

Theme of the Year 2009/10

The Destiny of the I in the Age of the Etheric Christ

Every person who begins the study of anthroposophy soon notices that at its heart stands the Mystery of the Human I. This central question of anthroposophical Christology is likewise among the most important questions of all anthroposophy.

I Organization

In his book *The Threshold of the Spiritual World* Rudolf Steiner gives a most concise yet strikingly differentiated description of what in later lectures he calls the “I Organisation” of the human being. The book’s chapters are divided into three parts, each followed by a “summary of the preceding.” Thus a clear three-stage structure is presented and at each stage one aspect of the human I organization is mentioned:

“the human being as independent entity (I)”;

“the human being’s ‘other self’ which is brought to expression through repeated lives on earth”—which according to this definition corresponds to the higher I;¹

and “the ‘true I’,” which forms the real core of the human spirit.

The present time is distinguished spiritually by the great event of the appearance of the Christ in etheric form on the astral plane. From this, and from the existential relationship of the Christ to the human I, there arises the question of His relationship with the three-part I organization of the human being. Through the Mystery of Golgotha a crucial alteration is accomplished for the earthly I. Since that event, human beings have had the ability to bring I consciousness with them into the spiritual world, and so to engage this spiritual world in full awareness.² But to be able to accomplish this, humanity had to await the full development of the consciousness soul and the elaboration and justification of the science of mind-and-spirit* which addresses the earthly I. In this earthly I, human intellectuality also takes root. Today, following the modern path of development, this intellectuality, in the form of pure thought, can be raised up together with the I consciousness into the spiritual world, where the meeting takes place with the etheric Christ.

This process goes hand in hand with the spiritualization of the earthly I. Rudolf Steiner describes it this way: “Progress is accomplished only when the human being develops heightened intellectuality not just for its own sake, but also bears it up into the astral world. The etherically visible Christ can and will come to meet human beings who have advanced in this sense, through just such an intellectual clairvoyance. He will do so more often and more distinctly in the course of the next three thousand years.”³ The raising-up of the spiritualized intellect into the astral world, in order there to meet the etheric Christ wakefully, by means of the clairvoyance in thought—this is the most important deed which the earthly I can accomplish in our time.

Two currents of ether

Rudolf Steiner described an important aspect of this process in his lecture on the etherization of the blood. There he speaks of two etheric streams that rise from the heart to the head, in order to connect the human being with the surrounding spiritual world.

The first stream consists of etherized human blood. In it the “intellectual element” rises from below upwards.

The second stream consists of the etherized blood of the Christ that flows, since the Mystery of Golgotha, in every human heart.

At first these two streams flow parallel to each other. But their coming together is the crucial precondition for beholding the etheric Christ. And how do they come together? Rudolf Steiner gives a surprising answer: the coming together happens when human beings are willing to take the new understanding of Christ up into the soul, and to bring it to life in themselves. In other words, it takes place through the study of the science of the mind-and-spirit,* a study which activates not only the head, but above all the heart, as a new organ for attaining knowledge (see the previous theme of the year).

The future

The etheric revelation of the Christ will unfold over some three thousand years, starting from the 20th century. It is, however, part of a still greater context. This includes two future and still higher revelations of the Christ:

His appearance in the astral body in lower Devachan,
and still later a great revelation of His I being in the higher spiritual world.⁴

Consider that, according to the above-mentioned book, the environment of the “other self” (higher I) is the spiritual world, and the environment of the true I is the higher spiritual world; elsewhere Rudolf Steiner spoke of them as lower and higher Devachan.⁵ From this we can see a direct relationship between the two future revelations of the Christ and the higher I and true I of the human being, just as the Christ’s present appearance is connected with the spiritualization of the earthly I.

From the foregoing it is clear how the evolution of the human I—as the purpose of the Earth—and the ever-higher revelations of the Christ are inextricably linked. To take this into our I consciousness and to further cultivate it in our soul—this is already the beginning of the path which can lead the human being of today to the Christ. | *Sergei O. Prokofiev*

Translation by John Beck.

* = Translator’s note:

The word *Geisteswissenschaft* is usually translated “spiritual science” or “science of the spirit” in anthroposophy, or as “the humanities” in general usage. In this particular context where both intellectuality and spiritual being are in question, it seemed desirable to us the expanded phrase “science of the mind-and-spirit” in order to suggest its fuller significance in the German language.

Notes:

1. Rudolf Steiner spoke at length about the relationship of the earthly I to the higher I in his Bologna lecture (see recommended reading).
2. Rudolf Steiner: *The Gospel of Matthew* (GA 123), lecture of 9 September 1910.
3. Ibid.: *Esoteric Christianity and the Spiritual Guidance of Humanity* (GA 130), lecture of 18 November 1911.
4. Ibid.
5. See the final chapter in Rudolf Steiner: *The Threshold of the Spiritual World* (GA 17): “Remarks on the relationship of what is said in this document to the presentation in my Theosophy and Occult Science.”

Recommended reading:

In English:

Rudolf Steiner, *The Threshold of the Spiritual World* (GA 17) in *A Way of Self-Knowledge and The Threshold of the Spiritual World*. Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2006.

Rudolf Steiner, *The Etherization of the Blood* (lecture of October 1, 1911) in *The Reappearance of the Christ in the Etheric*. Great Barrington: Anthroposophic Press, 1983.

In German:

Rudolf Steiner, *Das gespiegelte Ich. Der Bologna-Vortrag—Die philosophischen Grundlagen der Anthroposophie*. [The mirrored I. The Bologna lecture—The philosophical foundations of anthroposophy]. Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2007. Also in *Philosophie und Anthroposophie. Gesammelte Aufsätze 1904–1923* [Philosophy and anthroposophy. Collected essays 1904–1923] (GA 35).

Wolf-Ulrich Klünker, *Anthroposophie als Ich-Berührung* [Anthroposophy as contact with the I]. Dornach, 2010.

Sergei O. Prokofiev, *Das Rätsel des menschlichen Ich*. [The riddle of the human I]. Dornach, 2010.