

The Way of the Passion— Crowning with Thorns

THE INNER MEETING with the spiritual Thorn-crowning, which follows on the Foot-washing and the Scourging, reveals fundamental spiritual facts and laws no less important than those disclosed by the Foot-washing and the Scourging. It reveals the kind of adjustment, desired and intended by the Spiritual World, of the relationship between *frontal* and *dorsal*. For this relationship will be just as consciously regulated under the Christ-impulse as the relationships of above and below, left and right are regulated by spiritual work, destiny and world-history.

To understand on what the relationship of frontal and dorsal depends, we must first observe the human being from this point of view. And indeed we must begin by considering, in its spiritual bearing, the “simple” fact that Man, in perception, speech, action and gait, is organized in a *forward* direction. The frontal Man is the Man who perceives, speaks, and uses his hands and feet, while the dorsal Man is blind, dumb, and incapable of action. The physical organization of Man expresses the inner fact that the active Man is provided for in



Die Bibel in Bildern, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1789-1853)

Adam and Eve Hide from the Presence of the Lord

“Hiding from the Lord” describes the condition of humanity fallen from etheric to material consciousness, and thus separated from perception and knowledge of their Creator. “Where art thou?” called the Lord God. Adam answered, “I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”—Genesis 3:7-11

front and the passive Man, behind. All the courage needed for life on Earth finds not only its expression, but also its organs in the frontal Man; all devotion to the governance of the higher and the unknown in existence is located in the dorsal Man.

But Man—as he has become since the Fall—does not represent exclusively courage and devotion. He is, on the contrary, so organized that Fear and Shame play at least as important a part as courage for life and devotion to destiny. For the two basic elemental forces which entered into Man through the Fall are precisely Fear and Shame. This fact is indicated in the Bible when we are told

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that Adam hid himself from the Lord God, and that the first human pair saw “that they were naked.” Their eyes were indeed “opened,” but at the same time they became aware of their “nakedness.” Lucifer certainly kept his promise: the senses of the frontal Man were opened to the outer world, but at the same time Shame entered into him. And the power which expelled the dorsal Man from Paradise and drove him to flight was the power of Fear. Since then, the frontal Man has been filled with Shame, and the dorsal Man filled with Fear. For these two forces prevent Man from experiencing “Paradise,” on whose Threshold the Guardian stands.

Shame causes him to turn from Paradise, and Fear holds him at a distance from it. But the activity of these forces is for the most part hidden in Man’s subconsciousness. There they form the curtain concealing the Spiritual World. Only a small part of these forces penetrates into the experience of consciousness in the physical body. But when consciousness rises into the etheric body it becomes aware of those forces. And it meets them in the etheric body in a way which corresponds to the character of the ether-body as the *time*-body; for it experiences Shame as the elemental force which conceals the past, and Fear as the force veiling the future.

For the organization of Man in his ether-body is the opposite of his physical organization. This applies not only to sex, but also to the relationship between the frontal and the dorsal man. Whereas in the physical body Man is so constituted that he looks forward, in the etheric body he looks backward. The seeing—that is, the “frontal”—man is, in the ether body, the man that looks towards the past, and the “dorsal” man faces forward, in the direction of the future.

But this organization is more fully developed in a higher sphere during Man’s life after death; there Man experiences the Kamaloka-[Desire World] state in a backward direction, and the Devachan-[Thought World] condition on into the future. But this arrangement is not, as a rule, elaborated during the life between birth and death, and the cause of that is that Shame and Fear conceal the Spiritual World. These two forces are the “inward” karma of the Luciferic and Ahrimanic influences

in Man. They keep Man back from consciously entering the Spiritual World. But the same forces become wings to the soul when Shame is converted into Conscience, and Fear into Reverence. For Shame and Fear are the rays flashing from the two-edged sword of the Guardian who stands at the Threshold of the Spiritual World to prevent the unauthorized from crossing it. Awakened Conscience and Reverence, on the other hand, are the pinions whereon the Guardian raises the souls of men into the Spiritual World.

The meeting with the Guardian of the Threshold is, therefore, the third principle of the Christian Rosicrucian path. For this meeting determines the method of preparation, and also vouches for the *certainty* of the knowledge gained of the Spiritual World. Because the untransformed Luciferic influences and the Ahrimanic influences are left on this side of the Threshold, the experience on the other side is sure; it is free from the intervention of those forces which produce illusions.

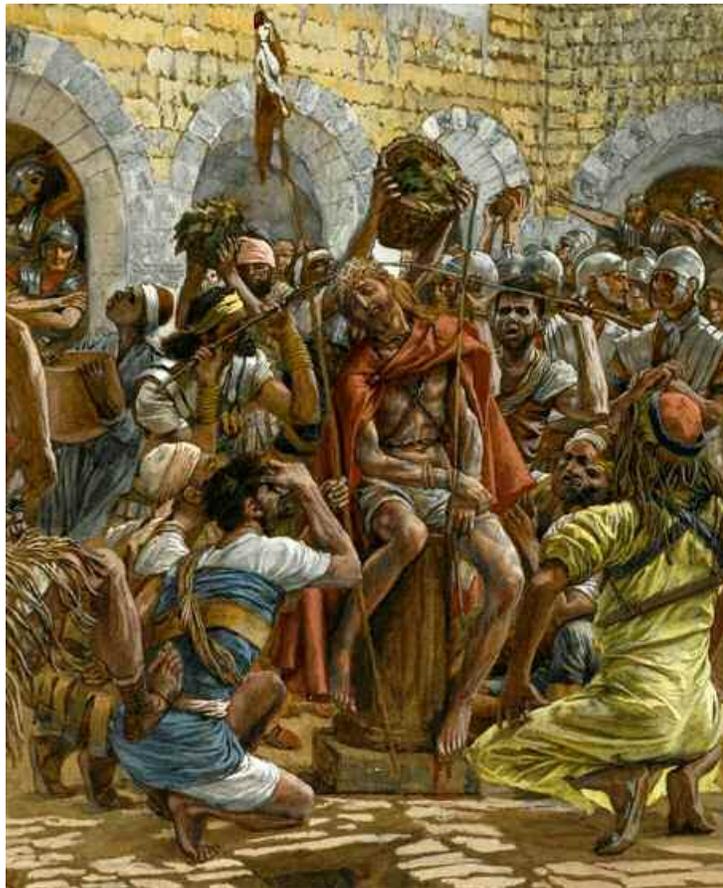
Then again there are other paths which, indeed, lead to spiritual experiences *without* the meeting with the Guardian of the Threshold. There are those, for instance, who extol “blissful rest in the light.” But they strive to achieve it by desiring to experience the Spiritual World as bliss. They raise themselves by an enhancement of Reverence to an experience of light-filled blessedness in which they forget everything—even all the troubles and pain of humanity. In this way, however, they offend against the injunction of the Guardian, to keep Conscience awake. They certainly practice Reverence, but the striving after blessedness (*anañda*) benumbs the Conscience. And because the Conscience is dulled, the consciousness of meeting with the Guardian of the Threshold is also dulled.

As far as consciousness is concerned, this meeting does not take place; and consequently the entrance into the true Spiritual World does not take place. The “light-filled blessedness” experienced on this path is not the Spiritual World entered by Man after death only when he has been purified in the Kamaloka-state, and on the path of Initiation only after meeting with the Guardian of the Threshold. It is, on the contrary, a distinct sphere of existence which may be called the “Luciferic

devachan.” This region is a kind of “Luciferic double” of the Earth; it is full of light, but there is no truth in it.

Others again strive after a knowledge of the occult by the overcoming of Fear. But what they evolve in this way is not the courage which is the expression of Conscience, but the courage of a realism without Reverence. Thus they arrive at the so-called “unvarnished truth” concerning Man and the Universe. They learn, in fact, the secrets of the subconscious both in Man and in the Earth-organism. All forms of human egoism are, by this means, revealed to them, and many forces of the Subterranean Spheres become known to them. Courage, indeed, is needed to perceive these things, but it is a courage which, by its very nature—because it is without Reverence—is a spiritual cynicism. And Man, as he is recognized on this path, is not the true Man but the lower man of the subconscious; and the world thus recognized is not the true Spiritual World, but, rather, a reflection distorted into its opposite in the form of the spheres of the Interior of the Earth. It is not possible to penetrate into the Spiritual World by this path; for the Guardian of the Threshold requires the courage of true Conscience and devotional Reverence from all who enter there. If anyone evades the meeting with the Guardian, his one-sided endeavor leads not into the Spiritual World, but into the world either of Lucifer or of Ahriman.

For this reason the meeting with the Guardian of the Threshold is just as fundamental to the method of the Christian Rosicrucian school as are the principles of Foot-washing and Scourging. But the meeting with the Guardian of the Threshold has quite definite consequences for one who has experienced it. Certain secrets of existence are revealed to him, and he becomes thereby himself a “guardian” of these mysteries. Henceforward the Guardian of the Threshold entrusts a part of his mission to him. He himself is trusted with a share in the responsibility and the task which the Guardian of the Threshold has. What was confided to him by the Spiritual World, the Man must now “guard” in the spirit of the task of the Guardian of



Opaque watercolor over graphite on wove paper. J. James Tissot, 1836-1902. Brooklyn Museum

The Crowning of Thorns

Experiencing ultimate forms of derision and abuse are the lot of the disciple of Christ who submits to the crowning of thorns.

the Threshold. But this means that he is left free to decide in what manner he will place his knowledge at the service of Mankind. For the “guardianship” does not consist in withholding or keeping secret this knowledge, but in the task of making it accessible in the right way to all who consciously strive after it, and really need it.

A new dignity is conferred upon Man when he passes the test of meeting with the Guardian of the Threshold. He is assigned a “crown,” but such a crown as would involve scorn and contempt in the eyes of the world if the world ever heard of it, and which, for the man himself, means fresh pain and further trials. For as he had to overcome Shame and Fear in response to the demands of the Guardian of the Threshold, so, from henceforth, he is no longer only a representative of the Mysteries, but also an awakener of Shame and Fear in others. He is not only liberal benefactor to other men, he

also becomes a trial or test for many people. He must accept the fact that standing for the truth before men frequently brings with it the shaming and frightening of men. It may even involve the necessity of remaining dumb under the eyes of many—under eyes which are either greedily spying out something in the man unworthy of the truth for which he stands, or seeking in his conduct something to prove that his truth is not true.

For Shame, anxious not to be exposed, sharpens the eyes for all deficiencies in the personality of him who represents spiritual truth; and Fear, wanting to remain hidden, gives to the glance a readiness to find contradictions in the spiritual truth which is represented. To such eyes is a man exposed when he has undertaken the task of “guarding”—of representing—spiritual truth. And he who wears the *Crown of Thorns* must overcome Shame and Fear under exposure to such human eyes, just as he had to overcome them at the voice of the spiritual Conscience representing the Guardian of the Threshold. He must not allow himself to be drawn into polemical self-defense, nor must he shrink before the “keen and brazen glance” of those who wish to strip him naked and to cut in pieces all that he holds most holy. He must not permit himself to take one aggressive step forward, nor to yield one step backward. The Thorny Crown of his task obliges him to stand—to stand fast in the Truth. It is the experience of a new dignity—the dignity of Truth represented by Man. And this is true human dignity, the dignity of the Son of Man.

What we have attempted to characterize here in a general way can be made clear and astonishingly alive by many actual examples if the life of Rudolf Steiner is studied from this point of view. The life-history of Rudolf Steiner is, assuredly, the best source from which to draw profound understanding of the Foot-washing, the Scourging, the Crowning with Thorns, the Cross-bearing and the Crucifixion. These stages in the spiritual history of the present day run through the story of that life, and at the same time exhibit the characteristics of the future spiritual history of Mankind. For as the Scourging, for instance, is a karmic necessity in the history of Man’s future, so also is the

Crowning with Thorns. The Thorn-crowning will be part of the spiritual history of Man’s future at the epoch when “white humanity” is pitted against Ahrimanic humanity—after a complete severance of the two currents. Then white [figuratively speaking] humanity will stand as the representative of spiritual truth—and, at the same time, as a reproach and a warning to the rest of Mankind. But it will be standing before a humanity grown clairvoyant for all deficiencies and weaknesses—a humanity which will have the faculty not only of spying out every imperfection, but also of working destruction through the entrance-doors of those imperfections. Then will the words become historical truth: “Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.” All Goodness to which the element of compromise still clings will be destroyed by the forces of the other section of humanity; so that “even that he hath” will be taken away from those who “hath not” an attitude free from compromise.

And herewith our study of the first three stages of the Passion, in their significance for methods of occultism, for karma, and for the spiritual history of humanity, may be brought to a close.

Nevertheless, a short spiritual-moral summary of the essentials on which these three stages are based may not be out of place. This summary may be given in quite short sentences. For in Foot-washing we deal with the conquest of pride through service; and in Scourging, with the uncompromising attitude which swerves to neither side; while in the Crowning with Thorns we deal with the firm stand in the name of truth—neither striding forward, nor shrinking back

Thus the first three stages of the Christian path may be summed up in these words:

The First must be the servant of all.

His left hand must not know what his right hand doeth.

He must know that the servant is not greater than his lord.

The further stages of the Way of the Passion will be considered in the next article. (Continued) □