religious texts and never finish learning. Sometimes when one hears an explanation like this it sounds forced. But every step that leads you deeper will furnish evidence that it is not forced. Superficial explanations seek to avoid the “depths” purposely. But there are depths in these writings. Those who know something can always say to themselves: probably there is much more in it, I have still much to learn. This is the attitude of reverence that we can bring to religious texts.

This reverence is of the utmost importance, for it will become strength in us drawn from the depths. There is one important sentence that I can only touch on. In chapter 19, verse 33, we find: “But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already they brake not his legs . . . ” and in verse 36, “For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.” You know that this reminds one of a passage in one of the books of Moses (Exodus 12.46). Rightly understood, it has a deep meaning. It is deeply symbolical, but I can only touch on it.

If you look around the world you will have to admit that man as he is now incarnated in the flesh has no power over life, nor over what stands, above life. He is only master of the lifeless inorganic forces. Man cannot oblige a plant to grow, or to grow faster. He would have to acquire occult power, to do so. Far less is he able to master what is higher than life forces. What he is able to control is the lifeless outer world. There, he exerts his mastery in everyday work over the materials with which nature provides him. He creates works of art, pictures of the Almighty, but he cannot breathe life into them. He can only copy life. He cannot awaken an intimation of life in the lifeless, even in the most sublime Christian works of art. This is so because man has enfolded his astral and etheric forces in the solid, dense physical body. Thus he came to have this relation to the outer world — to be master only of the lifeless.

The higher forces which are not tied to the physical must be awakened, and then man will again be able to master life. As it is, he can only control physical forces, and not life itself.

This is connected with the fact that the human body which was once soft and pliable has now become more and more solid. If you go back in evolution you will see that man has changed very much. In Lemurian times he had no skeleton. This was formed later. The bones were the last things to appear in the human organism. He will have them until he has spiritualised himself again, until he has awakened again his inner forces and learned the lesson which he can only learn in this dense body with its hard skeleton. Christ Jesus is that spirit whose cosmic mission it was to be incarnated in just such a body in order to show man the way out of this world into a higher world. He is the leader and guide into the higher world. That which has to find its way into the higher world is symbolised by the solid human skeleton. As long as man had not reached the stage of having a hard skeleton, he did not need a Messiah. But for this present epoch he needs the Messiah, the Redeemer.

Thus it is evident that the forces in Jesus which are connected with the higher world do not concern present day humanity. We can express it by calling the skeleton the exterior; water, the etheric body; blood, the astral body; and then the spirit. \*[First Epistle of John, ch. 5, v. 8, (literally) “And there are three that bear witness: the spirit and the water and the blood.”] Therefore blood and water can flow from the body of Christ. These are of no import for the present cycle of human development. On the other hand, that which supports the whole, which leads man upwards to the throne of the Eternal, what he needs in order to learn the lesson, that must be kept uninjured. This is the skeleton, the symbol for the lifeless in nature. Through this skeleton, Christ is connected with the present cycle of man's development. This is what must be kept

intact until such time as man shall have reached higher stages. We can follow this back to the corresponding passages in the Books of Moses. But this can be done some other time.

Today I wanted to add something which will have shown you that the John Gospel is inexhaustible, and how full it is of strength and life. As we take it in and absorb it, it gives us strength and life. This is why this gospel is the leading scripture for those who wish to penetrate deeper and deeper into theosophical Christianity. If theosophy is to work for Christianity it is from this, above all, that it must start. But clearly, if I were to explain the John Gospel in its entirety to you, I should have to take the whole winter. I should have to take it sentence by sentence and then you would see how deep are the words ascribed to John, i.e. to him whose very name indicates that he is a herald of the higher self. He is the representative of air, and master of the higher forces, who, from the perception of the higher self, wrote his Gospel according to St. John.

It would be futile and in vain, to attempt to fathom, or criticise this gospel with the powers of the ordinary intellect. In our time the intellect has achieved great things, but the John Gospel is not written for the intellect. Only he who has overcome the intellect and is able to lead it to the heights of spirit power as John did, can understand his gospel. Theosophy would be quite wrong to undertake an intellectual critique of this John Gospel. Instead, it should immerse itself in it, in order to understand it. Then we should see that a new spirit of Christianity — not only the spirit of the past, but a future Christianity, can proceed from the John Gospel. We will become aware of the deep truth of one of the most beautiful and profound sayings of Christ. Out of his mouth we are told that Christianity is not something that has merely lived in the past, but that the same power still lives today. True it is what Christ said: I am with you always, even unto



**the end of time.**

## Notes

1 Bruno Wille, 1860 — 1928, founded the Giordano Bruno Bund in 1900. see Rudolf Steiner, *The Course of My Life*, Rudolf Steiner Publications, New York, 1977

2 *Subba Row*, 1865 — 1890. His contributions to the periodical “Theosophist” were published under the title, “Esoteric Writing”, 2nd Edition Madras 1931.

3 *Elemental Beings*. See “The Influence of Spiritual Beings in Man” Lectures 1, 10 and 12(6 Jan, 1 May, 11 June, 1908) Anthroposophic Press, New York, 1961. “The Apocalypse”, lectures 2, 3, and 10 (19,20,28 June 1908) Anthroposophical Publ. Co, London, 1958 “Spiritual Hierarchy and their Reflection in the Physical World”. lectures 2 and 3 (12,13 April, 1909) Anthroposophic Press, New York, 1977. “Chance, Necessity and Providence”, lecture 5 (30 August, 1915), Anthroposophic News Sheet, 1939, No.s 5-8.