

REZENSIONEN / BOOK REVIEWS

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Rudolf Steiner. *Schriften. Kritische Ausgabe (SKA)*. Edited by Christian Clement. Volume 5. Writings on Mysticism, Mysteries and Religious History. Frommann-holzboog/Rudolf Steiner. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt/Basel. 2013.

Rudolf Steiner's works have so far been exclusively published, apart from a few exceptions, by the Rudolf Steiner-Verlag in Switzerland. Here the editors' main concern was simply to make the exceedingly large body of literary remains available in a readable form. This publishing venture, initiated by Steiner's widow, has been running for decades, but in all that time has never produced an edition that would satisfy scientific standards of criticism. In view of Steiner's rising reputation in non-anthroposophical media circles and the art world since his 150-year jubilee, it is therefore very fitting that a highly regarded, academic publishing house has had the idea of bringing out a new critical-historical edition of Steiner's main works, the first of its kind. *frommann-holzboog* are publishing this new edition (in co-operation with the Steiner-Verlag), initially in eight volumes, containing the most important of the books Steiner wrote, from his early philosophical writings up to his *Geheimwissenschaft (Occult Science)* of 1910. These initial eight volumes are part of a series called "Schriften. Kritische Ausgabe" (SKA). They have been edited by Christian Clement of the Brigham Young University in Utah, USA. He has already made a name for himself as the originator of a web-based Steiner library.

Volume 5, the first to appear, brings together *Die Mystik im Aufgange des neuzeitlichen Geisteslebens und ihr Verhältnis zur modernen Weltanschauung* and *Das Christentum als mystische Tatsache (Christianity as mystical Fact)*. Both are works in which Steiner made

some important changes for new editions. The SKA documents these revisions in minute detail by means of a continuous annotation system, yet without disturbing the flow of reading with a complete set of textual parallels. In addition to this – and this is particularly important in the case of these two texts – the editor has reconstructed, and extensively commented upon, Steiner's sources, which he himself was often rather loose in specifying. In his book on mysticism (the first title given above) Steiner often had recourse to contemporary publications. The SKA not only identifies the exact references, but also painstakingly traces them back to the actual works of the mystics and philosophers concerned. In this way Clement is able to show not only that Steiner drew his back-up material from a number of fairly easily identifiable contemporary works, but even how he lifted quotations from them in a definite sequence. As Clement comments: "Clear references, sharp demarcation of method, and factual detachment ... were ... not Steiner's thing." But, anyway, these were not the point. Rather, his concern was to present an account of a transformation of consciousness, "an account that was intentionally tinged with the subjective and personal, and modelled upon Goethean morphology".

Besides this work of documentation, what appears equally important is that fact that Clement's critical apparatus also entails cross-references and aids to understanding which repeatedly integrate Steiner's formulations into the main contextual thrust of his argument. Here is one of many examples: Commenting on what Steiner says about the Apocalypse of St. John, Clement makes reference to the richer content of later lectures on this subject: "Compared with these later interpretations ... that of 1902 would appear to be relatively immature, but the seeds of the hermeneutic approach that appears later is nonetheless present."

Continuity, not “breach”

The understanding informing Clement’s editorial work is not solely philological in character. This editor, in contrast to Steiner biographers such as Zander and Ullrich, has quite evidently taken pains to penetrate the more mystical side of Steiner’s mind. Integral to this he classes Steiner’s early theory of knowledge, since this, just as much as the later anthroposophy, “represents an attempt to arrive at a comprehensive documentation of how the human (or steinerian) mind experiences the ground of being”. For Clement this perspective reveals many continuities in the development of Steiner’s thinking from *the Philosophy of Freedom* to his writings on mysticism and Christianity. He thus avoids what has been construed by others as a “breach in continuity”, seeing the impression they have received as due simply to a change of subject. Viewed in this way, this meticulously produced edition of these two works can be seen as a valuable instrument of future Steiner research. They form, indeed, a sort of hinge between the philosophical and theosophical-anthroposophical phases in the development of Steiner’s works. In his introduction, Clement delicately delineates this hinge-function, thus distinguishing himself from other commentators, who have tried to construe Steiner’s change from “philosophy” to “theosophy” as pure opportunism. Instead, he expresses his conviction that the “dialectical conception” at the basis of the book on mysticism “had already been envisaged by Steiner before the turn of the century”, and that “the books he wrote in 1901 and 1902 were conceived as a fundamental investigation of the nature and development of consciousness, and thus can be interpreted as the idea of anthroposophical science in rudimentary form.”

Especially surprising is Clement’s contention that Steiner’s understanding of the Christ was “already essentially contained in the concept of being as it appears in the early writings” and that this invalidates the notion that Steiner simply adapted theosophical images that he got from Blavatsky and Besant’s interpretation of Christ.

Ground of being beyond subject and object

Steiner’s book on Christianity is interpreted by Clement not as something new, but as a continuation of previously laid epistemological foundations. Steiner’s view, he says, was that in the Mysteries knowledge was gained by direct experience of the fact that the dimensions elevated in naive folk-beliefs to the level of gods were in reality mirror images of the contents of consciousness – albeit not in the trivial, wrong-headed sense of mere illusory projections, but in the sense that “the neophyte direct his attention away from these self-created ‘gods’ towards the ‘god-creating activity’ of his own mind”. By this Steiner was trying to show that in this activity “not only [the neophyte] as subject was at work, but much more the ground of being as such, which encompasses subject and object”. And in a further note Clement adds, “this thought is undoubtedly an ideal metamorphosis of the theorem to do with the ‘observation of thinking’, which appears in *the Philosophy of Freedom*”. For this reason he is convinced that Steiner’s main philosophical work was already “composed in the spirit of the idea of the ancient mysteries, as Steiner imagined it in 1901.” Clement sums all this up in the formula: “Steiner’s esotericism can be understood as a conscious, ideal transformation of his philosophy for the purpose of rendering the philosophically implicit pictorially explicit.” Such a bridge of understanding between the “philosophical” and the “mystical-Christian” Steiner is not only useful in the area of Steiner’s “public image”. It could also serve as an aid to reflection for those anthroposophical “insiders” who tend towards a strongly denominational view of Steiner as the new “prophet of Christianity”. To come to an understanding of the development of Steiner’s works as a process of metamorphosis would enable us to see the “anthroposophical” phase not as the “real” (because later) Steiner, but – by analogy with organic development – as various expressions of a single formative principle. The first volume of this new edition is, therefore, a grand step towards general academic recognition – and an equally major challenge for the anthroposophical world.