The Michael Path to Christ: A Christmas Lecture

Stuttgart, December 25, 1919 – Lecture 2 of *The Cosmic New Year,* GA 195

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When I have had occasion in recent years to speak on any of the great yearly festivals, Christmas, Easter or Whitsuntide, I have felt bound to say that we have no right, especially under the conditions that obtain today, to commemorate these occasions in the old accustomed manner; we have no right to forget the widespread suffering, the widespread sorrow of the times, and to recall only the greatest event which took place in earthly evolution. It is our duty, standing as we do on the ground of our spiritual conception of the world, so fully to realize all that which indicates decline in human civilization today, that this realization permeates our thoughts even round the Christmas tree. It is clearly our duty so to receive the birth of Christ Jesus into our hearts, into our souls, that we do not close our eyes to the fearful deterioration that has overtaken the so-called culture of humanity.

At this very time it is for us to bring forward the question: "Has not the thought of Christmas also suffered the fate of being seized by the forces of general deterioration?" When Christmas is spoken of today are we still conscious of that of which we ought to be conscious when we raise our thoughts and feelings to the contemplation of the festival of Christ? Are people in general conscious of the true meaning of what entered human evolution at the Mystery of Golgotha?

We light up our Christmas trees, we repeat the customary words and phrases associated with the Christmas festival, but all too often we avoid opening our eyes fully, we avoid awakening our consciousness fully, to the need of saying to ourselves: "Here, too, there is decline. Where art Thou, O Christ-Power, Thou who canst actively bring about a new ascent?" For it must have been very clear to you in the lectures which for many years have been given in our circles, that only by the power of Christ will it be possible to permeate declining civilization with that impulse which can give it a new uplift.

In these days we must often think of human beings, in the middle of the nineteenth century, or towards the last third of it, who, from a certain materialistic mentality, spoke quite differently from the way many people speak today. They spoke more honestly than most people do today. I should like to recall to you one personality, a truly materialistic mind—David Friedrich Strauss. You know that his book, *The Old Faith and the New*, is a kind of Bible of materialism.

Among the questions Strauss asks in this book is the following: "Can we still be Christians?" He answers this question, and the unusual thing about his answer is that it comes from a mind fundamentally materialistic, but at the same time honest.

David Friedrich Strauss constructed a world-edifice of thoughts, of ideas, formed entirely according to materialistic, physical laws. He placed humanity within it in a world-order in which human nature contained none but physical laws. From these convictions, Strauss answered the question "can we still be Christians?" with an emphatic "No". For human beings who held the views on natural science which Strauss held in accordance with the consciousness of his times, could not be Christians.

Thus a fatal but entirely honest opinion is expressed in this "No" of David Friedrich Strauss, and the feeling often occurs to us today: Would that the official advocates of this or that religious faith were as honest as was David Friedrich Strauss. Could they but see that though they use the name of Christ they are really active opponents of Christianity.

My dear friends, we dare not surrender ourselves in these days to a love of ease, nor close our eyes to the essentially important happenings of the present time. It may not seem to you to be associated with Christmas, though it does indeed seem so to me, when I refer to an experience which came to me through a kind of spiritual investigation of an actual fact of the present day.

You all know those persons who to a great extent are responsible, especially in Central Europe, for the dreadful conditions into which we have drifted, so far as any human being can be called responsible for these things. What did these individuals do when misfortune broke over Europe? They wrote books! We had books written by all kinds of people.

Now, the following experiment can be made with the help of Spiritual Science. The question can be asked, but strictly in accordance with Spiritual Science: "What forms of thought speak to us from the greater part of these self-vindicating books?" I have tried from every side to answer this question conscientiously. I have asked myself: "Of what kind are the thought-forms of these individuals on whom so much of the fate of Central Europe depends?" If we do not proceed in the abstract, but enter into things in the concrete, we compare one thing with another. In this way a comparison came to me when I asked myself the question: "About what period in the normal course of evolution in Europe were such thought-forms cultivated as those which we find in the leading personalities during the World War?" After conscientious scrutiny of the facts, it was made plain to me that human beings thought in this manner at about the time of the Roman, Julius Caesar. There is no difference between the soul- and thought-life of Julius Caesar at the time, let us say, of his Gallic wars, and the way in which such modern personalities form their thoughts. This means that these personalities have remained in a life of thought entirely unaffected by Christianity, for Caesar lived before the Mystery of Golgotha had broken into evolution. Even if the name of Christ Jesus is sometimes on their lips, the soul-life of these individuals has

developed in such a way that it has nothing to do with concrete Christianity.

As the result of our many-sided studies, we know that if anything develops in its own period, it is fundamentally good for humanity, but that it is otherwise when this thing remains stationary and comes to the front later. When this happens, when for instance that which was suited to the time of the Caesars continues to play a part in the twentieth century, that which was suitable to Caesar's day is transformed into something Luciferic. For that which ought to have worked properly in another period becomes, if it remains stationary, Luciferic. It is indeed essentially Luciferic.

We may now ask: "How is it that people whose fate has placed them in a leading position, have in their lives remained behind in this way?" If this question is to be answered we must turn our attention to those who claim to fill their spiritual life with the Christ-impulse, but who really work in an anti-Christian direction. Let us turn our attention to many official representatives of religious creeds, people who pretend to speak according to the Gospels, but who are opposed to everything that really tells of the living Christ in our day. The most anti-Christian persons are frequently found today among the clergy, among the preachers of the so-called Christian creeds.

If among other writings people would investigate a book—regarded by many as setting the fashion—a book entitled *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Nature of Christianity*) by Adolf Harnack, they would find an answer to this question. If the name of Christ were struck out of this book and replaced by the name of a God generally little known, a God who permeates and controls human life just as he permeates and controls Nature; if the name of Christ were struck out and replaced by the name of Jahve of the Old Testament, this book would be nearer the truth than it is, and would then have some meaning.

The fact is that Adolf Harnack knows nothing of the real Being of Christ, that he has not the vaguest idea of the real Being of Christ, that he worships a universal, indefinite God and then labels this universal, indefinite God with the name of Christ. And who is Adolf Harnack? Adolf Harnack has become the fashionable theologian of the circles which have provided the ground for the spiritual tendencies of those persons of whom I have been speaking. It is because no true revelation regarding the Christ comes any longer from the representatives of the creeds, that we no longer find in the events of the present day, among the people bound up with these events, any understanding for the true revelation of the Christ.

It hardly means anything to thousands, to millions of people at the present day, when they speak of the festival of Christmas; for they know nothing of the Being of Christ in the sense that is so necessary for our time. We must look into these things if in a deeper sense we will to understand the original causes of

the downfall in contemporary events, and in the life of humanity within these events.

I have frequently spoken to you here of that important event which came to pass in the last third of the nineteenth century, the event through which a special relationship was established between the Archangelic Power, that Being whom we call the Archangel Michael, and the destiny of humanity. I have reminded you that since November 1879, Michael has become the Regent, as it were, of all those who seek to bring to human beings the beneficial forces necessary to their healthy progress.

My dear friends, in our day we know that when such a matter is indicated, the indication refers to two different things: first, to the objective fact, and second, to the way this objective fact is connected with what human beings are willing to receive into their consciousness, into their will. The objective fact is simply this, that in November 1879, beyond the sphere of the sense world, in the supersensible world, that event took place which may be described as follows: Michael has gained for himself the power, when human beings come to meet him with all the living content of their souls, so to permeate them with his power, that they are able to transform their old materialistic intellectual power—which by that time had become strong in humanity—into spiritual intellectual power, into spiritual power of understanding. That is objective fact; it has taken place. We may say concerning it that since November 1879, Michael has entered into another relationship with humanity than that in which he formerly stood. But it is required of human beings that they shall become the servants of Michael.
What I mean by this will become quite clear to you through the following explanation. You are aware that before the Mystery of Golgotha was accomplished upon earth, the Jews of the Old Testament looked up to their Jahve (or Jehovah). Those who, among the Jewish priests, looked up in full consciousness to Jahve, were well aware that they could not reach him directly with human perception. The very name, Jahve, was held to be unspeakable, and if it had to be uttered, a sign only was made, a sign which resembles certain combinations of signs which we attempt in the art of eurythmy. The Jewish priesthood, however, was well aware that human beings could approach Jahve through Michael. They called Michael the countenance of Jahve. Just as we learn to know someone when we look into their face, just as we draw conclusions about the gentleness of their soul from the gentleness of their countenance, and about their character from the way they look at us, so the priesthood of the Old Testament, through the atavistic clairvoyance which flowed into their souls in dreams, desired to gain from the countenance of Jahve, from Michael's connection with Jahve, that which it was not yet possible for humanity to gain.

The position of this priesthood towards Michael and Jahve was the right one. Their position towards Michael was right because they knew that if a person

of that time turned to Michael, they could find through Michael the Jahve-power, which it was proper for the humanity of that time to seek.

Other Soul-Regents of humanity have appeared since then in the place of Michael; but in November 1879, Michael once more took the lead, and can become active in the soul-life of those who seek the paths to him. These paths today are the paths of spiritual scientific knowledge. We may speak of "the paths of Michael", just as well as of the "paths of spiritual scientific knowledge".

But just at the time when Michael entered in this way into relationship with the souls of human beings, in order again to become their inspirer for three centuries, at this very time the demonic opposing force, having previously prepared itself, set up the very strongest opposition to him, so that a cry went through the world during our so-called war-years, in reality years of terror, a cry which has become the great world-misunderstanding which now fills the hearts and souls of humanity.

Let us consider what would have become of the Jewish people of the Old Testament, if instead of approaching Jahve through Michael they had sought to approach him directly. They would have become an intolerant people, a national self-seeking people concerned with the aggrandizement of their own nation, a nation thinking only of itself. For Jahve is the God who is connected with all natural things, and in the external historical development of humanity, he manifests his being through the connection of generations, as it expresses itself in the essential qualities of the people. It was only because the ancient Jewish people desired at that time to approach Jahve through Michael, that they saved themselves from becoming nationally so egoistic that Christ Jesus would not have been able to come forth from among them. Because they had permeated themselves with the Michael power, as this power was in their time, the Jewish people were not so strongly impregnated with forces given over to national egoism, as would have been the case had they turned directly to Jahve.

Today Michael is again the Regent of the World, but it is in a new way that humanity must become related to him. For now Michael is not the countenance of Jahve, but the countenance of Christ Jesus. Today we must approach the Christ-impulse through Michael. In many respects humanity has not yet struggled through to this. Humanity has retained atavistically the old qualities of perception by which Michael could be approached when he was still the intermediary to Jahve; and so today humanity has a false relationship to Michael. This false relationship to Michael is apparent in a very characteristic phenomenon.

During the years of the war, we heard continually the universal lie: "Freedom for individual nations, even for the smallest nations." This is an essentially false idea, because today, in the Michael period, the all-important matter is not groups of human beings, but human individuals, separate individualities.

This lie is nothing else than the endeavor to permeate each individual nation not with the new force of Michael, but with the force of the old, the pre-Christian time, with the Michael-force of the Old Testament. However paradoxical it may sound, there is a tendency among so-called civilized nations at the present day to transform what was justifiable among the Jewish people of the Old Testament, into something Luciferic, and to make of this the most powerful impulse in every single nation.

People wish today to build up the republics of Poland, of France, of America, etc., upon methods of thought suited to Old Testament times. They strive to follow Michael as it was right to follow him before the Mystery of Golgotha, when people found through him the folk-god Jahve. Today it is Christ Jesus whom we must strive to find through Michael, Christ Jesus the divine leader of the whole human race. This means that we must seek for feelings and ideas which have nothing to do with human distinctions of any kind on the earth. Such feelings and ideas cannot be found on the surface. They must be sought where the spirit and soul-part of human beings pulsate *i.e.*, along the path of Spiritual Science. The matter lies thus, that we must resolve to seek the real Christ upon the path of Spiritual Science, that is, upon the Michael-path. Only through this striving after spiritual truth is the real Christ to be sought and found; otherwise it would be better to extinguish the lights of Christmas, to destroy all Christmas trees, and to acknowledge at least with truth, that we want nothing that will recall what Christ Jesus has brought into human evolution.

Pre-Christian ways of thinking speak to us from the memoirs of our contemporaries, that is, ways of thinking which in our time are anti-Christian. When individuals, who are held to be representative, make pronouncements such as Wilson has done in the Fourteen Points, from such pronouncements there resounds nothing but pure Old Testament mentality, a mentality which in our time has become Luciferic.

Whence comes this, my dear friends? What really lies before us? When we travel back through the periods of human evolution prior to the Mystery of Golgotha, we find, early in the course of Eastern civilization, within that civilization out of which the Chinese civilization of today has developed, a human personality who was the external incorporation of Lucifer. Lucifer really did walk the earth at that time, in a human body. He it was who brought that human light which we find at the foundation of the ancient pre-Christian wisdom, with the exception of Judaism. In the art, the philosophy, and the statesmanship of Greece, much was still active which had proceeded from this Luciferic incarnation thousands of years before the Mystery of Golgotha.

We must endeavor clearly to understand, that that which today we call human understanding is always, so long as we have not spiritualized it, a

gift of that Lucifer. We must not hold merely, in a matter-of-fact, bourgeois way, the one-sided idea that anything Luciferic is dreadful, and we must get rid of it. The more we seek to get rid of Lucifer, the more we are dominated by him, for it was necessary during thousands of years of human evolution to enter into the inheritance of the incarnated Lucifer. Then came the Mystery of Golgotha. And a time will come in the future when, just as Lucifer was incorporated in the East in an earthly personality, to prepare for Christianity among the heathen, so in the West there will take place an earthly incarnation of Ahriman himself. This time is approaching. Ahriman will appear, objectively, on the earth. Just as truly as Lucifer has walked the earth, and as Christ has walked the earth, objectively, in human form, so will Ahriman walk the earth, bringing with him an extraordinary increase of power to the earthly human understanding.

We human beings have not the task of hindering in any way this incarnation of Ahriman, but it is our task so to prepare humanity beforehand, that Ahriman may be estimated in the right way. For Ahriman will have tasks, he will have to do this and that, and we must value rightly and make a right use of that which, through Ahriman, comes into the world. We will only be able to do this if we are able to adjust ourselves now in the right way to that which Ahriman is already sending to the earth from the worlds beyond in order that he may control the economic life upon earth without being noticed. This must not be. Ahriman must not control the economic life on the earth without his being noticed. We must thoroughly learn to know his particular qualities. We must be able to oppose him with full consciousness.

During the time I am lecturing here at Stuttgart I shall point out much that we must carefully note in human evolution up to the time of the Ahriman incarnation, so that when this comes to pass, we may know how rightly to assess it. Today I shall only call your attention to one thing more. In this respect many of the modern interpretations of the Gospels are just as bad as the worst materialistic conceptions. When the representatives of so-called religious societies accept the Gospels today simply as they are written, and when every new revelation is rejected, such devotion to the Gospels, such a way of furthering Christianity, is really the best way to prepare for Ahriman's appearance on earth. A great many of the exponents of the so-called creeds of today are working intensively for Ahriman; they leave unnoticed the truth: "I am with you always, even unto the end of the Earth-age," when they declare heretical all that proceeds from the immediate vision of the Christ today. They leave this truth unnoticed because it is more comfortable to take the Gospels in a literal way only, that is, to hold to what *they* deem to be the literal interpretation of the Gospels.

Humanity must be protected by wisdom from regarding the Gospels in this way, for the four Gospels, as regards external physical understanding, do contradict one another. Those who do not press

forward today to a spiritual interpretation of the Gospels, spread abroad an untruthful interpretation of these Gospels, for they deceive people as regards the external contradictions which are to be found in the four Gospels. They who deceive people regarding the things that concern them most vitally, best further the progress of Ahriman.

It is most important for us at the present time to place Christ in the center between Ahriman and Lucifer. The Christ power must permeate us. But as human beings we must always seek the balance between the mystic enthusiasm which tends to lift us above ourselves, and the materialistic understanding which by its bourgeois heaviness drags us down to earth. At every moment we must seek the balance between the Luciferic impulses which lift us up, and the Ahrimanic which drag us down. In the effort to gain this balance we find the Christ. When we strive to gain this balance, then alone can we find the Christ.

By a strange coincidence, a remarkable thing happened in human evolution at the time when materialism entered into it. I shall mention (concerning it) only two documents: Milton's "Paradise Lost" and Klopstock's "Messiah". In these poems the spiritual powers are described as if a Paradise had been lost, and the human being had been driven out of it. The work of both poets is based upon the idea of duality in the universe, upon the opposition of good and evil, of the divine and the diabolical. It is the great error of modern times that world-evolution should be represented as a duality, whereas it should be represented as a trinity. One set of forces are the upward-striving Luciferic forces which approach us in mysticism, in sentimentalism, in fantasy—in what in fantasy is degenerate, fantastic; these forces dwell in our blood. The second are the Ahrimanic forces which dwell in all that is dry, heavy (speaking physiologically) in the bony system. The Christ stands in the middle between these two. His is the third group of forces. Lucifer's is the first, Ahriman's the second, and in the center, between the two, is the Christ-force.

What then has happened in more recent days? Something has taken place to which people should look up with true spiritual-intellectual fervor, for unless they understand what it is that has happened, they cannot enter in the right way into the Christmas festival. We read today Milton and Klopstock, we read their descriptions of the supersensible world. What do we find? Everywhere we find Luciferic qualities ascribed to beings who are called divine. Writers such as Milton and Klopstock describe the fight between Luciferic qualities which appear to them divine, and Ahrimanic qualities. And a great part of that which modern humanity describes as Godlike, is simply Luciferic. They do not recognize it for what it is; just as little as they recognize that which is Ahrimanic for what it is.

The same thing appears in Goethe's *Faust*, where we find Mephistopheles contrasted with "the

Lord". Goethe, too, was unable to distinguish between the Luciferic and the Ahrimanic. Consequently his Mephistopheles is a kind of mixture of the two. I have already pointed this out in my little book *Goethe's Standard of the Soul* (*Geistesart*).

True followers of Goethe do not merely quote literally from his works, as do so many academic persons and the like. If we faithfully travel the path that Goethe has taken, so that we are able to recognize the things wherein he must have changed, especially if we follow his *Conception of the World* beyond the year 1832, we are able to speak of a Goethe of the year 1919, now soon to be 1920.

The way must be found calmly to admit that in the materialistic centuries, much that is Luciferic is hidden behind what is called divine. There is much by which people seek to spread religion at the present day that reaches humanity only as words born on the wings of Lucifer.

Only when human beings are once more able to recognize this dualism—the Luciferic that would lead them above themselves, and the Ahrimanic that would lead them down below themselves—and turn from these to what is truly Christ-like, only then will they again celebrate in the right way the Christmas event, that event by which we should recall how that which gives its own particular meaning, its true meaning to the earth, entered into human evolution.

Today we cannot help thinking sometimes of Leonardo da Vinci, of Leonardo, who once, as you know, painted in Milan his great picture, the "Last Supper"—Christ with His disciples around Him. Leonardo was a long time painting this picture—twenty years. He wanted to put a great deal into it, and could never finish it, because he was always making a fresh attempt to paint the figure of Judas in the right way. Now under the State organization of Milan, the abbot of the monastery for which the picture was being painted was his immediate employer. When later a new abbot came, a sharp resolute man, not so patient as his predecessor, he went to Leonardo and told him sternly that the picture must be finished forthwith. Leonardo replied that he could now finish the picture, for since the new abbot had come, he had a model for Judas. In a short time he had painted the face of Judas as we see it in the picture.

Just as at the beginning of the new age the face of Judas appeared to Leonardo on the ground of a positive faith, so we in our day have frequent occasion to write on our hearts and souls the fact that He whose birth we commemorate at this holy season, is betrayed most of all by many of those who declare that it is in accordance with their creed that they prepare this festival. We know that the Christmas Festival itself is one of those that has been adopted in the course of Christian evolution, that it was not till the third or fourth century that people began in these December days, to commemorate the birth of Christ. The event of Golgotha had already taken

place some centuries before, when those whose thoughts were centered upon that event, adopted something so incisively new, at that time, as the institution of the Festival of Christmas. Much, much later it was still possible for new things to be implanted in Christianity. Many of those who called themselves true Christians fought at the time against these innovations. Today there are very many such people at work, who will not advance in the way their own creed advanced when it accepted in the third and fourth centuries the institution of Christmas; people who hold rigidly to that of which they say, "it stands written", people who turn away from every living revelation.

Terrible as is the state of sleep of people at the present day—of people who with their non-moral thoughts soil, too often, things which are seeking to enter the spiritual life—the most terrible of all is the case of those who betray the true spirit of Christian evolution from out of the very faith itself.

It is in this earnest mood that I wished to present the lights of the Christmas tree to you today; next time I hope to speak of them in another connection.

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[edited for gender-neutrality by Nancy Foster]