



Anthroposophical Society in Australia
Canberra Branch

SPIRIT TRIUMPHANT

Preparing for Easter

Exploring how we can bring *Light into darkness* in our daily lives.

3-5pm Sunday 10 April 2022

Quakers Friends Meeting Room, 17 Bent St. Turner

You are invited to prepare for this special day by reading the attached lecture by Rudolf Steiner. Please bring your own contribution to share with others through, thoughts, meditations, verses, pictures or another artwork you choose to bring along.

We will then sing together and finish with a verse.

The program will be followed by an Easter themed High Tea.

Please bring something special to share. Refreshments will be provided.

Donations to help cover the venue cost will be much appreciated.

Please let us know you are coming; E: canberraanthropos1@gmail.com or call Riitta 0408 221 385

SPIRIT TRIUMPHANT

Thoughts on Easter

THERE is a significant contrast between the Christmas thought and the Easter thought. Understanding of the contrast and also of the living relationship between them will lead to an experience which, in a certain way, embraces the whole riddle of human existence.

The Christmas thought points to birth. Through birth, the eternal being of man comes into the world whence his material, bodily constitution is derived. The Christmas thought, therefore, links us with the super-sensible. Together with all its other associations, it points to the one pole of our existence, where as physical-material beings we are connected with the spiritual and super-sensible. Obviously, therefore, the birth of a human being in its full significance can never be explained by a science based entirely upon observation of material existence.

The thought underlying the Easter festival lies at the other pole of human experience. In the course of the development of Western civilisation this Easter thought assumed a form which has influenced the growth of the materialistic conceptions prevailing in the West. The Easter thought can be grasped – in a more abstract way, to begin with – when it is realised that the immortal, eternal being of man, the spiritual and super-sensible essence of being that cannot in the real sense be born, descends from spiritual worlds and is clothed in the human physical body. From the very beginning of physical existence, the working of the spirit within the physical body actually leads this physical body towards death. The thought of death is therefore implicit in that of birth.

On other occasions I have said that the head-organisation of man can be understood only in the light of the knowledge that in the head a continual process of dying is taking place, but is counteracted by the life-forces in the rest of the organism. The moment the forces of death that are all the time present in the head and enable man to think, get the upper hand of his transient, mortal nature – at that moment actual death occurs.

In truth, therefore, the thought of death is merely the other side of that of birth and cannot be an essential part of the Easter thought. Hence at the time when Pauline Christianity was beginning to emerge from conceptions still based upon Eastern wisdom, it was not to the Death but to the Resurrection of Christ Jesus that men's minds were directed by words of power such as those of Paul: "If Christ be not risen, then is your faith vain."

The Resurrection, the triumphant victory over death, the overcoming of death – this was the essence of the Easter thought in the form of early Christianity that was still an echo of Eastern wisdom. On the other hand, there are pictures in which Christ Jesus is portrayed as the Good Shepherd, watching over the eternal interests of man as he sleeps through his mortal existence. In early Christianity, man is everywhere directed to the words of the Gospel: "He Whom ye seek is not here." Expanding this, we might say: Seek Him in spiritual worlds, not in the physical-material world. For if you seek Him in the physical-material world, you can but be told: He Whom you seek is no longer here.

The all-embracing wisdom by means of which in the first centuries of Christendom men were still endeavouring to understand the Mystery of Golgotha and all that pertained to it, was gradually submerged by the materialism of the West. In those early centuries, materialism had not reached anything like its full power, but was only slowly being prepared. It was not until much later that these first, still feeble and hardly noticeable tendencies were transformed into the materialism which took stronger and stronger hold of Western civilisation. The original Eastern concept of *religion* came to be bound up with the concept of the *State* that was developing in the West. In the fourth century A.D., Christianity became a State religion – in other words, there crept into Christianity something that is not religion at all.

Julian the Apostate, who was no Christian, but for all that a deeply religious man, could not accept what Christianity had become under Constantine. And so we see how in the fusion of Christianity with the declining culture of Rome, the influence of Western materialism begins to take effect – very slightly to begin with, but nevertheless perceptibly. And under this influence there appeared a picture of Christ Jesus which at the beginning simply was not there, was not part of Christianity in its original form: the picture of Christ Jesus as the crucified One, the Man of Sorrows, brought to His death by the indescribable suffering that was His lot.

This made a breach in the whole outlook of the Christian world. For the picture which from then onwards persisted through the centuries – the picture of Christ agonising on the Cross – is of the Christ Who could no longer be comprehended in His spiritual nature but in His bodily nature only. And the greater the emphasis that was laid on the signs of suffering in the human body, the more perfect the skill with which art succeeded at different periods in portraying the sufferings, the more firmly were the seeds of materialism planted in Christian feeling. The crucifix is the expression of the transition to Christian materialism. This in no way gainsays the profundity and significance with which art portrayed the sufferings of the Redeemer. Nevertheless, it is a fact that with the concentration on this picture of the Redeemer suffering and dying on the Cross, leave was taken of a truly spiritual conception of Christianity.

Then there crept into this conception of the Man of Sorrows, that of Christ as Judge of the world, who must be regarded as merely another expression of Jahve or Jehovah – the figure portrayed so magnificently in the Sistine Chapel at Rome as the Dispenser of Judgment. The attitude of mind which caused the triumphant Spirit, the Victor over death, to vanish from the picture of the grave from which the Redeemer rises – this same attitude of mind, in the year 869 at the Eighth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, declared belief in the Spirit to be heretical, decreed that man is to be conceived as consisting only of body and soul, the soul merely having certain spiritual qualities. Just as we see the spiritual reality expelled by the crucifix, just as the portrayals of the physical give expression to the pain-racked soul without the Spirit triumphant by Whom mankind is guarded and sustained, so do we see the Spirit struck away from the being of man by the decree of an Ecumenical Council.

The Good Friday festival and the Easter festival of Resurrection were largely combined. Even in days when men were not yet so arid, so empty of understanding, Good Friday became a festival in which the Easter thought was transformed in an altogether egotistic direction. Wallowing in pain, steeping the soul voluptuously in pain, feeling ecstasy in pain – this, for centuries, was associated with the Good Friday thought which, in truth, should merely have formed the background for the Easter thought. But men became less and less capable of grasping the Easter thought in its true form. The same humanity into whose creed had been accepted the principle that man consists of body and soul only – this same humanity demanded, for the sake of emotional life, the picture of the dying Redeemer as the counter-image of its own physical suffering, in order that this might serve – outwardly at least – as a background for the direct consciousness that the living Spirit must always be victorious over everything that can befall the physical body. Men needed, first, the picture of the martyr's death, in order to experience, by way of contrast, the true Easter thought.

We must always feel profoundly how, in this way, vision and experience of the Spirit gradually faded from Western culture, and we shall certainly look with wonder, but at the same time with a feeling of the tragedy of it all, at the attempts made by art to portray the Man of Sorrows on the Cross. Casual thoughts and feelings about what is needed in our time are not enough, my dear friends. The decline that has taken place in Western culture in respect of the understanding of the spiritual, must be perceived with all clarity. What has to be recognised to-day is that even the greatest achievements in a certain domain are something that humanity must now surmount. The whole of our Western culture *needs* the Easter thought, needs, in other words, to be lifted to the Spirit. The holy Mystery of Birth, the Christmas Mystery once revealed in such glory, gradually deteriorated in the course of Western civilisation into those sentimentalities which revelled in hymns and songs about the Jesus Babe and were in truth merely the corresponding pole of the increasing materialism. Men wallowed in sentimentalities over the little Child. Banal hymns about the Jesus Babe gradually became the vogue, obscuring men's feeling of the stupendous Christmas Mystery of the coming of a *super-earthly* Spirit. It is characteristic of a Christianity developing more and more in the direction of intellectualism that certain of its representatives to-day even go as far as to say that the Gospels are concerned primarily with the *Father*, not with the *Son*. True, the Resurrection thought has remained, but it is associated always with the thought of Death. A characteristic symptom is that with the development of modern civilisation, the Good Friday thought has come increasingly to the fore, while the Resurrection thought, the true Easter thought, has fallen more and more into the background. In an age when it is incumbent upon man to experience the resurrection of his own being in the Spirit, particular emphasis must be

laid upon the Easter thought. We must learn to understand the Easter thought in all its depths. But this entails the realisation that the picture of the Man of Sorrows on the one side and that of the Judge of the world on the other, are both symptomatic of the march of Western civilisation into materialism. Christ as a super-sensible, super-earthly Being Who entered nevertheless into the stream of earthly evolution – that is the Sun-thought to the attainment of which all the forces of human thinking must be applied.

Just as we must realise that the Christmas thought of birth has become something that has dragged the greatest of Mysteries into the realm of trivial sentimentality, so too we must realise how necessary it is to emphasise through the Easter thought that there entered into human evolution at that time something that is forever inexplicable by earthly theories, but is comprehensible to spiritual knowledge, to spiritual insight.

Spiritual understanding finds in the Resurrection thought the first great source of strength, knowing that the spiritual and eternal – even within man – remains unaffected by the physical and bodily. In the words of St. Paul, "If Christ be not risen, then is your faith vain," it recognises a confirmation – which in the modern age must be reached in a different, more conscious way – of the real nature of the Being of Christ.

This is what the Easter thought must call up in us to-day. Easter must become an inner festival, a festival in which we celebrate in ourselves the *victory of the Spirit over the body*. As history cannot be disregarded, we shall not ignore the figure of the pain-stricken Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, on the Cross; but above the Cross we must behold the Victor Who remains unaffected by birth as well as by death, and Who alone can lead our vision up to the eternal pastures of life in the Spirit. Only so shall we draw near again to the true Being of Christ. Western humanity has drawn Christ down to its own level, drawn Him down as the helpless Child, and as one associated pre-eminently with suffering and death.

I have often pointed out that the words, "Death is evil," fell from the Buddha's lips as long *before* the Mystery of Golgotha as, *after* the Mystery of Golgotha, there appeared the crucifix, the figure of the crucified One. And I have also shown how then, in the sixth century, men looked upon death and felt it to be no evil but something that had no real existence. But this feeling, which was an echo from an Eastern wisdom even more profound than Buddhism, was gradually obscured by the other, which clung to the picture of the pain-racked Sufferer.

We must grasp with the whole range of our feelings – not with thoughts alone, for their range is too limited – what the fate of man's conception of the Mystery of Golgotha has been in the course of the centuries. A true understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha is what we must again acquire. And be it remembered that even in the days of Hebraic antiquity, Jahve was not conceived as the Judge of the world in any juristic sense. In the Book of Job, the greatest dramatic presentation of religious experience in Hebraic antiquity, Job is presented as the suffering man, but the idea of the execution of justice from without is essentially absent. Job is the suffering man, the man who regards what outer circumstances inflict upon him, as his destiny. Only gradually does the juristic concept of retribution, punishment, become part of the world-order. Michelangelo's picture over the altar of the Sistine Chapel represents in one aspect, a kind of revival of the Jahve principle. But we need the Christ for Whom we can seek in our inmost being, because when we truly seek Him, He at once appears. We need the Christ Who draws into our *will*, warming, kindling, strengthening it for deeds demanded of us for the sake of human evolution. We need, not the suffering Christ, but the Christ Who hovers above the Cross, looking down upon that which – no longer a living reality – comes to an end on the Cross. We need the strong consciousness of the *eternity of the Spirit*, and this consciousness will not be attained if we give ourselves up to the picture of the crucifix alone. And when we see how the crucifix has gradually come to be a picture of the Man of suffering and pain, we shall realise what power this direction of human feeling has acquired. Men's gaze has been diverted from the spiritual to the earthly and physical. This aspect, it is true, has often been magnificently portrayed, but to those, as for example Goethe, who feel the need for our civilisation again to reach the Spirit, it is something, which, in a way, rouses their antipathy. Goethe has made it abundantly clear that the figure of the *crucified Redeemer* does not express what he feels to be the essence of Christianity, namely, the lifting of man to the Spirit.

The Good Friday mood, as well as the Easter mood, needs to be transformed. The Good Friday mood must be one that realises when contemplating the dying Jesus: This is only the other side of birth. Not to recognise that dying is also implicit in the fact of being born, is to lose sight of the full reality. A man who is able to feel that the mood of death associated with Good Friday merely presents the other pole of the entrance of the child into the world at birth, is making the right preparation for the mood of Easter – which can, in truth consist only in the knowledge: “Into whatever human sheath I have been born, my real being is both unborn and deathless.” – In his own eternal being man must unite with the Christ Who came into the world and cannot die, Who when He beholds the Man of Sorrows on the Cross, is looking down, not upon the eternal Self, but upon Himself incarnate in another.

We must be aware of what has actually happened in consequence of the fact that since the end of the first Christian century, Western civilisation has gradually lost the conception of the Spirit. When a sufficiently large number of men realise that the Spirit must come to life again in modern civilisation, the World-Easter thought will become a reality. This will express itself outwardly in the fact that man will not be satisfied with investigating the laws of nature only, or the laws of history which are akin to those of nature, but will yearn for understanding of his own will, for knowledge of his own *inner freedom*, and of the real nature of the will which bears him through and beyond the gate of death, but which in its true nature must be seen spiritually.

How is man to acquire the power to grasp the Pentecost thought, the outpouring of the Spirit, since this thought has been dogmatically declared by the Eighth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople to be an empty phrase? How is man to acquire the power to grasp this Pentecost thought if he is incapable of apprehending the true Easter thought – the Resurrection of the Spirit? The picture of the dying, pain-racked Redeemer must not confound him; he must learn that pain is inseparable from material existence.

The knowledge of this was a fundamental principle of the ancient wisdom which still sprang from instinctive depths of man's cognitional life. We must acquire this knowledge again, but now through acts of conscious cognition. It was a fundamental principle of the ancient wisdom that pain and suffering originate from man's union with matter. It would be foolishness to believe that because Christ passed through death as a Divine-Spiritual Being, He did not suffer pain; to declare that the pain associated with the Mystery of Golgotha was a mere semblance of pain would be to voice an unreality. In the deepest sense, this pain must be conceived as reality – and not as its mere counter-image. We must gain something from what stands before us when, in surveying the whole sweep of the evolution of humanity, we contemplate the Mystery of Golgotha.

When the picture of the man who had attained freedom at the highest level was presented to the candidates for ancient Initiation after they had completed the preparatory stages, had undergone all the exercises by which they could acquire certain knowledge presented to them in dramatic imagery, they were led at last before the figure of the *Chrestos* – the man suffering within the physical body, in the purple robe and wearing the crown of thorns. The sight of this Chrestos was meant to kindle in the soul the power that makes man truly man. And the drops of blood which the aspirant for Initiation beheld at vital points on the Chrestos figure were intended to be a stimulus for overcoming human weaknesses and for raising the Spirit triumphant from the inmost being. The sight of pain was meant to betoken the resurrection of the spiritual nature. The purpose of the figure before the candidate was to convey to him the deepest import of what may be expressed in these simple words: For your happiness you may thank many things in life – but if you have gained knowledge and insight into the spiritual connections of existence, for that you have to thank your Buffering, your pain. You owe your knowledge to the fact that you did not allow yourself to be mastered by suffering and pain but were strong enough to rise above them. And so in the ancient Mysteries, the figure of the suffering Chrestos was in turn replaced by the figure of the Christ triumphant Who looks down upon the suffering Chrestos as upon that which has been overcome. And now again it must be possible for the soul to have the Christ triumphant before and within it, especially in the will. That must be the ideal before us in this present time, above all in regard to what we wish to do for the future well-being of mankind.

But the true Easter thought will never be within our reach if we cannot realise that whenever we speak of Christ we must look beyond the earthly into the *cosmic*. Modern thinking has made

the cosmos into a corpse. To-day we gaze at the stars and calculate their movements – in other words we make calculations about the corpse of the universe, never perceiving that in the stars there is *life*, and that the will of the cosmic Spirit prevails in their courses. Christ descended to humanity in order to unite the souls of men with this cosmic Spirit. And he alone proclaims the Gospel of Christ truly, who affirms that what the sun reveals to the physical senses is the outer expression of the Spirit of our universe, of its resurrecting Spirit.

There must be a living realisation of the connection of this Spirit of the universe with the sun, and of how the time of the Easter festival has been determined by the relationship prevailing between the sun and the moon in spring. A link must be made with that cosmic reality in accordance with which the Easter festival was established in earth-evolution. We must come to realise that it was the ever-watchful Guardian-Spirits of the cosmos who, through the great cosmic timepiece in which the sun and the moon are the hands in respect of earthly existence, have pointed explicitly to the time in the evolution of the world and of humanity at which the Festival of the Resurrection is to be celebrated. With spiritual insight we must learn to perceive the course of the sun and moon as the two hands of the cosmic time piece, just as for the affairs of physical existence we learn to understand the movements of the hands on a clock. The physical and earthly must be linked to the super-physical and the super-earthly.

The Easter thought can be interpreted only in the light of *super-earthly* realities, for the Mystery of Golgotha, in its aspect as the Resurrection Mystery, must be distinguished from ordinary human happenings. Human affairs take their course on the earth in an altogether different way. The earth received the cosmic forces and, in the course of its evolution, the human powers of will penetrate the metabolic processes of man's being. But since the Mystery of Golgotha took place, a new influx of will streamed into earthly happenings. There took place on earth a cosmic event, for which the earth is merely the stage. Thereby man was again united with the cosmos.

That is what must be understood, for only so can the Easter thought be grasped in all its magnitude. Therefore, it is not the picture of the crucifix alone that must stand before us, however grandly and sublimely portrayed by art. "He Whom ye seek is not here" – is the thought that must arise. Above the Cross there must appear to you the One Who is *here* now, "Who by the spirit calls you to a spirit-awakening."

This is the true Easter thought that must find its way into the evolution of mankind; it is to this that the human heart and mind must be lifted. Our age demands of us that we shall not only deepen our understanding of what has been created, but that we shall become creators of the new. And even if it be the Cross itself, in all the beauty with which artists have endowed it, we may not rest content with that picture; we must hear the words of the Angels who, when we seek in death and suffering, exclaim to us: "He Whom ye seek is no longer here."

We have to seek the One Who *is* here, by turning at Eastertime to the Spirit of Whom the only true picture is that of the Resurrection. Then we shall be able, in the right way, to pass from the Good Friday mood of suffering to the spiritual mood of Easter Day. In this Easter mood we shall also be able to find the strength with which our will must be imbued if the forces of decline are to be countered by those which lead humanity upwards. We need the forces that can bring about this ascent. And the moment we truly understand the Easter thought of Resurrection, this Easter thought – bringing warmth and illumination – will kindle within us the forces needed for the future evolution of mankind.

Rudolf Steiner 27 March 1921