

## Embodying Anthroposophia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

by Robert Karp, 2007

### Part I: The Awakening Call of Catastrophic Events

On August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005, the Catholic Feast Day of the beheading of John the Baptist, hurricane Katrina poured out her bowl of wrath upon the Gulf Coast of North America, leaving in her wake a level of devastation rarely witnessed in American history. Over 1,800 people were killed, hundreds of thousands were left homeless and the infrastructure of an entire modern city largely destroyed. While the natural response to such a heart rendering event is to first turn our thoughts to the physical needs of the people and places affected, we may also feel called to ask ourselves:

*What is the spiritual background to this event?*

*Is there a deeper message to Katrina and if so what is it?*

*What kind of response is this event, and events like it, asking of us?*

In addition to natural catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina, we can also ask what is the spiritual background and significance of “man-made” catastrophes such as the event of 9/11.

With these questions in mind, the members of the Central Regional Council of the Anthroposophical Society gathered for their Michaelmas 2005 retreat in Ames, Iowa with an earnestness greatly deepened by the fact that one of our members, Margaret Runyon of New Orleans, had just lived through the Katrina event a month prior. The following represents one fruit of the spiritual work we undertook together that weekend.

#### **The Cross of American Karma in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Plato spoke of the world soul being crucified on the world body. This imagination can be understood through spiritual science when we can come to experience how the *soul forces* of the earth work along an East-West axis while the *life forces* of the earth work along a north-south axis. This reality can be seen, for example, in the way post-Atlantean civilizations have largely unfolded from East to West, whereas the earth’s climate zones are primarily differentiated on a north-south axis. As such, we could say, *the East is the cradle of civilization* while the *South is the womb of life*. We could also say that in the West *spirit takes on form* while in the North *life is filled with consciousness*.

This cross can also be found in the microcosm of North America.<sup>1</sup> Speaking quite generally, along the east-west axis of North America, we find the different soul forces concentrated as follows: on the eastern seaboard the power of thinking is predominant, supported by deep granite formations; in the west, the will element predominates, supported by the long history

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Robert Patterson, a retired priest of the Christian Community whose knowledge of the spiritual geography of this continent has proven so invaluable to my research and which I have drawn on extensively in this document.

of volcanic activity, while in the middle, the powers of feeling predominate, supported by the many rhythmic layers of limestone, coal and other mineral deposits, which were created by the ebbing and flowing of an ancient ocean, the remnant of which we find today as the Gulf of Mexico.

Along the north-south axis, on the other hand, we find a relationship to the life-physical bearers of these soul forces. In the north, for example, we find a concentration of the nerve sense organ of the continent expressed, for example, through the lake forming processes and the abundance of fresh water lakes which are like the eyes of the earth; in the south the metabolic limb forces predominate expressed in the abundance of warmth and growth forces; while in the middle, the heartland, we find indeed a kind of mediating heart-lung region, where the air and earth elements predominate.

Against this backdrop, we can perhaps begin to recognize the way in which the events of Hurricane Katrina and 9/11 form a kind of karmic cross in the 21<sup>st</sup> century destiny of America. For along the east-west axis of this cross—which is connected to the spiritual and cultural evolution of mankind—(and thus with man-made catastrophes in general) stands the event of 9/11 revealing to us with immense power the negative impact of America’s cultural, political and economic life upon people in other cultures and upon our own nation. Along the north-south axis of this cross, on the other hand—which is connected to the physical-etheric forces of world evolution (and to natural disasters in general)—stands the event of Hurricane Katrina, revealing to us with equal force our civilization’s impact upon the life of nature and the world of life forces.<sup>2</sup> A study, for example, of what has been done to try and control and manipulate the Mississippi River over the last 100 years, or the creation of the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico through the modern agricultural practices, or the effect of global warming on ocean temperatures, can readily bring home the way this axis of the cross finds its expression in the Katrina event.<sup>3</sup>

If we draw the axes of this cross spreading west from the East Coast region struck by 9/11 and north from the Gulf Coast region struck by Katrina, they meet in the heartland, the region of Chicago and the Great Lakes, the place where Rudolf Steiner tells us the forces of anthroposophy concentrate themselves and then ray out across the continent.<sup>4</sup> Meditating on this cross in the wake of hurricane Katrina, I came to hear words to this effect:

*America can no longer be protected from the karma of her actions in the world; the old forces of grace that once protected this country are losing their power. Small groups of spiritually awakened human beings, imbued with the substance of spiritual science, must begin to take inner responsibility for the history and development of America and for her impact on the world. These groups must work together in such a way, with such a power of harmony, that the cross of America’s karma in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be borne and transformed. In this way and only in this way, can the blows of karma, which must need*

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<sup>3</sup> The division between North and South and East and West that I am portraying here is obviously not hard and fast. We are dealing here with living, interweaving realities. Thus, the event of Katrina also has great cultural import and precedents, for example, in the domain of race relations in North America.

<sup>4</sup> This indication of Rudolf Steiner’s, via Friedrich Bensch, can be found in *.Into the Heart’s Land*, by Henry Barnes, Steinerbooks, page 34.

*increase in the years to come, become opportunities for awakening conscience, healing and renewal among the peoples of America.*

This message is profoundly underscored by the Katrina event in New Orleans. Consider for how long New Orleans was protected from such an event as Hurricane Katrina, consider how many hurricanes changed direction or weakened considerably just before reaching New Orleans. On one of these past occasions, Margaret Runyon, (my colleague on the Central Regional Council from New Orleans) awoke from sleep and experienced great forces of protection for New Orleans emanating from the statue of Joan of Arc, the maid of Orleans, that stands in New Orleans' French Quarter. And consider this: just weeks before Katrina hit, the first official anthroposophical group in the history of New Orleans was formed. The message rings clear here again:

*The old forces are waning--students of spiritual science must now take on conscious responsibility for the destiny of America...*

Can we perhaps see in these two events (Hurricane Katrina and 9-11) a kind of psychic shock to the soul of America, a shock that ideally would awaken the heart center of the continent and the heart mission of our movement? And did we not perhaps witness in the Barak Obama phenomena, which followed these two events, something of the heart chakra of our country seeking to open...for good or ill...in response, no less, to an unusual figure from Chicago?

And did not the financial crisis of 2008 and the gulf oil spill of 2010 represent yet another set of shocks to these two key axis points of our continent: the civilizational axis point of New York City and the ecological axis point of the Gulf of Mexico?

### **The Keys to the Kingdom**

Just weeks prior to the Katrina event these themes were already beginning to stir powerfully at the "Being Awake" conference held in Ann Arbor 2005 where the entire Vostand came as guests and presenters. At one workshop Sergei Prokofieff was bringing together two important indications of Rudolf Steiner: the one—that a great culmination or renewal of the anthroposophical impulse must occur in our time through the fulfillment of what has come to be called the Michael Prophecy, that is, the combined working of the Platonists and the reborn Aristotelians, a deed, he suggests anyway, we are still awaiting. The second indication: that there is a new class of elemental and hierarchical beings who participated in the Michael school and who wish to incarnate as group souls into communities of anthroposophists where sufficient harmony or karmic order has been achieved, and whose presence can make possible white magical deeds of great significance, deeds upon which it is possible the entire destiny of the world new depends.

Now here again are thoughts to awaken by:

*That I as a human being, as a westerner and as a student of spiritual science, together with my fellow human beings and colleagues, through our inner work and outer deeds, or lack thereof, are responsible for the fate of the Western world, for how deeply we sink into the abyss, for how violently the blows of karma fall...*

How much blood must be spilled by wars and natural disasters before this message stirs our hearts and wills, before we realize the immense responsibility laid into our hearts by consciously taking up spiritual scientific impulses and by uniting our karma with the Michaelic movement on earth?

Have we considered the possibility, for example, that whether or not certain individuals and karmic groupings both inside *and* outside the Anthroposophical Society find a way to meet, understand one another and work together, often across the abyss of social antipathy, forming vessels for the decent of higher knowledge and higher beings, could be the deciding factor in whether two countries a thousand miles a way go to war, or whether a certain natural disaster takes human life or whether a certain man made disaster comes to pass at all? This may sound extreme, but I would suggest it actually lies in the direction our thoughts need to go if we would feel the necessary earnestness emanating from the events of 9/11 and hurricane Katrina.<sup>5</sup>

Do we not witness in the “vortex of forces” formed by hurricane Katrina, a destructive physical manifestation of the Pentecostal “vortex of forces” that can and must come into being supersensibly through the harmonious working together of groups of spiritually striving human beings?

*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*  
(Mathew 16:19 English Standard Version).

Have we not indeed been given, through our relationship to Rudolf Steiner and spiritual science, the keys to the kingdom? Even if we are only a kind of ferment within the world wide life of humanity, I would suggest that as human beings empowered by spiritual science, we can choose to feel ourselves responsible for the whole earth, as westerners we can choose to feel ourselves responsible for the fate of western civilization, and as Americans we can choose to feel ourselves responsible for America. The message of 9/11 and of Hurricane Katrina rings out:

*The keys to the heavenly, human and elemental kingdoms are now in our hands...if we will but take hold of our responsibility and grasp them...*

To the degree this is true, we can therefore say:

*No matter what other people and forces we might be able to point to as standing behind the great tragedies of our time, the greatest responsibility lies with those who have been in a position to “bind on earth” through their co-working and deeds, the new Michaelic elementals and group soul beings and, having failed to do so, have let loose into the world the forces that could lead to a 9/11 and a Katrina...*

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<sup>5</sup> Whereas Sergei Prokofieff appears to see this heightened co-working as something that must occur primarily among anthroposophists of different karmic streams, I would suggest that, *in addition*, it must occur between anthroposophists and many of our fellow Michaelites who are working outside our own movement. These are two poles, I would suggest, of one deed, and they both must be worked at simultaneously. More on this later in this essay.

### **The Chalice of the Central Region**

Etheric life forces pour into the heartland of North America from Europe, running backwards along the current of the Gulf Stream and her many tributaries. These forces flow into the continent through two primary portals or gateways: a northern gateway, which is connected with the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway; and a southern gateway, which is connected to the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River network.

What flows in the northern gate, which we could call the Gate of the Sun, bears forces connected to the mysteries of Northern Europe, the Celtic and Arthurian and Norse spiritual life, while what flows in the southern gate, which we could call the Gate of the Moon, is more connected to the mysteries of Southern Europe, the Grail stream, as well as Muslim, Catholic, Greek and old Egyptian influences. Looked at imaginatively, the Mississippi and her brother and sister rivers in the central region form an immense grail chalice, and sitting in this chalice, like a sun-host, are the Great Lakes. New Orleans is situated in a very special place in relation to this Southern portal and to the foundation of this chalice, just as Chicago sits in a very special relation to the Northern portal and to the cup of the chalice.

When we bring the power of inspiration to this imagination, we can take it further still. Then we can see that very different soul forces are active in the people and the land as we move from south to north along this chalice. In the south (Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Kentucky, and parts of Missouri and Texas, for example), the forces of the sentient soul are more strongly active. Moving northward we arrive in states and regions where the intellectual soul forces predominate (Illinois, Iowa, Ohio, Indiana, Kansas and Nebraska, for example). Further north, in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and the Dakotas, the forces of the consciousness soul gain strength. Descending from Canada and the far north (indeed even from Russia), meanwhile, we can feel the forces of the Spirit Self, like a dove descending into the Great Lakes.

The union of all these streams, centered in the Chicago region (but extending across the whole of North America), creates what I call a 'Pentecostal spiritual vortex' formed by higher beings that bear impulses for the transformation of the sentient, intellectual and consciousness soul forces in North America, that they may be placed in the service of the Spirit Self and of the Christ impulse. It is this vortex which rays out the impulses of anthroposophia across the North American continent. In addition, many, many other smaller vortices, like chakras, lie all along this north-south corridor and throughout the continent. A rich field of spiritual work and research awaits us here, work that is necessary if we wish to unite our spiritual scientific striving with the actual forces and destiny of this continent, bringing Christian occult forces to bear upon the transformation of the American spirit, soul and landscape, and thus avert, or at least turn to the good, the great tragedies and disasters that certainly lie in our future.

This is a work that can only arise, however, when undertaken in the spirit of Pentecost, that is, when undertaken by students of spiritual science working together in harmony, bringing questions together and receiving answers together, thus forming together vessels for spiritual insight and revelation.

## **Katrina and the Ahrimanic Mysteries of Ancient Mexico<sup>6</sup>**

The resistance to the work just described, however, is very great indeed and this leads us to turn our attention to another network of forces that also find their way into North America through these two gates described earlier. These forces are connected to black magical practices that found a home in the time before Christ in the region that is now modern day Mexico. Rudolf Steiner has described these mysteries, which involved the ritual torture and murder of other human beings, as having the goal of destroying in human beings their will and capacity for incarnation on the earth and of turning the whole earth, thereby, into a kind of machine, a life-less desert <sup>7</sup>

He also describes how these efforts reached a peak at the time of Christ through the work of a great black magician who wished to prevent the mystery of Golgotha through the impact of these black magical practices on nature. Steiner describes how this effort was prevented through the deeds of a great initiate who incarnated at this time, exactly the same time that the Mystery of Golgotha was taking place in the Middle East, and who vanquished this black magician. This great initiate is named by Rudolf Steiner as Vitzliputzli.

A full discussion of the Ahrimanic mysteries of ancient Mexico and the deed of Vitzliputzli is not practical in the scope of this short work, but it is important to understand that, as indicated by Rudolf Steiner, the forces connected to these Ahrimanic mysteries have become particularly active again in our time, the age of the consciousness soul. These are the forces that stand behind the intense mechanization of all aspects of human life through modern industry and technology. These are also the forces that stand behind the darkest aspect of the Katrina event, whose aim was, among other things, to evoke immense waves of fear in human beings, fear that would lead people to “evacuate” their bodies and souls and in turn lame their will for incarnation—and that would in turn leave New Orleans open to a much deeper Ahrimanic impulse in the course of its “rebuilding.”

Thus we can think of these ahrimanic forces as entering our civilization in two primary ways—they enter through the gate of the Sun as the force of materialistic science and technology—forces which find their greatest concentration in the universities and centers of business and industry that are most firmly rooted in the northern half of our country. And they enter through the gate of the Moon as the forces that would strip away the dignity of other human beings and the life bearing qualities of the natural world, as came to expression for example in the practice of slavery that was focused on the southern half of our country. In the last 50 years these two have increasingly formed an unholy alliance which we can picture forth especially in the genetic manipulation of plants and animals—research and work that is highly concentrated in the heartland and along the Mississippi river.

In this light it is possible to see how hurricanes, tornadoes and other extreme nature events are in part “fostered” by the progressive “stripping away” of the life forces of the country and of the central region which has been enacted at a steady and intensifying pace since the Europeans first “discovered” the New World. From the destruction of the prairie, the buffalo,

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<sup>6</sup> I have chosen to replace the term “Mexican Mysteries” which is common among anthroposophists with the phrase “Ahrimanic Mysteries of Ancient Mexico” because of the inherent inaccuracy of the former term, and its potential for great misunderstanding.

<sup>7</sup> See the lecture series: Inner Impulses in Evolution, Rudolf Steiner.

and the virgin forests, to the entombing of the Mississippi river and the genetic modification of food crops—the mechanizing, life destroying impulse that has its spiritual origins in the Ahrimanic mysteries of ancient Mexico has been steadily gaining strength. In the age of the Second Coming of Christ in the etheric, this takes the form of an attack on the life-bearing nature of the physical world, which the Christ being bears as a kind of second scourging.

Just as the hearts and stomachs were once torn out of the victims in the Ahrimanic mysteries of ancient Mexico, now we see these same impulses working to tear out the heart and stomach of the North American continent and of the North America peoples, with a special focus on making uninhabitable the heart center of the continent, the heartland, the central region, from whence should arise spiritual impulses, spiritual vortices, capable of harmonizing the great polarities of this continent.

This striving was pictured forth in a remarkable way in post-Katrina New Orleans: a once vibrant city of a half million people now devastated, hollowed out, made uninhabitable, it appeared, except for criminals—an image that in turn awoke intense waves of fear, both conscious and subconscious, in the American populous.

And yet we might ask: is this dark, hollowed out image of post-Katrina New Orleans accurate, does it tell the true story of the mystery of Katrina, or is there a deeper ‘occult reality’ hidden behind the scenes of the devastation, something from which we can derive hope, something which can guide our efforts to work in a healing and transformative way in the aftermath of Katrina?

### **World Catastrophes in the Light of the Eleusinian Mysteries**

One way we can begin to better understand the deeper, inner aspect of natural and often man-made catastrophes, in general, is to see how they reenact in a new form initiation processes that were the focus of the ancient mysteries. Let us consider, in this light, the ancient Greek Mysteries of Eleusis, which were centered on the myth of Persephone. The Eleusinian mysteries were concerned with the increasing encroachment of Ahriman (pictured as Hades) into the depths of the earth (Demeter) and into the human soul forces (Persephone). The Eleusinian initiates recognized that Persephone, a being Rudolf Steiner tells us dwells within the depths of the earth and who is like the soul of the plant world, was increasingly falling under the spell of Ahriman, and they recognized that this fact had its counterpart in human beings, particularly in the hardening and darkening of human etheric and astral bodies.

The first stage of the Eleusinian mysteries thus involved a loosening of those etheric and astral forces that were being hardened by Ahriman’s influence, making the soul receptive again to the spirit, and quickening the spirit’s will for incarnation. This was accomplished through certain rites which evoked in the human soul something akin to what is evoked in the soul of the earth through plowing, which on the feeling level amounts to a kind of awe-filled grief. This was the stage of catharsis. Greek tragedy accomplished something similar in a public form and this may have been one of the reasons Aeschylus, the father of Greek Tragedy, was accused of betraying the Eleusinian mysteries.

The relationship between the soul and the earth depths was deeply understood in these mysteries. It was understood, for example, that a catharsis produced in the right way in the souls of people also liberated forces deep within the earth, making agriculture more fruitful,

and weakening the influence of Ahriman within the earth. Hence the connection between agriculture and soul transformation was not simply symbolic: the initiates understood the real connections involved between the soul life of the people and the life of the depths of the earth.

The Eleusinian initiates also understood that these hardening forces within the earth were deeply connected with the deceased, the ancestors, who were increasingly chained through their fallen moral life and their growing intellect to Hades, to Ahriman. Through the Eleusinian initiation, the disciple—and through them their ancestors—could be liberated to a degree from this weight, from this bondage, and gain a foretaste of the soul's liberation and immortality.

We see these mysteries enacted again on a higher level in the Mystery of Golgotha where the intense grief of the holy women—an intensity of grief never before seen on the earth—helped loosen the depths of the earth, preparing the earth for the penetration of Christ, like a seed planted into plowed soil. And we see how Christ, through this deed, liberated the souls of the dead bound to the underworld, freed them from Hades and, in doing so, opened all human souls, and the earth itself, to a fresh in-pouring of the Spirit. The catharsis of grief played a similar role in the resurrection of Lazarus: without the tears of the Holy women and his own, Christ could not have worked down to the level of the physical-etheric body of Lazarus.

We could summarize the stages of the Eleusinian mysteries in this way:

**Catharsis:** In the initial stage of the mysteries the disciple is led into his or her own soul depths where they witness, semi-consciously, in an awe inspiring manner the reality of their fallen soul forces. They are led to feel, we could say, the parts of their own soul that have become subject to the demonic forces of the underworld and this evokes great grief and longing for divine liberation. Through this process Ahrimanic resistance in the body and soul to the incarnation of the spirit is exorcised to a degree. The soul's relation to the deceased and the elemental world also come into greater harmony through this process. This is the stage of *tears*.

**Illumination:** The disciple is now ripe to begin to be taught, in full consciousness what he or she has experienced semi-consciously in the stage of the catharsis. The disciple is taught the mystery of the descent of the human soul into matter and the resulting fall of the soul forces and they are shown how the true destiny of humanity is to purify and transform their soul forces and eventually transfigure all things earthly. The disciple also learns about the myriad and concrete connections between the life of the earth, the realm of the deceased and their own soul and they begin to recognize the long path of spiritual and moral development, over lifetimes, that will be necessary to accomplish their own and the earth's transformation. This is the stage of *sweat*.

**Union:** Through these teachings and through spiritual and moral practices, the disciple becomes ripe for higher stages of initiation. At the highest stage of the Eleusinian mysteries, the initiate, fully united with his or her own spiritual individuality, gains the capacity to unite with the depths of the earth. He or she becomes one who can serve the reconnection of the upper and lower worlds, transform demonic beings in the earth and even liberate, to a degree,

the dead who have fallen into the underworld. The image of the Pieta conveys something of this stage imaginatively. It is an image of the purified soul forces of the earth receiving the fullness of the courageous spirit forces of the human being. This is the stage of *blood*.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Initiation of Humanity through Natural Catastrophes**

Meditating on the Eleusinian Mysteries in this way we can come to understand that there is a profound longing in the soul depths of the earth to be united with the true spirit forces of the human being and this, in turn, can allow us to understand all manner of tragedies that beset the world today, particularly those that result in the death (the spilling of blood) of innocent human beings. This can be understood, somewhat clumsily, in the following manner:

When human beings fail to unite their higher spiritual nature, through their inner work and outer deeds, with their own soul and with the life of the earth, then they and the earth become increasingly open to the hardening, deadening influence of Ahriman. This results in a capturing or imprisoning of elemental beings within the earth, who then become subject to sub-natural demonic beings who can fan their disappointment in human beings into hatred toward humanity.

To better understand this, we can think of the elemental beings as being like innocent children, some of whom have been abused and neglected by human beings and who through this abuse, become filled with hatred, and in turn become abusers themselves—a phenomenon we regularly witness in the human realm. The hatred that fills these elemental beings becomes a caricature of the earth's genuine longing to be embraced, warmed and ennobled by the spirit of the human being—and this takes the form of *lust for human blood*, for the spilling of human blood, fueled by hatred towards human beings for all they have withheld from the earth and the elemental world. Here we see a materialized distortion of the true communion between matter and spirit that arises, or should arise through the etherization of the blood.<sup>9</sup>

It is also important to note that this blood lust is most often “born” by the most pure and innocent of human beings, for it is often these souls who in their life before birth have resolved upon a willingness to sacrifice their lives, if necessary, on behalf of the earth and of humanity.

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<sup>8</sup> These mysteries and the last stage of “Union” in particular, were the deeper background to a remarkable series of conversation between Rudolf Steiner and Countess Johanna Keyserlingk (see [The Birth of a New Agriculture: Koberwitz 1924](#), pages 81 to 94). When understood in the light of the Eleusinian mysteries, we can see more clearly the significance of the fact that these conversations, on these topics, occurred at the same time and place as the Agriculture Course which gave birth to the biodynamic agriculture movement.

<sup>9</sup> The phenomena I have described here in relation to elemental beings also holds good for many deceased who have crossed the threshold with a darkened consciousness, and who, according to Rudolf Steiner, can find themselves seduced by Ahriman into assisting in the creation of natural disasters and catastrophes as a means to appease their own great suffering on the other side of the threshold. There is a mystery here regarding the infliction of pain or suffering, namely that those who inflict pain on others are actually attempting to ameliorate their own suffering. Many incarnated human souls who succumb to acts of violence are also in a similar position to the elemental beings and deceased souls here described.

Nonetheless, it must be stressed that it is never the highest will of the spiritual world that human beings die in the catastrophes that result from this blood lust. But the spiritual world cannot entirely prevent disasters from occurring that do indeed spill human blood because there is a kind of justice in these events—the tithe to the earth must be paid somehow or another. Furthermore, when blood is spilled in this way, there actually is a loosening of the Ahrimanic forces of the earth that occurs, primarily through the waves of grief and the outpouring of love that arise in response and then envelop the earth, but also through the fact that an innocent blood sacrifice has indeed been made, which often has the effect of redeeming some of the hardened elemental beings and deceased souls who have played a role in the event.

Thus we could say, that to the degree that human beings do not learn to freely unite the spiritual blood of their higher selves with their earthly deeds and serve and transfigure the earth thereby, to that degree will earthly tragedies of all kinds be necessary in order to keep the soul of the human being and of the earth from succumbing completely to Ahrimanic influence. Rudolf Steiner has described this same reality as follows:

Mankind, however, must depend on its own free will; and if, out of its own free volition, mankind fails to grasp such possibilities [to work toward the spiritualization of the earth], the scale-beam sinks to the other side. What could have been reached on the spiritual path is now discharged through the blood. What we experience in our catastrophic times is an equalizing of the scales. Mankind who has rejected spiritualization must be forced to accept it. This can happen through a physical catastrophe.<sup>10</sup>

Spiritual research also reveals that many of those who die in these great tragedies undergo a great flash of illumination in their deaths, in which the mysteries described here are revealed to them and the meaning of their deaths is conveyed in dramatic images. A seed is thus planted in their souls that can lead to a great awakening to the spirit on the other side of the threshold or in their next earthly life.

In addition, the suffering entailed by these tragic events creates the possibility for Christ, and for other lofty beings of the spiritual world, to work through these events in a special way on behalf of humanity, in order to restore the balance of karma in human affairs and rebuild the connections between the heavens and the earth. Thus on a higher level, these events can indeed bring forth beautiful fruit, albeit through much tragedy and suffering.

Thus, we can see in the great tragedies and catastrophes of the modern world all the stages of the Eleusinian mysteries described above:

1) The catharsis caused by the event in the souls of the friends and relatives of the loved ones who have died (and those who have survived), as well as in the souls of human beings connected to them through culture and nation or purely through their humanity, as occurs in the largest of catastrophes. This catharsis and the outpouring of love which it leads to can

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<sup>10</sup> Steiner, Rudolf, The Mission of the Archangel Michael (The Anthroposophic Press, New York 1961) page 143.

extend all the way to the hardened elemental beings and deceased souls who unwittingly played a role in perpetrating the event.

2) The illumination that occurs for those who have died in these events, and often among the living as well, which allows them to begin to understand the deeper purposes of world evolution and the drama that stands behind their deaths or the deaths of their loved ones.

3) The opportunity these events provide for Christ and other high spiritual beings to unite with groups of human beings and plant seeds for deep forces of spiritual renewal into the life of the earth.

Again, it is the ideal, the goal of the spiritual world that these catharses and illuminations and spiritual deeds of union and reunion occur through free deeds on the part of human beings on this side of the threshold on the basis of spiritual development and moral imaginations. Until such deeds occur in sufficient number and strength, however, the initiation of humanity through wars, murders, accidents, natural disasters and other catastrophes can only continue and must needs even increase.

These catastrophes thus open the door for two possibilities: they open the door for spiritually awakened human beings to participate in and respond to them in such a way that the forces of renewal that come into being through these events are anchored more deeply in the earth and in human beings, and they also open the door for ahrimanicly inspired human activities to more and more take hold. Which of these possibilities takes hold most strongly will depend, as stated above, more and more on the work or lack thereof among those human beings who are in possession of the knowledge made available to the world through spiritual science. In the next section therefore, I would like to turn more fully to the tasks facing the contemporary community of students of spiritual science who feel the awakening call of catastrophic events in the life of humanity and/or within their individual destinies.

## Part II: Embodying Anthroposophy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

To form an inner connection and relationship with Michael, the Spirit of our Time, we must come to feel ourselves responsible for the cosmic age in which we live and for what is striving to emerge in the evolution of humanity in this time through the work of divine spiritual beings. Through our encounter with and study of anthroposophy we can awaken to this sense of responsibility and be infused with new impulses in our destiny.

For students of anthroposophy to fulfill their task in our time, however, this relationship with Michael, the time spirit, must be brought into right relationship with the “Spirit of our Place on Earth,” that is, with the spiritual beings and earthly realities connected to the culture into which we were born and the country, region, city, community and geography where we actually dwell on earth. From one perspective, we can look upon these beings and realities as a whole as being connected to “Sophia” if we think of Sophia, the divine feminine as being connected to the mysteries of soul and of matter (or space) while thinking of Michael as being connected with the mysteries of spirit and of time.<sup>11</sup>

The birth of anthroposophy itself can be conceived of as a result of this union of Michael and Sophia in the inner being of Rudolf Steiner, that is, as the result of Rudolf Steiner’s effort to unite his purely spiritual experiences in the School of Michael, which awakened him to and guided him in his mission in the larger sense, with the realities of the particular place and time in which he lived. The fact that anthroposophy is a gift to all mankind and all peoples and nations is not diminished by acknowledging that Rudolf Steiner through the karma of his individual destiny, worked with special intensity to forge a new and genuine relationship to the Spirit among European peoples as a whole, and that he himself was a living example of the true German spirit.<sup>12</sup>

A careful reading of Steiner’s biography will reveal the great care which he took to connect both to the past legacy of the spiritual impulses that were living in his “place on earth” as well as to what was living among his contemporaries. Steiner clearly felt a responsibility to connect to and build on the legacy of all that came before him and all that was taking place around him, even when he became painfully aware that all that had come before him and all that was working in the present were not able to reach with genuine insight into the spiritual world or provide a real foundation for the new spiritual revelation that Michael wanted to

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<sup>11</sup> I first came across the term “Sprit of my Place on Earth” in a verse Rudolf Steiner gave during World War I and which was shared widely in this country after the event of 9/11. The verse reads as follows:

*Spirit of my place on earth  
Reveal the light of your age  
to the Christ endowed soul  
That striving it may find you  
In the chorus of the spheres of peace  
Sounding with praise and power  
To the Christ devoted human sense.*

As this verse makes clear, we cannot easily separate the spiritual beings connected to time and those connected to place. From a higher vantage point these realities flow together: time becomes space and space becomes time. For example, Michael was once the guiding spirit of particular peoples connected to particular places on earth, whereas he is now the time spirit for all of humanity.

<sup>12</sup> Note here Rudolf Steiner’s statement that he had been born in America, he would have developed anthroposophy out of the work of Emerson.

bring into the world. Anthroposophy really was born from an immense inner struggle in the soul of Rudolf Steiner with this reality, particularly as it manifested in his relationship to his teacher and colleague, Carl Julius Schroer.

In truth all the gifts we have received from Rudolf Steiner are the result of immense struggles in his soul to reconcile, to come to terms with, the gulf between spiritual and earthly realities. Again and again, out of these struggles, we could even call them labor pains, we witness that something new came to birth, something unexpected, unknown perhaps even to many beings in the spiritual world, something that represented a new and creative “solution” if you will to these tensions. It is this capacity, so beautifully exemplified by Rudolf Steiner in his own destiny, that is especially in need of development at this time among students of spiritual science who live in America—and it is this capacity, I would suggest, that is being called for by the catastrophic events occurring here, such as Hurricane Katrina and 9/11. Anthroposophy was not born once through Rudolf Steiner, she must be born again and again through each of us and through our co-working. How do we accomplish this?

### **The Soul Drama of the Anthroposophist**

In his lectures published under the title Awakening to Community, Rudolf Steiner describes three stages in the inner development of students of anthroposophy or what he calls “three acts in the soul drama of the anthroposophist.” The first stage he describes as a “moral-religious act” in which we completely withdraw our will from “what the civilization of recent centuries has produced.” In other words, we recognize, through anthroposophy, how alien modern civilization is to our true inner being and we inwardly withdraw from it, in a sense we declare our refusal to support and participate in the materialistic trends of our time, we turn our will inward, toward the depths.

The second act of this soul drama Steiner connects to an intensive striving for supersensible knowledge. At this stage, we live with our whole heart and soul into the life of knowledge as we receive it in anthroposophy—anthroposophical knowledge becomes our life blood, our nourishment, our source of strength and the purpose of our lives. What would normally pour into us from the civilization outside of us is thus replaced by the inner current of anthroposophy.

When we have passed through these first two stages, Steiner then describes how our souls can begin to live in a mood of inner pain and conflict—a mood that can reach tragic proportions, because in one part of our being, in the deepest part of our being, we have, in a certain sense, completely separated ourselves from the destiny of the outer world. Here we confront a painful irony: our own lives have found a new source of meaning but to accomplish this we feel we have had to divorce ourselves from the world and from the parts of ourselves connected to the worldly currents of our destiny—a world that, after all, we still inhabit and that we also desire to serve. Our path has brought us up against a kind of threshold which we could also describe as a sort of abyss between ourselves and the world.

It is out of living with and suffering with the pain of this separation, that Rudolf Steiner tells us we can arrive at the third act, or the third stage of this drama, which he describes as a “Sophia awakening,” an awakening of the inner wisdom of our souls in such a way that we feel our own destiny re-united with the destiny of our particular time and place in a new and profound manner. We reunite with the earth and her people, now from a higher source: we

are reborn as world citizens from the ‘confines’ of our anthroposophical mystery school and become able to participate in the destiny of our particular place and time in a new way as universal spirits.

This act of the drama, this “Sophia awakening” I would suggest, is deeply connected to what I have described above as finding our connection to the “Spirit of our Place on Earth.” What Rudolf Steiner is describing is the path whereby the universal seed of anthroposophy that has been born in us dies into the needs and challenges of our particular time and place and into the failings and weaknesses of our particular human personality and destiny.

This is a drama marked by crisis, by conflict, by great inner struggle with our double. Through this process of soul emptying something quite new can arise: new born capacities and new born tasks that reach right down in their effects to our current time and place on earth. We could even say of this act of the drama: *Anthroposophy herself dies in us and is reborn*--she dies in us as an abstract teaching, as a body of knowledge, as a personal spiritual path, as a historical phenomenon, and she reappears as a living spiritual being, weaving and shining through the all people and particulars of our daily lives.

### **The Soul Drama of the Anthroposophical Society**

It was, I would suggest, a lack in the number of students of spiritual science who were able to pass through the third stage of this drama, with its self-confrontation, its fiery death and rebirth, which created the conditions for the burning of the first Goetheanum, as well as for Rudolf Steiner’s premature death. And it is this task I would suggest that stands before the students of spiritual science still today as one of the greatest needs and as a precondition for a renewed working of Rudolf Steiner in our midst. A human community for anthroposophia must arise and can only arise when anthroposophia herself has passed through a death and rebirth in the inner being of a sufficient number of students of spiritual science.<sup>13</sup>

In saying this, I in no way wish to diminish the importance of the first two stages of the “soul drama of the anthroposophist” described above, nor the importance of the Anthroposophical Society being a place that supports and cultivates these capacities. Indeed, without the ongoing cultivation of the first two capacities--the reversing of our wills and the intensive studying of anthroposophy--the third stage becomes impossible. In this sense, the Society must be a place that offers human beings a complete path, or organism of initiation.<sup>14</sup> But the fact remains that these first two stages are not sufficient, in and of themselves, to provide a means for the fulfillment of the mission of the Anthroposophical Society. Rather, a leading number of members who have passed through the third stage and then, in addition, find a

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<sup>13</sup> What I am suggesting here is in many ways confirmed by the after-death communication of Rudolf Steiner to his close student and colleague Countess Joanna Von Keyserlink, the end of which reads: “Those people are guilty of my departure that suppressed the culture of the heart. Had they through their hearts penetrated into the depths they would have found the power to fulfill the task of their times.” *The Birth of a New Agriculture*, page 211. We need only read these words while keeping in mind that this third act in the “soul drama of the anthroposophist” is clearly connected to the deepening of the heart forces which allows a union with the depths of earthly existence (our place on earth), whereas the first two acts are connected to the will and the thinking, respectively.

<sup>14</sup> I hope it goes without saying that these acts of the soul drama of the anthroposophists are not something that are accomplished once and for all, but rather represent an organism of spiritual practice, each stage of which one must work to deepen and harmonize with the others during ones entire life, even when one is aware of being more strongly focused on one particular stage of the journey.

way to work in harmony with one another: this alone can make possible the vessel required by the spiritual world for the fulfillment of the mission of the anthroposophical movement.

The demand for this transformation in the community of anthroposophists became heightened, I would suggest, when Rudolf Steiner took on the presidency of the newly re-founded Anthroposophical Society in 1924. Then the condition of the spiritual world placed on Rudolf Steiner became, I believe, something that could be prosaically characterized in this fashion:

*Unless a sufficient number of your students become able, with the help of the deed you shall perform in re-founding the Society, to connect with the being of anthroposophia directly, vertically, as it were, and not simply through you as teacher, and in this way become able to form a real esoteric community vessel for this being, a vessel in which you can freely move and provide leadership, unless this occurs you may not remain on earth to guide this community, indeed, you simply will not have the forces to hold your physical body together. Your ability to remain on the earth is now entirely dependent on the inner work of the community around you.*

We can understand these words better if we consider how prior to the re-founding of the Society, Rudolf Steiner had, on the one hand, been the spiritual center of the anthroposophical movement<sup>15</sup> on earth, while outwardly holding no position in the earthly Anthroposophical Society, which served primarily exoteric, social and administrative functions. At the re-founding, however, Rudolf Steiner took on the leading exoteric role in the earthly Society and gave it a new form, in the hope that the Society could pass from being a largely exoteric entity and become instead, the earthly *and* spiritual center of the movement. For this to be realized, however, it became necessary that Rudolf Steiner himself be liberated in a certain sense, from being the spiritual center of the movement: for that center point needed now to be an esoteric community ensouled by the being of anthroposophia herself who, like Mary in the center of the disciples at Pentecost, could become the vessel for the movement, that is, for the revelation of Christ in His second coming upon the earth. It is not that Rudolf Steiner himself became less important; it is that Rudolf Steiner needed an *esoteric* community to form in order for him to take on an *exoteric* leadership role in this community. And for this vessel to be formed, a growing number of his students needed, through their relationship to the Foundation Stone and the deed of the Christmas Conference, to become able to form a new kind of relationship to one another and to the being of anthroposophia. The calling for this new community rings out clearly, again and again, from the records of the Christmas Conference.

And now we could ask: what was the consequence of the fact that this community was not able to completely fulfill this demand at that time, which led to Rudolf Steiner's premature death? The consequence was that the being of anthroposophia had to pass through this third stage in the life of humanity in a very different manner. Just as was described above in Part I with regard to the catastrophic events of our time, the initiation wrought by tragedy and by the spilling of human blood had to provide what conscious human spiritual development failed to provide. Thus, when a sufficient number of students of spiritual science were not

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<sup>15</sup> I am using the word 'movement' here as Rudolf Steiner did, to refer to the esoteric sources of anthroposophy in the spiritual world, and not as the sum total of anthroposophically-inspired institutions in the world.

able to reach a higher stage of development in which the mystery of the death and resurrection of anthroposophia in the human soul could be enacted within an esoteric community, then this mystery had to be enacted in the outer world through the tragic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup>

We could even say, with all the blood that was poured out upon the earth in WWII and subsequent wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the collective soul of humanity did indeed pass through something akin to the third stage of anthroposophical initiation described above, and through this, the being of anthroposophia did indeed come to life in the world wide life of humanity: her being was united, in a new way, with the collective soul of humanity. In other words, in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a kind of death took place for the inner being of anthroposophia through the myriad crises of the Anthroposophical Society and within the world at large. And out of the blood that was spilled and the pain that was suffered by human beings in the course of these tragic events, a supersensible vessel was indeed formed through which the Christ being was able to reunite with the earthly realm in His Second Coming.<sup>17</sup>

But what does this mean for us today? What it means for us, in the first place, is that today we must speak, as it were, of two Michael streams in the world. First, there is that stream which has come into being historically through the life work of Rudolf Steiner and all that has flowed from it in the positive sense—this we could call the Kingly stream of Michael. Then there is that stream which is rising up in a semi-conscious way in the will and feeling and thought life of human beings all over the world—often (usually) with no outer connection to this historical stream at all—this we could call the Shepherd stream of Michael.<sup>18</sup>

The kingly stream of Michael radiates to us from a particular center, the Goetheanum, from a particular institution and a particular history. The Shepherd stream of Michael, on the other hand, radiates to us from a multitude of initiatives and movements that have no particular center. These are the same two streams that, in the karmic microcosm of the Anthroposophical Society, Rudolf Steiner sought to unite through the deed of the Christmas Conference. In our time these streams are striving again toward a powerful convergence, a convergence that is necessary for the cultural breakthrough Rudolf Steiner predicted as possible to occur within Western civilization, in the time leading up to year 2033.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This is not to suggest that these tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would not have occurred at all if the Anthroposophical community had lived up to its task, it is simply to suggest that they could have taken a very different form.

<sup>17</sup> To understand this event more deeply and from another perspective, I would warmly encourage readers to study the work of Jessiah Ben Ahron “The Spiritual Event of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.”

<sup>18</sup> Of course, one can also speak of “Kings” and “Shepherds” among anthroposophists themselves. The truth is that these polarities find their reflection at all levels of life: within each human soul, within discrete organizations and movements, and within the world at large. Here I am pointing to how this polarity has come to be reflected within the worldwide community of Michaelites rather than within the context of the Anthroposophical Society and its members. The two, however, are intimately connected, as I will elaborate on in future installments of this essay.

<sup>19</sup> Many anthroposophists are not aware that Rudolf Steiner considered April 3, 33 AD, the date of the Mystery of Golgotha, as the actual beginning of the first Christian Millennium. Thus the year 2033, rather than the year 2000, represents the actual end of the twentieth century, from an esoteric Christian perspective. I will address this mystery in more depth in future installments of this essay.

What does this mean for those of us ready and willing to embark on the journey of this third stage of anthroposophical initiation in our time? It means that there is now a powerful inspiration there to support and guide us, namely the reborn being of anthroposophia who has now passed through this stage herself within the world wide life of humanity. She stands waiting to help us confront the deepest conflicts, weaknesses and failures of our own destiny so that we can place all we have gained from our connection to the historical stream of Michael in service to the deepest needs, realities, events and challenges of our own particular place and time.

### **Becoming a Living Bridge**

So many current dramas within the Anthroposophical Society and in the inner life of anthroposophists, I would suggest, derive from a lack of cognition of the above facts. We remain torn apart as a Society, torn between those who want us to honor and remain faithful to the central impulse of Rudolf Steiner and the Anthroposophical Society as it came into being historically, and those who feel called to the life of something new, something that is radiating in from the periphery and working in other movements as well as our own, something that is not contiguous with the earthly institution of the Society. Again and again, we swing like a pendulum between those who want us to deepen study and those who want us to build bridges, those who want to foster loyalty and those who want to foster breadth of soul.

And yet the truth is that these are two poles, two revelations of one being and it is our task in our time to weave them together into one living, shining garment: it is our task to be *both* profoundly loyal and faithful to the impulse of the Christmas Conference AND to be able to recognize that in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—indeed with the help of the Christmas Conference-- anthroposophia has been born also in world-wide life of humanity: her radiance shines to us from our humblest brothers and sisters who are our next door neighbors, if you will, and from a host of allied movements and spiritual streams working with equal diligence on behalf of the future.

To meet this reality, we must combine, just as Rudolf Steiner indicated, the greatest possible esotericism with the greatest possible openness, something he suggested we could only really accomplish with the help of the Christmas Conference deed. Only on this foundation can we each stand with the being of anthroposophia in our time, stand in her shoes and serve her impulses, as a living bridge, a living threshold across the sometimes seeming abyss that separates the Kings and the Shepherds.

For these two streams need each other to fulfill their common task. For on the one side we find the Kingly stream which is gifted with a conscious understanding of spiritual science and many disciplined vocations and practices and initiatives that are imbued with this knowledge. And yet this community has been lamed at the level of the heart, lamed as a community, so that the full flowering of her potential has yet to unfold. The other side of this movement, the Shepherd stream if you will, is emerging in an organic way from the actual conditions of the time, initiated, as it were, by the catastrophic events occurring around us, and yet it is also lamed by the lack of a full understanding of the inspiration which carries it forward and by the lack of a unifying impulse. This places it in constant danger of being compromised by materialistic culture, detoured into unfruitful paths or splintered into a million 'single causes.'

The proper uniting of these two streams, however, can only be consummated when a sufficient number of anthroposophists have passed through the third stage of their anthroposophical destiny and thus harmonized within themselves these two streams, and in doing so, become able thus to carry out esoteric deeds of worldwide significance--the kind of deeds that were needed and could have occurred in the early part of the twentieth century—the kind of deeds which must come forth now if we desire to avert or turn to the good the unfolding of even greater catastrophic events within the life of humanity. These deeds are analogous, in the highest sense, with the deeds of which the disciples of Christ became capable when, through the event of Pentecost, they were transformed into apostles, when, that is, they finally found their vertical connection to the Christ impulse which they had come to know on earth, in human form, through Christ Jesus.

### **The Further Paradox to be Overcome**

I realize that the idea “harmonizing” or “weaving together” spiritual currents at work both within and outside the present day Anthroposophical Society could easily give rise to the idea that I am proposing here some kind of merger between the Anthroposophical Society and one or more other unnamed movements or organizations or even people outside the Society. In fact, I am suggesting no such thing. Here we confront a kind of paradox that again and again has proved to be an obstacle to the harmonious coming together of different people who are equally devoted to work of Rudolf Steiner and thus to the fulfillment of the Society’s task in our time.

The paradox lies in this: on one hand, the profound archetype of the Anthroposophical Society as a public-esoteric organization (which we could picture imaginatively in the form of the Foundation Stone) has been brought into existence through Rudolf Steiner and is in the process of realization. The Christmas Conference impulse is alive and well and its realization remains one of the greatest tasks we can devote ourselves to at this time. On the other hand, the capacity to incarnate and embody this impulse in a fashion that meets the demands of the time, will forever be lacking unless a sufficient number of members go through the kind of “turning inside out” initiation described here, an initiation that can allow us to catch up with the biography of the being of anthroposophia, with the ever evolving Christ impulse, and with the moral development demanded by our times, and therefore gain the spiritual world’s support for our efforts to bring to life this archetype, this impulse within the context of this moment of history.

When we go through this process, we gain the power not only to connect horizontally, as it were, in a healthy way with the diverse spiritual, social and economic movements working in our midst but *also* to connect vertically in a powerful manner with the true archetype of the Christmas Conference Society. We gain the power to recognize that in all our work, both inside and outside the Anthroposophical Society--every meeting and every act--represents an opportunity to foster the incarnation of this impulse, this archetype. In a sense, we become able to see the archetype of the Society separate from its historical forms, *without* thereby forsaking those forms, but rather we find a new will to transform the outer forms of the Society in accordance with our experience of the true archetype, just we find a new will to transform society at large in accordance with this same archetype.

This is the paradox, I would suggest, we must learn to live; the karma we must learn to harmonize. On the one hand, no person or movement outside the Society holds the key to

unlocking the Society's archetype, that it may become embodied on earth--only the sincere and active members hold this key. On the other hand, the members will never find this key unless they come to recognize the power and manner and way in which the being of anthroposophia and the etheric Christ have been and are now working in mighty events, mighty movements and mighty individualities outside of the Anthroposophical Society. Only in this way can the work of building the Society as a temple be carried out truly in service to, and truly on behalf of, and truly in spiritual partnership with--all mankind.