

Rudolf Steiner's "Credo:"

The young Steiner's worldview

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It is characteristic of Rudolf Steiner's life that he did not become publicly active in the field of esoteric spirituality as a young man. It was only in his fortieth year that he began to teach in this area. In his thirties, he wrote his philosophical book, "The Philosophy of Freedom" which argued the case for a source of ethics existing within the human soul. This book, building on his university doctoral thesis, which examined this same theme, written in 1891, certainly established his exceptional intelligence and commitment to ethics. But it was not until in 1902 that he wrote his first book on spiritual esoteric themes, "Christianity as Mystical Fact", where his extensive knowledge of, and insight into, ancient Mystery wisdom also became evident.

However, after his death a number of documents came to light which established that as a young man he was deeply involved in the meditative life, and in the pursuit of higher spiritual faculties. One of these documents is a letter he wrote to friend.

This letter of Rudolf Steiner's written in 1881 reveals that already then, at the age of 20, his enquiry into the nature of human consciousness was in fact connected with the acceptance of the existence of spiritual reality, both within the human being, and 'behind' the sense-perceptible world. In this letter he reports that he had been reading texts of Schelling (Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, 1775 – 1854),

I had been occupied until half an hour past midnight with several philosophical problems, and then I threw myself onto my bed. In the previous year I had striven to determine whether it was true, what Schelling said; 'We all possess a secret, wondrous capacity, to draw ourselves out of the changing flow of time, away from all that comes to us externally and into our innermost being, our unveiled self – there we may behold the eternal in us, in an unchanging form.' I believed, and believe still today, that I had discovered this innermost capacity very clearly in myself – which I had intuitively sensed for a long time. The entire idealistic philosophy was now viewed by me as having an entirely different form; what does a sleepless night matter, compared to such a find !

This document gives a clear picture of just how immersed was Steiner in the inner life, in the quest for the divine. Some years after his death, the archives published a remarkable document from Steiner's early years, which was found in 1944. He had titled it "Credo" which in this context means, "What I believe". It should be clearly kept in mind that this document, in its youthful idealism and simplicity of assertions, does not represent how the mature age Steiner would speak to his students. It is of value in

that it presents a very clear statement about his view of spirituality and service to the divine, as the purpose of life. He was only 27 yrs old when he wrote this,

The “Creed”:

The realm of the Idea¹ is the origin and sustaining principle of all Existence. In it is never-ending harmony and joyous tranquillity. Any part of Creation which this realm did not illumine, would be something dead and without being, and would have no part of the life of the universe. Only that which derives its existence from the {archetypal} Idea, has significance on the cosmic Tree, from which all things are created.²

The Idea is self-evident Spirit, Spirit sufficient unto itself, in itself, with itself. The individual must have the Spirit indwelling, otherwise it falls away, like a dry leaf from the tree, and would have been, anyway, whilst there, without purpose.

Now, the human Being, when it has become fully conscious {an adult}, feels and knows itself as a separate Being. It also has implanted within its being, the yearning for the Idea. This yearning drives it on, to overcome the separateness, and to let the Spirit come into life within his or her being, so that the soul may become like the Spirit.

Everything which is egotistic, everything which forms the person into this definite, separated-self, must be cast away, this is what the human being must strip away, for this it is, which obscures the light of the Spirit. That which derives from sensual lust, instinctive drives and passions, is desired only by this egotistic self. Therefore, the human being must destroy this selfish will in itself. Instead of seeking that which he or she as a separate being wants, the human being should want that which the Spirit, the Idea, in him wills and seeks. Guide the “Separate-Being” towards this goal, hearken to the voice of the Idea within you for that alone is divine !

What one wants as a separate-being is, within the circumference of the universe, worthless. It is a worthless point, disappearing within the flow of Time. What one wills “in the Spirit”, as it were, that is in the centre, for then, the central Light of the Universe comes into being within us: such a deed is not subject to the flow of Time.

When someone acts as an isolated individual, they remove their ‘self’ from the closed chain of cosmic activity, they are separated away from this. When a human being acts ‘in the Spirit’, she or he then lives ever more into the universal processes of the Cosmos. Destroying all self-centredness, this is the foundation of the higher life. For whoever lets this Selfhood die, shall find an eternal existence. That which is mortal in us in our separate-self.

This is the true meaning of these words of Goethe, “Whosoever does not die before death, shall perish at death”. This means, whoever does not make an end to egotism during the earthly life, shall not have a part of the universal life, which is immortal. For such a person never existed within this greater Life, and had no real existence.

¹ This is the famous realm of archetypal Thoughts, of Plato and early esoteric wisdom.

² This unusual phrase refers to a very effective and evocative metaphor, deeply linked to the older Germanic and Celtic worldview; the “Welt Esche” or cosmic Ash tree, from which all the realms in the cosmos have their origin.

There are four fields of human activity in which the human Being deadens all egotism and fully dedicates himself or herself to the Spirit. These are: Knowledge, Art, Religion and loving dedication to an individual in Spirit. Whoever does not live in at least one of these four activities, does not really live at all. Knowledge is devotion to the universe, in Thought; Art is devotion to the universe in sense-perception; Religion is devotion to the world – through the life of Feeling; dedicated Love is devotion with all of ones' spiritual forces, being directed towards something that appears to one as a worthy member of the Cosmos.

Knowledge is the most spiritualized form of selfless devotion, Love the most beautiful form. For love is truly a heavenly radiance shining into the life of daily existence. Devout, truly spiritual Love ennobles the innermost fibre of our being, it refines and uplifts everything that lives in us. This pure, devout love transforms the entire soul-life into something that is akin to the Universal-Spirit. To love in this most exalted sense means to bear the breath of the Heavens into that realm where there is usually to be found only the most detestable egotism and mindless lust.

One must first know something of the holiness of Love, before one can speak about Spirituality (piety). If a person has made the journey out of the separated condition, through one of these four activities, and merged into the divine life of the Idea (Spirit), then that person has attained to that, for which a seed of yearning was placed in his or her heart: the union with the Spirit. For this is the true destination of the human. Whoever who lives in the Spirit is free, for they have extricated themselves from everything of secondary significance. Nothing compels him or her to act, except a coercion which he gladly undertakes, for such a person has recognized the task at hand as the highest duty of all.

Let truth be lived: lose yourself in order to find yourself again within the Cosmic-Spirit
!

R. Steiner, ca. 1888 (27 years old)

Translated by Dr. Adrian Anderson

It is important to note that here the young Rudolf Steiner was already aware of the four aspects to our human nature, which later became a corner-stone of his anthroposophical teachings. He declares here that there are four areas of human life in which we can strive spiritually namely, knowledge, art, religion and loving dedication to a worthy cause. This reflects the fourfold structure we possess in our consciousness. Our soul or mind has three stands to it, thinking, emotion and will or volition, and as a fourth element there is additionally, our sensory capacity. This fourfold structure is explained in detail, together with the nature of the human spirit, in his book, *Theosophy*. (And in my forthcoming book, "This is Anthroposophy: a Rudolf Steiner Compendium".)

This youthful but immensely insightful testimonial to the truths of the spirit, and the value of the spiritual selfless life, has a similar quality to a beautiful passage from Goethe's *Faust*, which occurs towards the end of Part Two. We find there a character describing the sublime nature of the ascent of the departed human soul into higher realms,

Pater Seraphicum

“Arise to higher spheres,
imperceptibly growing ever further
in the eternal pure way,
does God’s presence strengthen you.
For that is the nourishment of spirits
living in the freest of ethereal spaces
the revelation of eternal Love,
flowering into bliss

(tranl. Dr. A. Anderson)

These words from *Faust* are a moving description of the exquisite realms of the spirit, for those who are able to ascend into remote spiritual realms, after death. It is interesting to note how the *Credo* of Rudolf Steiner speaks of the incarnate person already having the possibility to attain to these wonderful heights of blessed existence, if they but follow the path to selflessness.

If this brief document has given you an orientation into the spirituality underlying Steiner’s worldview and attitude to life, evident even in his youthful years, and a feeling for the richness to be found in Goethe also, then it has served its purpose.