

Agape Love St. John's Mission For Our Age

By Andrew Linnell

This article is based on esoteric Christian teachings that have not been part of common Christian practices, especially those of recent times. A good background to esoteric Christianity can be found in Rudolf Steiner's book *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, Anthroposophic Press. After this background, further depth can be found in Steiner's lecture series published under the title *The Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric*, Anthroposophic Press. Lastly, Edward R. Smith's book *The Burning Bush*, Anthroposophic Press, is very helpful to tie together succinctly many of the esoteric meanings found in the Old and New Testaments.

I have, for the reason of consistency, chosen to base this article's Biblical references solely on John's Gospel. While I have used a couple references to future times, one from Matthew and one from Luke, all the references to Agape come only from John. The Greek word Agape does indeed appear in other books of the New Testament. Like John, Paul is also capable of speaking of Agape from his own experience. Paul's transformation during his trip to Damascus was an initiation similar to that of John's in that it is the only other recorded initiation personally administered by the Christ. No other individuals of the New Testament had this form of initiation whereby they could write about Agape from their own experience. While Paul knows about Agape, the Agape mission described herein belongs to John. Paul has another mission.

A WORD ABOUT JOHN

Three historical figures in Christianity have the name John. One, John the Baptist, son of Zacharias and Elizabeth who, apparently barren through her childbearing years, gives birth to him in her later years and names him Johanna (Ioannes in Greek, John in English). Elizabeth is the cousin of a teenage girl, Mary, who will become the mother of Jesus described in St. Luke's Gospel. John the Baptist knew he had a special role to play towards the coming of the Messiah. "Make straight the way for the Lord" was his forerunner message as he baptized Jews in the Jordan. Although John lives in the desert near the Dead Sea away from populated areas, he is recognized for his blessedness and he develops a following complete with disciples. Soon after baptizing Jesus, John is thrown into prison and later beheaded. According to Christ, John the Baptist is the reincarnation of Elijah [see Mt 17:9-13]. "'Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?' [see Malachi 4:5-6] He replied, 'Elijah does come, and he is to restore all things, but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist."

The second John is a disciple of Christ. He is the son of Zebedee and brother of the disciple James [see Mark 1:19-20 and Matthew 4:21]. Like many of the other disciples, not much was written about him. This John does play a significant role among the disciples as he is chosen to accompany Peter and James to witness the Transfiguration [Luke 9:28-32]. It is believed that he may have been martyred in 44 A.D. along with his brother James [Acts 12:2]. He is not, however, the John referred to in this article.

The third John has the title John the Evangelist. It is this John and his writings with which this article concerns itself. **This John along with John Zebedee are among the twelve disciples of Christ.** Eventually exiled, he lives a long (it is believed he lived to be 106) yet lonely existence mostly on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. Here he writes the two books that are included in the Christian Bible, *The Gospel of John* and *The Book of Revelations*.

The early church fathers, in the 4th century, selected four books about Christ to be included in the New Testament. These are called the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In addition to authoring a Gospel, Paul's physician, Luke, is also the author of the book called *The Acts*. Paul was a scholar and apparently deeply versed in the esoteric knowledge of the time [Gal 1:14]. Paul had been involved in the persecution of Christians until he had a vision of the resurrected Christ. This so changed his life that he changed his name from Saul to Paul. Several of his letters are included in the New Testament. Changing one's name after a life-altering event is a key to understanding who is the author of John's Gospel.

What is it about *The Gospel of John* that differs from the other three Gospels? Early Christian theologians assigned a Zodiac symbol to each of the four writers, namely the angel-man, Aquarius, to Matthew, the Lion to Mark, Taurus the bull to Luke, and the Eagle/Scorpion to John. (Note the similarity to the 4 entities of the Sphinx as well as the 4 of Elijah's vision). Astrological traditions assign the Eagle to the same Zodiac sign as Scorpion where the Scorpion is seen as the lower form while the Eagle represents the transformed Scorpion. Here is another clue to understand who is the author of John's Gospel. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called synoptic yet only John's Gospel gives time sequence details. For example, the time of Passover is always mentioned in John's Gospel. John's Gospel reaches back to pre-Creation time. John's Gospel begins at a time before creation when the Logos (the Word) was with God, "In the beginning was the Logos" [John 1:1] Later, this Gospel comes to creation with "Through Him all things were made." [John 1:3] John also writes *The Book of Revelations* that reaches far into the future. The other Gospels begin with Adam or even Abraham and venture no further than their present time. With John's understanding of the Logos and his declaration "and the Logos became flesh," John is writing about a much wider view, an Eagle's view, that expresses a deeper aspect of Christian mystery than was possible for the other Gospel writers. The Gospel writer who traced Jesus' lineage to Adam understood Christ was able to expiate the sins of Adam and Eve. John sees before Creation and as such can understand a bigger picture of the role of Christ and of Humanity. How did John attain such an ability to see more than the other Gospel writers? What special role does John have? This article attempts to explore these questions, especially John's mission of love.

John is the one the Lord loved [John 13:23]. It is John who lays his head on the chest of the Lord and can listen to his heart. There is something special about the relationship John has with Christ that differs from the other disciplines, something that can be said to be higher and deeper. Of all the disciples, only John is able to witness the crucifixion. John it is who takes on Jesus' mother as his own [John 19:26]. It is John and Peter who run to the grave after hearing Mary's story [John 20:3]. It is John and Peter who are mentioned during the final experience of the Resurrected Christ at the Sea of Tiberias [John 21:7]. John and Peter and Paul are the key individuals for the spread of Christianity. Each has a role in the unfolding of Christianity. This article will focus on the roles of Peter and John. It will contrast just these two who were with the Christ.

THE THREE QUESTIONS

Let us picture ourselves present during the last conversation that Resurrected Christ has with his disciples in Chapter 21 of the *Gospel of St. John*. Initially, we are on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias. It is early morning and the disciples have been fishing during the night. Christ, unrecognized, stands on the shore and asks the disciples about their catch. They confess they have not caught any fish. Christ suggests they try the right side of the boat. As a result, the number of fish is so great that they are unable to haul in the net. The disciple John, whom, it says, Jesus loved, now recognizes the person at the shore and proclaims, "It is the Lord" [John 21:7]. Peter, aware of his nakedness, wraps himself and leaps from the boat into the water in order to quickly come to the Lord. John, on the other hand, comes with the other disciples in the boat dragging the net full of fish. On the shore, Christ already

has a fire going and fish cooking. Only as Christ bids them to bring some of the recently caught fish does Peter run back to help pull to land the net with 153 fish.

The story raises many questions such as what is the meaning of fishing at night; what is meant by the watery element into which Peter leapt as opposed to the shore where Christ stands; what is the significance of the nakedness of Peter; and what is the significance of 153 fish? The Gospel writers do not waste words. All details are significant. This article will lose focus, however, if all these questions are pursued. They are introduced to show the style of this gospel and to suggest that the author is writing about more than just the physical. Thus these details can be called symbolic or, perhaps more apt, a description of happenings in the spiritual world described using words that apply to the physical world.

The story highlights differences between Peter and John. Thus far we can see that it is John who can recognize the resurrected body of Christ. To those who cannot see beyond the physical senses, the body of the resurrected Christ is not recognizable as the same body he had before his crucifixion. All the disciples could see someone on the shore, but only John who was capable of an extended vision, could recognize him. Once Christ was so revealed, then the other disciples could understand who it was. Peter expresses impulsiveness out of his devotional love for Christ. He is ashamed of his inadequacies evident by covering himself up before leaping into the watery element. John's knowing, or conscious love, differs from Peter's impulsive, passionate love.

After they ate, a conversation between Peter and the Resurrected Christ ensues. To appreciate the depth of this conversation, we must first look back to an earlier conversation that took place in the evening before Christ's crucifixion. At this previous occasion Christ and the disciples are also together to eat a meal, namely the Last Supper. The conversation between Peter and Christ begins immediately following Judas's departure into the night to betray Christ. Peter asks "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake." [John 13:37] To which Christ replies, "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice." Following the Last Supper, the disciples (minus Judas) go for an evening walk in a garden. Here in the garden Judas, with a group of soldiers, finds them. Judas reveals to the soldiers who is Christ through a kiss. As Christ is taken away the disciples scatter. Peter attempts to follow the soldiers. Three times during that night people see Peter and accuse him of being one of Christ's group. Fearing for his life, Peter denies this each time. Just as he completes his third denial, the cock crows. Immediately Peter recalls Christ's words.

With this background, we return to the conversation between Peter and the Resurrected Christ. The setting is again a meal, but this time it is just *after* night ends. To allow Peter to better see himself and to redeem his three denials, Christ asks him three questions. Each time the question is "do you love me?" Imagine yourself as Peter being asked this question. You feel so much love for Jesus that you have just leapt into the water to come quickly to him. Here is not only your beloved teacher, but also a God who became man and whom you have declared as your Lord. Peter knows that Christ will know if he lies or exaggerates. Peter further knows that Christ can read his heart and knows his capabilities. Therefore Peter answers truthfully, "Yea Lord, you know that I love you."

Unfortunately, the English translation hides the drama and meaning of this passage. This apparent banal passage becomes especially powerful and significant when we read the Greek version in an interlinear Bible. Greek had three words for love: eros, philos, and Agape. Christ asks his question the first two times using the word Agape while Peter answers with the word philos. Thus, Christ asks Peter "Do you Agape me more than these?" Peter replies, "yea Lord, you know that I philos you." Christ commands him to "feed my lambs." Again Christ asks "Agape thou me?" to which Peter again says "yea Lord, you know that I philos you." This time the command is "shepherd my little sheep." Now the third question but this time Christ asks "philos thou me?" Peter grieves at

being asked apparently the same question a third time. He replies "Lord, all things you know. You know that I philo thee." To this Christ commands Peter to "Feed my little sheep."

THREE WORDS FOR LOVE

To understand this drama and its significance for both the Christian Church and the world, it is important to understand the difference between these two words for love used in this conversation and also a third Greek word for love, Eros. (These definitions are my own, not from any dictionary.)

1. Eros is the love one feels for another when the other can meet his/her needs. It is Eros one feels when someone says, "I feel wonderful around him; he makes me feel like a woman" or "We have so much in common" or "I love what she does for me" or "We are so comfortable together, it's as if we've known each other forever." This love draws much from the physical world. Eros forms the basis for the word erotic but this connotation can be misleading. Both Eros and Philo express the mood of desire for the other but Eros' desire is based on how good that loved person makes one feel about oneself. One's own ego is the beneficiary of this love. Sexual desire can be a foundation for eros love but in and of itself, it is not eros. It can be said that one has eros for a person who gives him/her pleasure. The ego is pleased, even fed by such a relationship. The relationship may have a quality of a bargain in that each gives to the other something they desire. If the pleasure turns to pain or if the ego is no longer served, then eros slips out the backdoor. [Later a distinction between the ego mentioned here, also called the lower ego, and the Ego that comes through the Christ, called the higher Ego, will be made]. Most marriages begin with a strong bond of Eros. During the course of the marital relationship, the challenges brought by life, test this bond. For many, the testing results in the development of Philo.
2. Philo is the love whose basic quality is devotion. It is the love one feels for a guru or another blessed person who gives guidance and meaning to life. The love of a parent for a child usually is Philo. Difficult times, criticism, and absence have no effect on Philo. It is the root for the word philosophy (philo + sophia, the devoted love of wisdom). Philo has the quality of love between two who are unequal. Both may respect and admire the other for who the person is or does. The "superior" one in philo love is allowed to test the other's devotional love and demand that this "inferior" one do certain tasks in order to improve the "inferior's" wisdom, talents, or behavior. In fact, the "superior" one can judge and punish the other. The "inferior" knows that the "superior" acts out of love and wisdom and readily accepts such challenges or punishments.
3. Judgment, demands, punishment, or testing of another's love are not possible between two (or more) who share Agape love. It is active loving that flows into willing. Just as moral actions based on true free will is, in fact, doing God's will so does Agape love flow from a deeply rooted quality of freedom. Whereas the consciousness associated with typical feelings is analogous to dreaming while willing is to unconscious sleep, Agape love can begin only after one has awakened to the inner activity of both feeling and willing. Agape love is a conscious love. The words unconditional and spiritual also apply to Agape, as does the word equal. Equal here does not mean the two individuals are the same. It means that the two recognize each other as equals within their humanity. Is the eye greater than the toe? Each has different functions to perform but both are equal in being a part of the human. Likewise each human is a part of the body of Humanity [see Romans 12:4-5]. Because the Greek word Agape appears in the Bible, translators have attempted to understand it with concepts available to them at the time of translation. As we shall see, the capacity to develop Agape love was not possible for most people until recent times. Often Agape is translated merely as

AGAPE LOVE, JOHN'S MISSION FOR OUR AGE

“love” or “true love” while at other times as “charity.” A deeper penetration into Agape will reveal that the higher Ego is the source for this love.

Peter, who is perhaps the strongest and most willful of the disciples, is given his Apostolic mission with the proclamation “upon this rock I build my church” [Matthew 16:18]. Peter, alone amongst the disciples, had the strength and will to conquer Rome. Yet it was Peter who denied Christ three times. What rock was this that was charged with founding Christ’s church? In John’s Gospel, Christ asks Peter to “feed my lambs” and to “shepherd my little sheep” implying that the first Christians are somehow very young and immature. Philo is the love Peter declares he has for Christ with his words “yea Lord, you know that I love (Philo) you” [John 21:19]. It is this devotional love that the Roman Christian church taught its congregation to have for Christ and one another. Each of the disciples was commanded to “Love (Agape) one another. As I have loved (Agape) you, so you must love (Agape) one another” [John 13:34]. Peter accomplished this to the best of his ability but by his answers to three questions posed by the Risen Christ in John chapter 21 we see that this is but Philo love that Peter can honestly claim. The Christian churches have embodied this. Great and wonderful is the devotional love the church has engendered in its congregation for Christ Jesus and for one another. It has replaced the devotional love for one’s tribe with a devotional love for one’s congregation and for a larger body of Christians and in its ideal for all of Humanity. Given where human development was at this time, this was the only feasible step towards Agape that could be taken.

Peter has magnificently accomplished his mission. First, love that extends beyond the bloodline, beyond the tribe, beyond the ethnic group, had to be firmly established. With this foundation, an even greater love can now be established. This task falls upon “the other disciple,” the “one whom the Lord loved (Agape).”

UNDERSTANDING JOHN'S MISSION

Who was this disciple “whom the Lord loved?” In John 21:24 we are told that the author of the Gospel of John is the same disciple. John is given a mission as expressed in John 21:22-23. What was his mission? Was he not the most spiritually developed disciple? Is not John the only one referred to as the one the Lord loved (with the word Agape used)? Is not John the one that all the disciples knew was closest to Christ? Peter, surprised that Christ has chosen him and not John, asks Christ “what about him [John 21:21]?” Christ answers “What is it to you that I have him remain until the time I come again [John 21:22]?” Christ is saying “I have given you, Peter, a mission; now go accomplish it! I have a different mission for John, one that must wait until I come again.” From his questions, Peter, despite his strength and willfulness, is unable at his stage of development to rise to the Agape level of love. This is not a condemnation of Peter as he represents the heights of what mankind in the time of Christ could attain. John, on the other hand, represents something of the future. John is somehow more advanced than the common person of his time. In fact, John represents something new in the stream of humanity, something not yet present in Peter. Thus, Peter must accomplish his mission first because the world is not yet ready for what John has to bring.

Here we come to a mystery that reveals more about John and his mission. Let us go to the middle and crowning event of the Gospel of John, namely to the Raising of Lazarus. Note that Christ always refers to himself not as the Son of God, but rather as the Son of Man. God had to become Man to save Mankind. The spirit of Christ enters into the body of Jesus at the Baptism. At this point God is becoming Man. God is not yet fully Man as this is a process that will be taking place over the next three years. John the Baptist witnesses this key event. “I saw the Spirit come

down from heaven as a dove and remain upon him. I would not have known him except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain upon is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." [John 1:32-34] But John the Baptist will soon be beheaded and will not be able to witness the most important event in all of history, the death and resurrection of a man, albeit the Son of Man, a God who had become a man. Who could understand such an event? Only a person initiated into the very deep mysteries of the history of humanity and the earth and what Christ's mission means to this history and to the future of humanity and the earth. The writer of John's Gospel is the only Gospel writer who can trace Christ's mission back to pre-Creation time. "In the beginning was the Logos ...". This writer can also see into the future as revealed in *The Book of Revelations*. Who is this person who writes only what he witnesses [John 21:24 and Rev 1:2] and can witness both the past beyond the Creation as well as the far future?

It would seem that the writer of the beginning chapters of John might be John the Baptist. But this John clearly could not write most of this book as he was beheaded well before the Raising of Lazarus. John clearly is not the son of Zebedee who is also called John, as this is made clear in the Gospels. A clue comes in the fact that the expression, "the one the Lord loved," does not occur until after the Raising of Lazarus. Let's look into the Raising of Lazarus to see if it has any clues to help understand who this author named John might be.

What happens to Lazarus after this raising from the dead in chapter 11? He is mentioned again in chapter 12 as a crowd has come to see the man raised from the dead, namely Lazarus. Then he is in no longer discussed in the Gospel. Yet he is part of a significant family that includes his sisters Martha and Mary Magdalene. Given that Martha and Mary continue in the story, why is nothing more mentioned of Lazarus? It is Mary Magdalene, the prostitute, to whom the Resurrected Christ first reveals himself. Why has someone so important as Lazarus, who is raised from the dead, now disappear?

Actually Lazarus has gone through an unusual "death" which might better be called a near-death experience. From the middle of this Gospel, John 11:11, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to awaken him." Since the disciples don't see the need to journey to Lazarus if he is only asleep, Christ explains further "Lazarus died and I rejoice because of you, that ye may believe since I was not there. But, let us go to him." The disciples understand that Lazarus has become a new man. This is why the other disciples ask to go through this same process after Christ has explained it to them. During the three days of apparent death, Lazarus is conscious in spirit though essentially dead in body. John the Baptist and other spiritual beings are with Lazarus as he learns how to use organs of perception to experience the spiritual world. Lazarus learns about the Mission of Christ during this initiation period. Prior to this, mystery schools around the world had performed similar initiations but these had always been done only within the Holy of the Holies inside the Temple. Christ performs the first public initiation. Because of this, the Temple Priests and the Pharisees condemn Christ Jesus to death.

Just as Saul will later change his name to Paul after his life changing event, Lazarus, in his new life, takes on a new name, that is the name of his teacher, John. As one initiated into this wisdom and with his spiritual organs opened, John-Lazarus can rise to a level unreachable by the other disciples. John-Lazarus is the first to open the door and let the Christ in. His being is now filled with the divine I-Am. All his eyes, all his spiritual organs, his **chakras** are now open and functioning. John's new heart begins to feel Agape love for Christ, the Son of Man. Upon feeling this recognition, equality, and free will, John can now express his love for Christ; the love of Agape. Christ has assured this potential for humanity through this unique initiation of Lazarus who lives on now under a new name, John. Because one human, John, has accomplished this, now any human is able to reach this stage of

development. The conditions of our current times are such that a given person may develop Agape with another. It is through the work of John, that this potential is now given to us.

Christ, with his all-encompassing wisdom, knew that John's Mission must wait for the future. He saw that John, a person uniquely initiated, was far advanced in comparison to his peers. John was capable of seeing what others could not. John could feel and love in ways the others could not even understand. But it was not the right time for John's work to begin 2000 years ago because the spiritual evolutionary conditions were not yet ready, meaning that people were not sufficiently prepared to receive it.

We can understand this further through Spiritual Science that speaks of an evolution of consciousness for humanity on earth. Our "common" consciousness has changed over the ages. In the earliest times, according to the Bible, the human directly communed with God and the host of heavenly beings. As time progressed, the experiences of God and the spiritual world became more indirect until all that was left were inspirations from dreams and temple oracles. A period came that was called the Twilight of the Gods. The oracles no longer revealed the divine will. The temples closed one by one. The dark ages (Kali Yuga) that were foretold in ancient Sanskrit writings had come to humanity. The doors of perception of the heavenly worlds had shut. Mankind, cut off from the guidance of any divine being, had to develop free will. Each would come to choose their way on an individual basis. The freedom of each human's choice and, therefore, the way evolution itself would progress became real drama even for the guiding beings of the spiritual world. Into this Dark Age came the foretold Christ to show man how to become new, to become one who could find a new way to God. While the former man found his way back to God along the path of descent, the new one develops more than the God-given talents and thus is able to rise up to a destined place in the heavenly hierarchy.

FOUNDATION FOR AGAPE

Essential for a love that can become Agape is the desire to be able to express one's own truly free human will while at the same time a joy exists that the object of one's love is also able to be so free. Agape can arise only on the free will won for Humanity by going through Kali Yuga. Such a truly and mutually free will must be based on an understanding of the extent (and limitations) of human equality. To act with true human freedom presupposes both wisdom and the presence of one's I-consciousness, of I-AM-ness. Agape can flow only from the heart that is one with the I-Am, with Christ. Slavery, inequalities of women in society, hatred for those of a different religion or ethnic heritage, hold humanity back from Agape. These inequities have played a major role in driving humanity to endure devastating wars and great sufferings. Despite the fact that such sufferings continue today, now, in our time, the seed of Agape is planted in the hearts of humanity. Spiritual Science has placed the time when some humans would once again be able to use or develop organs of perception of the spiritual world in the late 1800s. With such organs of perception, the *possibility* for understanding the necessity of human equality and freedom becomes present. The cosmic question is whether or not each human soul-soil is ready for this seed? Can it supply fertile ground for the Agape seed to root and grow and later bear fruit?

Now is the time when an individual seeking freedom can shed the old societal skin for a new. This is a time for passing through the eye of the needle. It can be a lonely time for an individual who seeks a new way. John's life on Patmos was an example of this loneliness. On the other side of the needle, one is free of the chains of society. In fact, one becomes free of attachments to material things throughout one's thinking, feeling, and willing. This is not a "taking leave of the world;" rather, one discovers a new love for the world emerging along with a renewed commitment to humanity and its evolution. The pioneers of Agape may find themselves misunderstood and lonely.

In order for Agape love to be commonly expressed and to thrive, new social forms will need to be created.

THE SECOND COMING AND JOHN'S MISSION OF LOVE

Spiritual Science describes what is called the Second Coming as an event that will last over many years¹ and will be taking place in a realm of which humanity today has little understanding. Christ already came in the physical; this will not be repeated. To do so would mean that his first coming was not complete. But Christ proclaims from the Cross that his mission in the physical world is complete with the words "it is finished" [John 19:30]. God had become man and could now experience death. The Son of Man would arise victorious over death on the third day. Easter, the festival of the Arisen Christ, becomes The Turning Point of Time. The blood of Christ, in flowing into the Earth, changed the fate of the Earth and of Humanity. The path back to God had long before been lost. Christ opened a new path that leads Humanity, progressively and at each stage with new talents [2 Cor 3:15-18], to God the Father. The next step, according to Spiritual Science, is taking place now.

That Christ would come again is foretold in all the Gospels and in many of Paul's letters that are included in the New Testament. Spiritual Science places the Second Coming beginning about 1909. Rudolf Steiner states in the early 1920s (he dies in 1924) that beginning in the 1930s, a few people will begin to have experiences of the Christ but these experiences will not be as many Christians expect. Just as many expected the Messiah to become a great earthly king and liberate Israel from the Romans, many today expect the Christ to appear in a physical body. Christ has come again and this second coming is as described in Acts 1:9-11, namely "in the clouds." Symbolically "cloud" refers to what Spiritual Science calls the etheric (**see Glossary**)? or, in this case, the life body of the Earth. What is meant is the "plane" closest to the physical but devoid of any mineral substance. It is a plane where the life body of living things has its existence. The etheric plane also has its own laws of "physics." There are etheric forces just as there are forces on the physical plane.

The human can experience this plane but not with the physical senses that can only perceive the physical plane. Just as organs of perception must exist to perceive the physical, spiritual organs of perception must be present in order to perceive what is spiritual. Grasping the percepts of a given plane requires a thinking activity on still a higher plane. The activities of thinking, feeling, and willing belong to what has traditionally been called the soul. That is to say that ordinary perception, that is, our physical perception requires a higher body's activity than the physical body in order to bring together both the outer percept and the inner mental image within consciousness. Our thinking must transcend both the percept and the mental image in order to bring these two together. For the physical senses, this entails a soul activity, thinking, using the etheric body. New sense organs, that already exist in each human being, need to be realized, that is, to be opened and to become acquainted with, in order to begin to perceive on the etheric plane. These new sense organs belong to our astral "body" and the perception thereof must be done by the soul's thinking activity on a higher body than the astral body. Just as the mind must transcend both the outer percept and the mental image to bring them together in consciousness, so too must the Ego engage a higher body for there to be consciousness of astral organs. For the astral to be so engaged, first it must itself be transformed so that it may be conscious of spiritual perceptions [Phil 3:20-21]. It is analogous to how we gain sight of the stars when the sun sets. In our current state of evolution, the power of our physical senses overwhelms these other organs. They have been dormant throughout Kali Yuga or

¹ The Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric, Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophic Press

AGAPE LOVE, JOHN'S MISSION FOR OUR AGE

for some 5000 years. Gradually we can reawaken our consciousness so that we can use these organs once again. Meditation that deals with sense-free images provides schooling where these organs can be awakened and refined. Rudolf Steiner's book *Knowledge of Higher Worlds and Their Attainment* is especially helpful for this.

In the times before Kali Yuga (The Dark Age), which began approximately 3100 BC and lasts till about 1900, mystery schools existed to train students to develop the ability to experience the etheric realm. In even earlier times, perception of the etheric was commonplace. These mystery schools persisted even up till the Renaissance but with ever fading glory. Remnants of these schools can be found in organizations such as the Freemasons. Developing such organs of perception, according to Spiritual Science, has again become possible in our time, that is, since the 1900s (to be more specific, since 1879).

In order to experience the Reappearance of Christ, one will have to develop organs that perceive the beings of the etheric realm. Christ began the Second Coming about 1909. This appearance becomes visible in this etheric realm to humans, Spiritual Science suggests, in the mid-1930s and it will continue for several hundreds of years. Is it just coincidence that such darkness arose during this time through such men as Hitler and Stalin? Spiritual Science also claims that there are forces working in the hopes of keeping humanity from experiencing this important event. A drama similar to when Christ appeared in the physical realm is now playing out in the etheric realm: namely, will humanity be able to recognize and accept Him? Just as Christ was unrecognized when he appeared in the physical, so too will it be difficult for us, so mired in materialism, to recognize him in his Second Coming.

Love has been cultivated by the spiritual world in the human heart since the start of human evolution. Yet, until modern times, the heights to which human love expression could attain were limited to a combination of Eros and Philo. For Agape love to be present in the human heart, evolution has had to wait for the Mission of John to begin. As Christ foretold, this would begin "when I come again" [John 21:22]. According to the spiritual scientific research of Rudolf Steiner, the so-called Second Coming was projected to begin in the 1930s and last for a few hundred years. This Second Coming is an event taking place not within the physical realm, but rather in the Etheric [see glossary]. This event follows the spiritual victory of the Archangel Michael over "the Dragon" in the late 1800s which opens anew the possibility for humanity to directly experience the spiritual world through the development spiritual organs of perception. Spiritual perception is necessary for humans to recognize the event of the Reappearance of Christ in the etheric realm. Sometimes such perceptions become possible during severe emotional stress as occurs during war or with near-death experiences. But what is needed for humanity is that step forward to a conscious and moral use of these spiritual organs of perception.

Humanity is presently in a time when individuals can rise inwardly to consciously experience the spiritual world that John experienced through spiritual organs of perception that Christ helped open with Lazarus' initiation. Once opened, individuals can then come, with further development, to feel Agape as John felt it. We now are in the time when Christ is present in the so-called etheric realm. We are in the times of the Second Coming. Now is the time that Christ had foretold with the words "what is it to you [Peter] that I have him [John] remain [a potential] until I come again?" [John 21:22] Many who were present when the Resurrected Christ spoke these words assumed this meant that John would not die. However, St. John's Gospel points out that this interpretation is erroneous. "The rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die, he only said 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?'" [John 21:23]. John's body would die, but John's mission would not. Instead, it would have to wait until the Second Coming to *begin* its work. Again we must interpret this passage that although the body and the

personality may die, the individuality, the Ego, the I-Am, does not. Although John's body dies, John's individuality works on from the spiritual world preparing for his mission.

THE REWARDS OF LOVE: AGAPE AND KARMIC RESOLUTION

Coincident with the Second Coming of Christ is the beginning of John's path of Christianity, a path of Agape Love. However, no one can tread the Agape path without first cultivating a deep inner feeling and conviction for both human equality and human freedom. Each must respect their own strivings as well as those of others. Agape goes well beyond respect to include the experience of joy knowing loved ones are striving to fulfill their karma. Agape love is not tendered with expectations of reward. As such, Agape love has a quality of being divine.

In a lecture on the 17th of December, 1912, Rudolf Steiner states,

"when we understand the significance of the law of reincarnation, we recognize the purpose of love in the world, both in a particular and in a general sense. When we speak of karma, we mean the cause in the lone life that affects the next. Nevertheless, we cannot truly speak of love in terms of 'cause and effect.' We cannot speak of an act of love and its eventual compensation. True, if there is an action, there will be compensation, but this has nothing to do with love itself. Acts of love do not look for compensation in the next life." ... "By everything we do out of love we pay off debts. [Debts here mean something not of our financial making but debts as in 'Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors' - author] From an esoteric point of view, what is done out of love brings no reward but makes amends for profit already expended. The only actions from which we have nothing in the future are those we perform out of true, genuine [Agape - author] love. This truth may well be disquieting and humans are lucky in that they know nothing of it in their upper consciousness. But in their subconsciousness all of them know it, and that is why acts of love are done so unwillingly, why there is so little love in the world. Human beings feel instinctively that they may expect nothing for their I in the future from acts of love. An advanced stage of development must be reached before the soul can experience joy in performing acts of love from which there is nothing to be gained for itself." [Love and It's Meaning in the World, 17 December, 1912, Zurich, Rudolf Steiner].

This expresses what John is striving for today in the hope that humans may achieve it.

Christ's consciousness expanded far beyond that of any human. But was Christ also conscious of his feelings? Could Christ have loved out of uncontrollable, unconscious sources? Could Christ fall in love as is typical of humans? Of course not! Yet Christ did become human, unlike any man that had previously existed on earth. Christ became the new Adam. As such, it can be said of Christ that he was conscious of his love. And by becoming human, this conscious love, this Agape love, became possible for all humans. Yet to be expressed love, it required another human to be the object of the love, someone capable of receiving and giving such love. This was John. Now Christ may command his disciples to love one another as he had loved them.

Conscious love can be attained only through a dual journey that begins within one's soul while at the same time discovers one's relationship to the external world. It may be necessary that to develop oneself, one needs to draw on anti-social and egoistic motivations in order to carve out the time to be alone to work on just one's self. This can bring one to the point of "passing through the eye of the needle." Then, as the higher consciousness begins to unfold, these motivations that exercised forces of antipathy and contraction used to penetrate within, now become changed to forces of

AGAPE LOVE, JOHN'S MISSION FOR OUR AGE

sympathy and expansion. As conscious is akin to light and love to warmth, the changed soul may seem to radiate as the sun radiates into the cosmos. Later, as Agape begins to emerge, the will, which is akin to life and death forces, can be experienced too in this continually changing soul. The one who radiates Agape love from heart and soul is like a microcosm of the sun.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

Christ's new commandment "Love [Agape] one another. As I have loved [Agape] you, so you must love [Agape] one another [John 13:34]." Here is the model for Agape Love. How does Christ express love for each of the twelve disciples? Each one is different. Each has strengths and weaknesses. Each has different moods and soul gestures. In fact, one could ask if there are twelve because there are twelve Zodiac signs? It could be argued that each human "belongs" to a Zodiac sign and by loving all twelve disciples Christ loved all aspects of human nature. At the scene mentioned earlier, namely Chapter 21 of St. John's Gospel, does the Resurrected Christ rebuke Peter for denying him? Were Christ's feelings hurt when Peter did not dare to come to witness the crucifixion? No, Christ gives Peter love-filled opportunities to atone for his denials. Christ gives Peter the opportunity to understand himself and his actions – to grow and to learn the power of forgiveness. Christ does not abandon Peter; rather, he bases the first Christian Church on him. He knows both Peter's strengths and his weaknesses. Christ understands the how and why of Peter's actions. Christ is not hurt by these actions; rather, he works with Peter to help him understand his weaknesses and gives him the insight and strength to overcome them.

This is quite different from the way Christ relates to John. Peter has the will, strength, and courage, as well as the motivation arising from his Philos love, to take Christianity to Rome. Peter, one man, takes on the greatest empire the world had ever known. Now we can ask, is the mission of John any less difficult? Could John, with his own strengths and weaknesses, have accomplished what Peter did? At that moment in history, would the world have accepted John as readily as it accepted Peter? What did John accomplish at this time for the spreading of Christianity? It appears to be very little. What can John accomplish today? What is the Roman Empire of today's world that John, who is not in a physical body, must overcome? Where does a Roman Empire exist within each of us? Is it not the Empire of Materialism? Just as Peter did not conquer and tear down the Roman Empire but transformed it; now, we must work with John to transform our inner Roman Empire. Into each of our Roman Empires, Christ is now present. Christ has reappeared within the etheric, within our living thinking body, enabling John to accomplish his mission. We today do not recognize Him as we expect something different from him just as people 2000 years ago expected a different Messiah, one who would overthrow Rome. Although we expect Him to manifest in the external world, we must go within ourselves to find Him. We must develop ourselves inwardly in order to overcome our blindness that prevents us from seeing Him where he now is appearing.

NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME

John's mission begins at a time in history when Christianity is permeated with the Peter expression. To this base, John begins to fill Christianity with new life. This path leads one to and through the etheric Christ towards the Father. Christ tells us clearly "No one comes to the Father except through me [John 14:6]." Christ is in the I-Am in each of us ("I am the I-Am [Exodus 3:14]"). As Peter's mission dealt with the physical realm represented by the Roman Empire, John's mission is with the etheric realm where Christ now appears. This moves humanity a step closer to the spiritual world. John leads us to this love-door through which we come to the Father. As we learn to love one another as Christ loved the disciples, we learn how to find and pass through this door to the Father. As odd as it sounds, the path is lonely. Love found on this path may not be what one expects. On

AGAPE LOVE, JOHN'S MISSION FOR OUR AGE

this path, one cannot expect to be loved by other humans. Embarking on this path with the hope of finding a loved one will bring disappointment. As stated, the path leads one inside, into one's soul. Out of a motivation to know oneself, the inner work leads to a transformation of one's being. Along this path one comes to a door "I am the door: through me if any man enter, he shall be saved [John 10:9]." Through this door one will find an etheric pasture brimming with life forces useful for the cultivation of Agape.

The call of the mystery centers of olden times was to each individual to "know thou thyself." It is working through one's life to one's spiritual center, one's I-Am. Through the inner work one comes to realize that **one's** own I-Am is divine; that it, the I-Am, is, in fact, Christ within. "I am the I-Am" [Ex 3:14] the Burning-Bush-Which-is-Not-Consumed declares to Moses. Hence, uniting with Christ is, at the same time, awakening to one's own I-Am. It may appear to be an unsolvable riddle that something at one's core, one's own I-Am, also is part of another individual. This riddle is unsolvable to the concepts we have developed through our physical perceptions, but to the concepts developed through spiritual perception, this is understood. Now we can better understand Christ's prayer "I pray, not for these [the disciples] alone, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they all may be one as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee and that they may be in us so that the world may believe that thou didst send me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given to them that they may be one as we are one. I in them and thou in me that they may be perfected as one, thus may the world know that thou hast sent me and I didst love (Agape) them as thou didst love (Agape) me. ... I made known to them [the disciples] the name of thee and will make known that the love (Agape) which thou hast loved (Agape) me may be in them for I am in them." [John 17:20-26] It is John who can testify to this in his soul. Later, Paul too can declare "With Christ I have been crucified and lives no more my I (my ego), but Christ lives in me." [Ga 2:20]

John's role at the time of Christ-Jesus was to be the witness. Through the wisdom and courage attained through Agape love John is the only disciple able to witness the Mystery of Golgotha. This is the Turning Point of Time when God-Logos fully becomes Man by experiencing death. John witnesses as well the Resurrection. Now the time has come for the development of Agape Love within humanity. This is the role John will fulfill for those with the will to come to experience the Christ in the etheric. It will be a new Christianity.

Agape is to the soul what the Sun is to outer life. Into this love-darkness comes a new love-light. As Christ entered into the only plane of existence in which humans could experience him during Kali Yuga, Christ now enters a plane to which the human must rise in order to experience Him. Through such an experience, a new light within the human etheric heart will stimulate new life leading to a new love, to Agape spreading throughout the world. As "in him was life; and the life was the light of men" [John 1:4] describes the coming of Christ spiritually descending from Love to Life to Light, so shall the Human ascend from Light, to Life, to Love. This evolution shall lead to a time in the far future when Humanity will become part of the Heavenly Hierarchy.

The world we live within now was created for us through the will of God by the Logos, the Christ. "All things through him became, and without him became not one thing which has become." [John 1:3] Everything, every process, within nature embodies wisdom that whispers "Oh Man, know thyself." Through the course of evolution, Humanity will ascend to where it may participate in the creation of the next world. As children of God, Humanity will help create a new world. It is a new Human who will be co-creating what Rudolf Steiner has called the Jupiter phase of Earthly evolution. In a way similar to how our current world embodies wisdom, this new world will embody Love. This new love-embodied Earth will be the world for a new group of beings who are to have their human phase of development. The role the evolved humans will have in this new world will be to guide the next beings at their human stage of development just as the Angels are doing for us. These beings will find love in their environment as in our current world we find supreme wisdom in Nature. "In

the beginning was the Logos,” the archetype of Humanity. To enable the turning point in the evolution of Humanity, “the Logos became flesh and tabernacled among us” [John 1:14]. When the Human becomes the tenth hierarchy, it will be said by the Heavens “and the flesh becomes Logos and forever abides with us.”

GLOSSARY

Nature Kingdom	Within its body is	Greek Model (State of Spirit)	Physics Model (State of Matter)
Man	Ego (self) and below	Fire	Plasma
Animal	Astral and below	Air	Gaseous
Plant	Etheric and below	Water	Liquid
Mineral	Physical	Earth	Solid

Physical: the seat of (the body for) visible substance (minerals) within the bodies of beings who exist in the World. Each entity of the four Nature Kingdoms has a physical body.

Etheric: an invisible component of a living being that imbues its physical body with the flow of life. Imagine a living body in which all the material substance has been removed. What remains? There remains a “fluid structure” that holds the material substances in a certain form. The etheric is where the life forces are present. It has its own law of “physics.” It contains the living blueprint for our bodily form. It is also the “movie screen” of our mental imaging and thinking. Our memory is “recorded” in the etheric. Like the Plant Kingdom, Animals and Man have individual etheric “bodies.” Because a mineral does not contain within it’s physical body an etheric body, it is not a living being.

Astral: again an invisible entity to our physical senses, the astral is a realm of inner light and darkness. The light of our thinking is found here shining upon the etheric or upon other astral entities. Feelings are also found here. It is the seat of passions and desires and also of consciousness. Animals and Man both have inner feelings and thus have astral bodies. The plant and mineral do not have an astral body within their earthly body.

Ego: the inner self, the I-Am. This gives to mankind the ability to be conscious of itself as an independent, self-aware entity. An animal, due to its astral body, has personality and survival instincts but it does not have an individual ego. Rather each animal belongs to a species where a group ego is present. Likewise, neither a plant nor a mineral has its own ego. The Ego (and what it transforms to spirit) is the lasting aspect of human individuality between lives on Earth. The Ego may be called the divine aspect to the Human.

Andrew Linnell lives in Hudson, U.S.A and has worked within the computer industry for the last 30 years.