



The address of *Herbert Witzmann*
to members of the Anthroposophical Society in America
New York Center, 30th august 1963

SeminarVerlag / Basel, 2015

The appointment of Herbert Witzenmann to the Vorstand of the General Anthroposophical Society was confirmed by the Annual General Meeting at Easter 1963. The following summer he attended the International Philosophical Congress in Mexico, interrupting his journey to spend three days in the United States. On August 30, 1963, at the request of the Society, he spoke to a gathering of members at the Center in New York City. Although he spoke in German, which had to be translated as he went along, those who heard him were impressed by the deeply poetic and very human manner which enabled him to create an immediate and personal contact with his audience despite the obstacle of language.

My dear friends !

To be privileged to set foot on the soil of this country which represents one side of the great scales which bears the weight of the world fills me with a sense of responsibility which I shall carry with me for the rest of my life. As a newcomer I do not feel called upon to speak, but rather to listen. If, however, in response to your friendly invitation, I now address a few words to you, bringing the heartfelt greetings of the "Vorstand" at the Goetheanum, then these can only be spoken in the sense of an echo of the mighty impressions which greeted me here - albeit an echo which is not merely a repetition, but within which its source is at the same time discernible.

After an initially stormy, then quiet, voyage across the waters of the Atlantic, beneath which rests Atlantis, the S.S. United States slipped into New York harbor on Goethe's birthday. In the pre-dawn grey, the mighty vessel glided into the mouth of the Hudson River with barely perceptible motion. As yet no firm shapes were visible, neither solid fundament nor towering structures, only pale illumined shadows, ranging from deepest black to delicate grey, which the gentle ocean breeze wove together into the veil of the morning, even as it intertwined the smoke-pennants of the tugboats. It was like one of those paintings, out of the substance of Atlantean experience, such as Turner saturated with the colors of the future. The arrival in port became thus a tangible act of creation through the deeds and sufferings of the light such as we experience in the pictures of this great painter.

Now the rising sun, slowly rounding itself to a disc, its ever more intense rays cascading through the canyons between the skyscrapers and overflowing their battlements, conjured forth out of the mist and shadow the whole panorama of the harbor. For me it was a dual experience - one indicative of the other - the primal ordering of matter by the spirit, and on the other hand the mission of

modern man to master with the lightforces of his spirit the physical world of the senses.

Deepening to black and flamed about with gold, the silhouette of the citadel of Manhattan still stands there before me. But before my inner gaze this picture transforms itself into one of ruins - the tragic wreckage of western civilization. Not a field of material ruins, not a premonition of approaching destruction through the might of warfare, but an image of the immediate present which has turned away from the creative power of the light whose glory had just uplifted me, and therefore falls into disintegration. Unscathed, however, there arises in the midst of this scene of destruction the figure of the Statue of Liberty, the bearer of the inextinguishable fire.

The danger which threatens Western civilization - indeed with which it threatens itself - contemplated here in the presence of one of its most impressive manifestations and in view of the promise and multiplicity of its tasks, can only find expression in the most shattering terms.

But if freedom is indeed that which is indestructible, the inextinguishable light, then its mere conceptual shadow cannot satisfy us. We must ask ourselves how much we actually know of her through observation and experience.

And in questioning thus, again a transformation takes place - the image of the Statue of Liberty transmutes itself before our inner eye into the form of the Sistine Madonna. For the Virgin Sophia with the Logos in her arms, and the two kneeling figures on either hand, belong to the most inward and imperishable images of our soul. The male figure, looking upward and outward, the female figure, downward and inward, appear as an epitome, in human guise, of the mystery of freedom which comes to manifestation between them.

Both of these figures now give us a reply to our question: Through what forces and in what region of soul does freedom become for us both observation and experience? And they each speak the very same words: namely in the experience of "you" - of one other than ourselves as expressed in that intimate and lofty word "thou." There, in the nature of this experience, is the soul region where the spiritual power of freedom flowers. But this identical answer branches out into two varying melodies, telling of two divergent experiences of "you."

Let us now clarify for ourselves this difference before enquiring as to how this experience of "you" can lead to the experience of freedom.

The "you"-experience, which the figure of St. Barbara has taken on in her gesture life, soul and spirit, in accordance with the feminine nature, is that of insight. The deepest insight into our own being is vouchsafed to us, when before our inner eye there appears no longer our own, but the being of our fellow man - when we experience another's self as our own. And this is possible when we no longer hurl against the other human being our thinking, feeling and desires, but allow his striving, his feeling and pondering to live within us. It is possible to harbor within us, in place of our own self, the inmost self of our fellow man, when we offer our own soul and spirit substance as an element within which he can form himself anew. The self of our fellow man is then livingly present within us in his full reality and becomes thus the cherished experience of "you." The more consciously we observe this whole inner process, the more clearly will that perceptive awareness expressed in the word "you" or "thou", be revealed to us. We now no longer speak with the other human being, but give expression to him as though he were ourselves.

The „you"-experience, on the other hand, which in the figure of St. Sixtus has taken on gesture, life, soul and spirit, in accordance with the masculine nature, is that of far-sight - of gazing outward and upward. Through the most lofty far-sight we experience our own ego as having its origin in the Godhead, as being united with Him, and as endowed by Him with light wherewith to exercise freedom of will. This can be achieved when, through inward soul observation according to natural scientific methods, we free ourselves from the illusion that thinking, the spiritual content of our being, has its life within us by virtue of our subjective ego. To be set free from this illusion is an experience of inner purification, wrought in character and style, by exact observation, in other words, one entailing the most modern attitude of consciousness. Hereby we participate in the highest and most profound experience of grace: that of being gifted with our own egohood.

For wakeful observation, therefore, ego-consciousness is an experience of grace because it acquires its existence by virtue of the spirit working actively within us in our thinking and not the reverse - namely, that the spirit active in our thinking exists by virtue of our subjective self. Our ego-experience rests upon the fact that our spiritually quickened thinking can grasp not only the objects lying outside it, but, more significantly, is able to grasp itself from within. The spirit in us, thus laying hold upon itself, is aware not of something foreign to it, but of its very own activity and essence - the miraculous reality of its own awareness. By living thus in this process of self-recognition, actively and observantly, we become conscious of our egohood as an experience of grace. We experience ourselves as a branch growing on the vine of the Godhead. And as this vine gifts us thus to grow upon it, it takes the manifold character of our ego into its own being. Inasmuch, therefore, as we take our being from the Godhead, and with this being enter once

more into its grace, we are able to give expression, in insight as well as far-sight, to that intimate mysterious word "you" or "thou". Thereby we bear witness to the presence of another being within our own, to that which becomes word within us in the act of giving utterance to another being.

This "you"-intimacy is common alike to both insight and far-sight, but at the same time distinguishes them in their contrasting relationships to the human and the superhuman spheres. The same is likewise true in the case of freedom.

The experience of freedom in insight is an experience not only of freedom but of setting free - of liberation.

The one who enfolds his fellow man within himself as "you", experiences thereby a liberation from his own subjective self. For he experiences in an uplifting selflessness, how out of the forces of his own soul, not he himself, but the ego of his fellow man takes form as "you". And the one who initiates this experience, he who takes up habitation there within us as "you", experiences likewise freedom. For he is no longer borne along by his own self-seeking experiences, but by the selfless manifestation of the one who, in this experience of "you", comes to meet him. Neither one of those who meet and recognize one another thus as "you" remains in a one-sided state of being. But this experience of I and you, of freedom and setting free, alternates in a continuous rhythm, backwards and forwards, as systole and diastole.

Likewise the experience of freedom in far-sight is a dual one, also one of freedom and liberation. The individual ego experiences himself as free when, in looking aloft, he is aware of himself as partaking in the universal ego. For then he is liberated from the forces of the blood which work in his organism and is conscious of his spiritual source. He is also free to form this spiritual source in an individual way, according to his own process of incarnation. And hereby the universal ego, the universal truth which undergoes suffering within the world-being, experiences, in its turn, liberation. For it must continue to bear the ills of our human insufficiencies just as long as man, in spirit forgetfulness, does not recall his origin. In gazing aloft in such a "you"-experience, however, - in knowing this source as his own - man alleviates the suffering of that all-pervading truth which has become man.

It is of special importance at this point to realize that these two experiences of "you" support and strengthen one another. The one, experienced as far-sight, in gazing aloft, attains purity capable of receiving grace only when it has as a foundation the "you"-experience of insight. And the other, the experience of "you" in insight - whereby through selfless soul forces the human ego is new born

- only attains to a sphere of true dignity through the loftiness of the far-sight which it brings to meet it.

Wherever, in this way, the two "you"-experiences sound together in their inherent qualities of freedom, sacrifice and grace, there the creative Logos can work, there as a constant presence He can embody Himself as that power which brings into being a new world. For it is, indeed, human beings who, out of ruins, - be they of the present or of the future, of spirit or of matter - must envision the structure of a new world from a spiritual aspect. Only free human beings can become such master architects, those who are capable of giving utterance to such a two-fold "you."

In Raphael's figure of the Virgin Sophia, holding in her arms the Cosmic Word, this two-fold "you" has become image and reality, - the selfless human being holding at heart her fellow man, the glory of heavenly grace about her head. Within herself she unites what the two figures kneeling near her express through their gesture and being. With the forces of freedom inherent in such a two-fold experience we shall be able to draw up from the depths into the light, out of the ancient treasure trove of Atlantis, the building stones for a new world. With the weight of these two experiences on either side of the scales, the balance of world history will become a symbol of righteousness from which the sunlight of a new human worth will shine forth.

This is, to be sure, a glimpse into the loftiest heights and profoundest depths of experience and may, therefore, appear to be foreign to reality, because unattainable ideals are spoken of. But with such an attitude of mind one will miss the point. For it is the best and worthiest human forces which actually fashion what is truly human and not the reverse. Only ever greater illusion pours into human life, making it hollow and preparing it for collapse, the more it is lacking in creative human forces strengthened through ideals. And however high or deep such "you"-experiences may lead us in quest of the springs of freedom, the paths to these springs, both to divine and to human love, begin within our hearts. We can, therefore, start at each moment to set forth upon them. Every beat of our heart can be such a step, can be a building stone for the new world.

Even though - if we do not wish to terribly deceive ourselves - we must look ahead from a present filled with ruins into a ruin-filled future, we can none the less step forward into this future with unshakable confidence. And we can truly harbor in our hearts this confidence, this trust, because we can trust one another: for we are able to say that intimate and mysterious word "you", both deep there within us and there, far aloft, beyond us.