

THE MYSTERY OF GOLGOTHA

A lecture delivered in Manchester College Chapel, Oxford, on August 27th, 1922. Authorized translation from the German of Notes unrevised by the lecturer. Published by kind permission of Frau Marie Steiner.

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MANKIND is reaching out to apprehend the Mystery of Golgotha once more with all the forces of the human soul; to understand it not only from the limited standpoint of present-day civilisation, but so as to unite with it all the forces of man's being. But this will only be possible if we are ready to approach the Mystery of Golgotha once more in the light of spiritual knowledge. Intellectualistic knowledge can never do justice to the full World-impulse of Christianity. For such knowledge only takes hold of the thinking life of man. So long as we have a Science whose only appeal is to our life of Thought, we must derive the sources of our Will (and these for Christianity are the most important) from our instinctive life, and cannot realise their true origin in spiritual Worlds.

Thus it will be indispensable to turn attention in our time once more to this the greatest question of mankind, inasmuch as the essence and meaning of the whole evolution of the Earth lies in the Mystery of Golgotha. I would fain express it in a parable, however strangely seeming. Imagine some Being descending from another planet to the Earth. Unable to become an earthly man, the Being would in all likelihood find the things on Earth quite unintelligible. Yet it is my deepest conviction, arising from a knowledge of the evolution of the Earth, that such a Being — even if he came from distant planets. Mars or Jupiter — would be deeply moved by Leonardo da Vinci's picture of the Last Supper. For in this picture he would discover that a far deeper meaning lies hidden in the Earth, — in earthly evolution. Beginning from this deeper meaning which belongs to the Mystery of Golgotha, the Being from a distant world could then begin to understand all other things on Earth.

We men of to-day little know how far we have gone in intellectual abstraction. We can no longer feel our way into the souls of those who lived a little while before the Mystery of Golgotha. They were very different from the souls of men to-day. We are apt to imagine the past history of mankind far too similar to the events and movements of our day. In reality the souls of men have undergone a tremendous evolution. In the times before the Mystery of Golgotha all human beings — even those who were primitive, more or less uncultured in their souls, — perceived in themselves something of the essence of the soul, which might be thus described: They had a memory of the time the human soul lives through, before he descends into an earthly body. As we in ordinary life remember our experiences since the age of three or four or five, so had the human soul in ancient time a memory of pre-existence in the world of soul and spirit. In a deeper psychological sense, man was as if transparent to himself. He knew with certainty: I am a soul, and I was a soul before I descended to the Earth. Notably in still more ancient times, he even knew of certain details of the life of soul and spirit which had preceded his descent to Earth. He experienced himself in cosmic pictures. Looking up to the stars, he saw them not in the mere abstract constellations which we see to-day. He saw them in dreamlike Imaginations. In a dreamlike way he saw the whole Universe filled with spiritual pictures or Imaginations, and as he saw it thus he could exclaim: "This is the last reflected glory of the spiritual World from which I am come down. Descending as a soul from yonder spiritual World, I entered the dwelling of a human body." Never did the man of ancient time unite himself so closely with his human body as to lose this awareness of the real life of soul.

What was the real experience of the man of ancient time in this respect? It was such that he might have said: "I, before I descended to the Earth, was in a world where the Sun is no mere heavenly body spreading light around, but a dwelling-place of higher Hierarchies, of spiritual Beings. I lived in a world where the Sun not only pours forth light, but sends out radiant Wisdom into a space not physical but spiritual. I lived in that world where the stars are essences of Being — Beings who make felt their active will. From yonder world I descended."

Now in this feeling two experiences were joined together for the man of ancient time: the experience of Nature, and the experience of Sin.

The old experience of Sin: the modern man has it no longer. Sin, for the man of modern time, lives in a world of abstract being. It is a mere transgression, a moral concept which he cannot really connect with the necessities or laws of Nature. For the ancients the duality was non-existent, of natural law upon the one hand, and moral on the other. All moral necessities were at the same time natural, likewise all natural [necessities] were moral. In those ancient times a man might say, "I had to descend out of the divinely spiritual World. Yet by my very entry into a human body — compared to the World from which I am descended — I am sick and ill." Sickness and Sin: for the man of olden time these two ideas were interwoven. Here upon Earth man felt that he must find within himself the power to overcome his sickness. Increasingly the consciousness grew on the souls of olden time: We need an Education which is Healing. True Education is Medicine, is Therapy. Thus there appear upon the scene shortly before the Mystery of Golgotha such figures as the Therapeutæ, as the healers. Indeed in ancient Greece all spiritual life was somehow related to the healing of humanity. They felt that man had been more healthy in the beginning of Earth-evolution, and that he had evolved by degrees farther and farther from the Divine-spiritual Beings. "The sickness of humanity" was a widespread conception, forgotten as it is by modern History, in that ancient world in which the Mystery of Golgotha was placed.

It was by turning their gaze into the past that the men of those ancient times felt the reality of spiritual things. "I must look back beyond my birth, far into the past, if I would see the Spiritual. There is the Spirit; out of that Spirit I am born; that Spirit must I find again. But I have departed far from Him."

Thus did man feel the Spirit from whom he had departed, as the Spirit of the Father God. The highest Initiate in the Mysteries was he who evolved in his heart and soul the forces whereby he could make manifest the Father in his own external

human being. When the pupils crossed the threshold of the Mysteries and came into those sacred places which were institutions of Art and Science and of the sacred religious Rites at the same time, and when at length they stood before the highest Initiate, they saw in him the representative of the Father God. The "Fathers" were higher Initiates than the "Sun-Heroes."

Thus, before the Mystery of Golgotha the Father Principle held sway. Yet it was felt how man had, departed ever more and more from the Father, to whom as we look up we say, *Ex Deo nascimur*. Mankind stood in need of healing, and the seers and initiates lived in expectation of the Healer, the *Hælend* [German *Heiland*, Anglo-Saxon *Hælend*, meaning Christ the Saviour] the healing Saviour. To us the conception of Christ as the Healer is no longer living. But we must find our way to it again, for only when we can feel His presence once more as the Cosmic Physician, shall we also realise His true place in the Universe.

Such was the deep-seated feeling in human souls before the Mystery of Golgotha, of their connection with the spiritual world of the Father. A strange saying coming down to us from ancient Greece — "Better to be a beggar upon Earth than a king in the realm of shades" — bears witness, how deeply humanity had learned to feel the estrangement of their being from the world of Spirit. Yet at the same time their souls were filled with a deep longing for that World.

But we must realise that if a man had gone on evolving with the old consciousness of the Father God alone and unimpaired, he could never have attained the full self-consciousness of the "I" and inner spiritual Freedom. Before he could attain true spiritual Freedom, something had to take place in man, which, in relation to his primæval state, appeared as sickness. All humanity was suffering as it were the sickness of Lazarus. But the sickness was not unto Death; it was unto liberation and redemption, unto a new knowledge of the Eternal within man.

Men had increasingly forgotten their past life of soul and spirit before birth. Their attention was directed more and more to the physical world around them. The physical environment was now the real thing. The souls of olden time, looking out through the body into their physical environment, had seen in all the stars the pictures of the world of spiritual Being which they had left behind when they descended to this life through birth. In the light of the Sun they saw the radiant Wisdom which they had indwelt, which had been their very breath of life. In the Sun itself they beheld the choirs of Divine Hierarchies by whom they had been sent down to Earth. These things mankind had now forgotten, and as the Mystery of Golgotha approached — in the 9th, 8th, 7th, 6th centuries B.C. — they felt that it was so. If external History says nothing of these things, that is its failing. He who can follow History with spiritual insight will find it as I have said. He will see at the beginning of human evolution a wonderful consciousness of the Father God; he will see this consciousness gradually weakened and paralysed, till man at length should only see around him a world of Nature, void of spiritual Beings.

Much of these things remained unspoken in the unconscious depths of the soul. Strongest of all, in the unconscious depths, was a question unexpressed in words, but felt the more deeply by the human heart. Around us is the world of Nature, but where is the Spirit whose children we are? In the best of human souls, in the 4th, 3rd, 2nd and 1st centuries B.C., this question lived, unconscious and unformulated. It was a time of questioning, when mankind felt their estrangement from the Father God, — when human souls knew in their very depths: "It must be so indeed: *Ex Deo nascimur*. But do we know it still? Can we still know it?"

If we look still more deeply into the souls of those who lived in the age when the Mystery of Golgotha was drawing near, the following is what we find: — First there were the more primitive and simple souls who felt, deeply in their subconscious life, their present separation from the Father. They were the descendants of primæval humanity, which was by no means animal-like as modern Science conceives; for within the outer form, however like the animal, primæval man had borne a soul, in the ancient dream-clairvoyance of which he knew full well: "We have come down from the Divine-spiritual world, and have assumed a human body. Into this earthly world the Father God has led us. Out of Him we are born." But not only so; the souls of primæval humanity knew that they had left behind them, in the spiritual worlds, That which was afterwards called and which we now call the Christ. For this reason the earliest Christian authors said that the most ancient souls of humanity had been true Christians, for they too had looked up to the Christ and worshipped Him. In the spiritual worlds in which they dwelt before their descent to Earth, Christ had been the centre of their vision — the Central Being to whom they had looked with the vision of the soul. It was this communion with Christ in the pre-earthly life which they afterwards remembered when on Earth.

Then there were the regions of which Plato speaks so strangely, where pupils were initiated into the Mysteries — where the vision of supersensible Worlds was awakened and the forces in the human being were liberated to gaze into the spiritual Worlds. Nor was it only in dim memory that the pupils of the initiates learned to know the Christ, with whom indeed all human beings lived before their descent to Earth. For by this time Christ was already a half-forgotten notion in the souls of men on Earth. But in the Mysteries the pupils learned to know Him once again in His full stature. Yet at the same time they knew Him as a Being who, if we may put it in these words, had lost His mission in the Worlds beyond the Earth. It was so in the Mysteries of the second and first centuries before the Mystery of Golgotha, that as they looked up to the Being in supersensible worlds who was afterwards called the Christ, they said: We still behold Him in the spiritual worlds, but His activity in those worlds grows ever less and less. For He was the Being who implanted in the souls of men what afterwards sprang forth within them as a memory of the time before their birth. The Christ-Being in the spiritual worlds had been the great Teacher of human souls, for what they would still bear in memory after their descent to Earth. Now that the souls of men on Earth were less and less able to kindle these memories to life, He who was afterwards called Christ appeared to the initiates as One who had lost His activity, His mission.

Thus as the initiates lived on, ever and increasingly there arose in them the consciousness: "This Being whom primæval humanity remembered in their earthly life — whom we can now behold, though with ever lessening activity, in spiritual worlds

— He will seek a new sphere of His existence. He will come down to the Earth to re-awaken the supersensible spirituality in man.” And they began to speak of the Being who was afterwards called Christ, as of Him who would in future time come down to Earth and take on a human body — as indeed He did, when the time was fulfilled, in Jesus of Nazareth. In the centuries before the Mystery of Golgotha it was one of the main contents of their speech, to speak of Christ as the Coming One. And in the beautiful picture of the Wise Men of the East — the three Kings or Magi — we see the typical figures of initiates who had learned in their several places of Initiation that Christ would come to Earth when the time should be fulfilled, and the signs in the Heavens would proclaim His coming. Then must they seek Him out at His hidden place. Indeed, there resounds throughout the Gospels what is made manifest as a deeper secret, a deeper Mystery in human evolution, when we approach it once more with spiritual vision.

Meanwhile the simple and primitive among mankind felt as it were forlorn when they looked up to Worlds beyond the realms of sense. Deep in the subconscious they said to themselves, We have forgotten Christ. They saw the world of Nature around them, and there arose in their hearts the question of which I spoke above: “How shall we find the spiritual World again?” But in the Mysteries the initiates knew that the Being who afterwards was called Christ, would come down and would take on a human form. And they knew that what human souls had formerly experienced in their pre-earthly life, they would now experience on Earth by looking up to the Mystery on Golgotha.

Thus, not in an intellectual or theoretic way, but by the greatest fact that ever took place on Earth, answer was given to the question: How shall we come once more to the Supersensible — to the Spiritual that transcends the world of sense? The men of that time, who had a certain feeling for what was taking place, learned from those who knew, that a real God dwelt in the human being Jesus. He had come down to Earth. He was the God whom mankind had forgotten because the forces of the human body were evolving towards Freedom. He, whom man on Earth had forgotten, appeared again in a new form, so that man could see Him and behold Him, and future History could tell of Him as of an earthly Being. The God who had only been known in yonder spiritual World, had descended and walked in Palestine, and sanctified the Earth inasmuch as He Himself had dwelt in a human body.

For those who were the educated men according to the culture of that age, the question was. How did Christ enter into Jesus, what path did He take? In the earliest times of Christianity the question about Christ was indeed a purely spiritual one. Their problem was not the earthly biography of Jesus. It was the descent of Christ. They looked up into the higher Worlds and saw the descent of Christ to Earth. They asked themselves, How did the supersensible Being become an earth Being?

And the simple men who surrounded Jesus Christ as His disciples were able to converse with Him as a spiritual Being even after His Death. Nay, what He was able to tell them after His Death is the most important of all. Only a few fragments have been preserved, but spiritual Science can re-discover what Christ said to those who were nearest to Him after His Death, when He appeared to them in His purely spiritual being.

Then it was that He spoke to them as the great Healer — the Therapeut, the Comforter — to whom the great Mystery was known, how human beings had once upon a time remembered Him, because they had been with Him in supersensible spiritual worlds before their earthly life. Now He could say to His disciples upon Earth: In former times I gave you the faculty to remember your spiritual life, your pre-earthly existence in higher worlds. But now, if you receive Me into your hearts and souls, I give you power to go forward through the Gate of Death, conscious of immortality. And you will no longer merely recognise the Father — *Ex Deo Nascimur* — you will feel the Son as Him with whom you can die and yet remain alive: *In Christo morimur*.

Such was the purport — though not of course expressed in the words I am now speaking — such was the meaning of what He taught to those who were near Him after His bodily Death. In primæval ages men had not known Death. Since ever they came to consciousness on Earth, they had an inner knowledge of the soul within them; they were aware of that which cannot die. They saw men die, but to them this Death was a mere semblance among the outer facts around them. They felt it not as Death. Only in later years, as the Mystery of Golgotha drew near, did men begin to feel the real fact of Death. For by degrees the soul within them had grown so closely united with the body that doubt could arise in their minds: How shall the soul live on when the body falls into decay? In olden times there could have been no such question, for men were aware of the living, independent soul.

But now there came the Christ Himself, and said: I will live with you on the Earth, that ye may have power to kindle your souls to life again, that ye may bear them, once more a living soul, through Death.

This was what St. Paul had not understood at first. But he understood it when the spiritual worlds were opened out before him and he received here upon Earth the living impressions of Christ Jesus. For this reason the Pauline Christianity is less and less valued in our time, for it requires us to recognise the Christ as One who comes from real worlds beyond the Earth, uniting with earthly man His cosmic power.

Thus in the course of human evolution, in the consciousness of man, the “Out of God — out of the Father God — we are born,” was supplemented by the word of life, of comfort and of strength, “In Christ we die” — that is to say, in Him we live.

In order to bring before our souls what came upon humanity through the Mystery of Golgotha, I shall best describe the present evolution of mankind, and that which we must hope for the future, from the standpoint of the initiate of modern time. I have already sought to place before you the standpoint of the initiate of olden time, and of the initiate of the time of the Mystery of Golgotha. I will now try to describe that of the initiate of our own time. The initiate is one who does not approach life with external natural Science alone, but in whom those deeper forces of knowledge have been awakened which can be kindled from depths of the human soul by proper methods. Such methods are indicated in the spiritual literature, [See especially “Knowledge

of Higher Worlds and Its Attainment" ("The Way of Initiation") by Rudolf Steiner.] and I have referred to them in my other course of lectures in this College.

When the modern initiate enters into the Sciences of our time (which are the glory and triumph of the age, and in the study of which so many people, possessed even of a certain higher consciousness, feel the greatest satisfaction) he finds himself in a tragic situation. For when he unites his soul with that form of Science which is valued above all by the world to-day, the initiate feels it as a slow process of Death. A sphere of existence higher than all earthly things has risen up before his soul. And yet, the more he imbues himself with that which all the world to-day calls Science, the more he feels his soul to die within him. For the modern initiate, the Sciences are indeed the grave of the soul. While he acquires knowledge about the world in the manner of modern Science, he feels himself bound up, even in life, with Death. Again and again he feels this Death deeply and intensely. Then he may well seek the reason why, whenever he acquires knowledge in the modern sense, he dies. Why is it, he asks himself, that he has a feeling comparable even to the presence of a corpse — the odour of decay — just when he rises to the highest points of modern scientific knowledge, the greatness of which he is truly able to appreciate, though to him it is the premonition of Death.

From his knowledge of spiritual worlds he finds the answer, which I will try to convey to you this evening, my dear friends, in a picture.

Before we come down to Earth, we human beings live in a life of soul and spirit. Now of that life in full reality of soul and spirit, in yonder pre-earthly realms, here upon Earth we retain only our Thoughts — our concepts and ideas. These are in our soul: yet how are they there? Look at the human being as he stands before you in the life between birth and death. He is fully alive, filled with the living flesh and blood. We say, he is alive. Then he passes through the gate of death. Of the physical man, the corpse remains behind, and this is given over to the Earth — to the elements. We see the dead physical man; we have the dead corpse before us, all that is left of the man who was filled with living blood. Physically he is dead

Now we look back, with the vision of Initiation, into our own souls. There we behold our thoughts — the thoughts we have in the present life between birth and death — the thoughts of modern Science, modern wisdom. And we recognise; These thoughts are the dead corpse of what we were before we descended to the Earth. *As the dead body is to the human being in the fulness of his life, so are our thoughts* (the thoughts which we respect above all things in this age, which bring us knowledge of external Nature) — *so are our thoughts to what we were in soul and spirit before we came down to Earth.*

This is what the modern initiate discovers, and it is a very real experience. He experiences in Thought, not his real life, but the dead corpse of the soul. I am stating a simple fact. It is not uttered out of any sentimental feeling: on the contrary, it comes before the soul in modern time with all intensity, just when the soul's knowledge is active and courageous. It is not what the sentimental mystic says to himself out of some dark and mystic depths of his being.

He who passes to-day through the Portals of Initiation discovers in his soul the real nature of the thoughts of man. For the very reason that they are unalive, they can make way for living spiritual Freedom. These thoughts are in truth the only ground on which man's spiritual Freedom grows. Because they are dead — because they are not alive — they have no power to compel. Man can become a free Being in our time because he has to do, not with living thoughts, but with dead ones. He can take hold of the dead thoughts and use them towards Freedom. And yet, it is with all the tragedy of Worlds that we experience these thoughts as the dead corpse of the soul — of the soul that was, before it came down to Earth. For in the pre-earthly life all this, which is a corpse in man to-day, was alive and filled with movement. In spiritual Worlds it lived and moved among other human souls — those who had passed through the gate of death and were now dwelling in those Worlds, and those who had not yet descended to the Earth. It lived and moved among the Beings of the Divine Hierarchies above humanity, and in the sphere of the elemental beings that underlie all Nature. There, everything in the soul was alive, while here, the soul possesses Thought as its heritage from spiritual worlds, and Thought is dead.

Yet if as initiates of modern time we fill ourselves with Christ, who made manifest His life in the Mystery of Golgotha; if we take hold in its deepest, inmost sense, of the word of St. Paul: *Not I, but Christ in me*, — then will Christ lead us even through this Death. We penetrate into Nature with our thoughts, yet as we do so Christ goes with us in the Spirit. He sinks our thoughts into the grave of Nature. For Nature does indeed become a grave, inasmuch as our thoughts are dead. Yet if, with these dead thoughts, accompanied by Christ Himself, we approach the minerals, the animals, the world of stars, the clouds, mountains and streams, then we experience in modern Initiation the resurrection of dead Thought as living Thought out of all Nature. With the dead Thought, we dive down into the crystal quartz, letting Christ be our companion, according to the word: *Not I, but Christ in me*. Then the dead Thought arises again as living Thought out of the crystal quartz, out of all Nature. As from the tomb of the mineral world, Thought is lifted up again as living Thought. Out of the mineral world the Spirit is resurrected. And as Christ leads us through the plant-world of Nature, here too, where otherwise only our dead thoughts would dwell, the living thoughts arise.

Truly we should feel that we are sick and ill as we go out into Nature, or gaze into the Universe of stars with the restricted calculating vision of the astronomer, thus sinking our dead thoughts into the world. We should feel that we are sick, and indeed it would be a sickness unto Death. But if we let Christ be our companion, if accompanied by Him we carry our dead thoughts into the world of the Sun, the Moon, the clouds, mountains and rivers, the minerals, plants and animals and the whole physical world of man, then in our vision of Nature it all becomes alive, and there arises from all creation, as from a tomb, the living, healing Spirit who awakens us from Death: the Holy Spirit. Accompanied by Christ, in all that we have hitherto experienced as Death we feel ourselves called to Life again. We feel the living and healing Spirit speaking to us out of all the creatures of this world.

These things must be regained in spiritual knowledge, in the new Science of Initiation. Then only shall we take hold of the Mystery of Golgotha as the true meaning of all Earth-existence. Then shall we know that in this age, when through the dead thoughts human freedom must be evolved, we need the Christ to lead us into a true Knowledge of Nature. For He not only placed His own destiny upon the Earth in the Mystery of Golgotha, but gave to the Earth the mighty liberation of Pentecost, in that He promised to mankind on Earth the living Spirit, which can arise through His help from all things on the Earth. Our Science remains dead — nay, our Science itself is Sin — until we are so awakened by the Christ that from all Nature, from all existence in the Cosmos, the living Spirit speaks to us again.

It is no formula devised by human cleverness: the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It is a reality deeply bound up with the whole evolution of the Cosmos, and it becomes for us a living, not a dead, dogmatic knowledge, when we bring to life within ourselves the Christ who as the Risen One is the Giver of the Holy Spirit.

Then do we understand how it is like an illness if man cannot see the Divine out of which he is born. Man must be secretly diseased to be an atheist, for, if he is healthy, his whole physical being will find as it were its summation in the spontaneous inner feeling which exclaims: Out of God I am born. And it is tragic destiny if in this earthly life he does not find the Christ who can lead him through the Death that stands at the end of life's way, and through the Death in Knowledge. But if we thus feel the *In Christo morimur*, then too we feel what is seeking to come near us through His guidance; we feel how the living Spirit arises again out of all things, even within this earthly life. We feel ourselves alive again even within this life on Earth, and we look through the gate of Death through which the Christ will lead us into yonder Life that lies beyond. We know now why Christ sent us the Holy Spirit, for if we let Christ be our guide we can unite ourselves to the Holy Spirit already in this life on Earth.

If we let Christ become our leader, we may surely say: We die in Christ, when we pass through the gate of Death. Our experience here on Earth, with our Science of the world of Nature, is indeed prophetic of the future. By the living Spirit, what would otherwise be a dead Science is resurrected. Thus we may also say, when the Death in Knowledge is replaced by that real Death which takes away our body: — Having understood the “Out of the Father we are born,” “In Christ we die,” we may say as we look forward through the gate of Death: “In the Holy Spirit we shall be reawakened.” *Per Spiritum Sanctum Reviviscimus*.