

# *Rudolf Steiner, Valentin Tomberg, and the Return of Christ in the Etheric*

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In his Introduction to Valentin Tomberg's book *Christ and Sophia*, Christopher Bamford writes in a most beautiful way concerning Valentin Tomberg as a Platonist. Without developing this important theme further, I would like to add something with respect to certain remarks made by Christopher Bamford in the following quote from his Introduction:

Tomberg was, in fact, one of the first anthroposophists to take up Christ's reappearance in the etheric, this most precious fruit of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual research. Although Tomberg had alluded to Christ's etheric return previously in two (1931) articles reprinted in *Early Articles* ("The Deepening of Conscience, which Results in Etheric Vision" and "Suffering as a Preparation for Etheric Vision"), in this lecture course he went into it in great detail. Interestingly, two pages of the typescript from lecture 6 entered circulation with the heading "From a lecture by Rudolf Steiner, Stockholm, 1910." As such, until the mistake was realized, people quoted from them as if they were by Steiner himself.<sup>1</sup>

What is referred to here? Firstly: Thirteen years after Rudolf Steiner's death, Valentin Tomberg spoke in detail about the return of Christ in the etheric realm in his lectures "The Four Sacrifices of Christ and the Return of Christ in the Etheric" now published in English translation as an Appendix to *Christ and Sophia*. These lectures were held in Rotterdam, Holland, in 1938. Moreover, as indicated in Thomas Stöckli's book *Das ätherische Christuswirken* ("The Activity of the Etheric Christ"):

Valentin Tomberg was one of the first to write about the reappearance of Christ in the etheric. However, we did not include his two interesting articles ["The Deepening of Conscience, which results in Etheric Vision" and "Suffering as a Preparation for Etheric Vision"] in this collection – not because Tomberg later distanced himself from anthroposophy, but because we think that the articles need to be supplemented in some important points, as they would otherwise be misunderstood. However, these texts would have filled a gap in our collection of essays.<sup>2</sup>

From this it is clear that Valentin Tomberg – already in 1931, seven years prior to his important lectures "The Four Sacrifices of Christ and the Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric" – had written on the theme of the reappearance of Christ in the etheric.

Secondly: Someone who received a copy of the transcription of these lectures made an excerpt of two pages from them. He or she typed the following heading:

*"About the Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric"*  
from a lecture by Rudolf Steiner, Stockholm, 1910 –  
notes given to Wilhelm Rath by his stepmother prior to her death.

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1 Valentin Tomberg, *Christ and Sophia. Anthroposophic Meditations on the Old Testament, New Testament, and Apocalypse* (Great Barrington, MA: Steiner Books, 2006), pp. xxvi-xxvii.

2 Thomas Stöckli (editor), *Das ätherische Christuswirken: eine geisteswissenschaftliche Aufgabe*, volume I: *Vom Christuswirken in der Gegenwart* (Dornach, Switzerland: Verlag am Goetheanum, 1991), pp. 111-112. Words in [ ] added by RP.

[This heading and the two pages from Valentin Tomberg's lectures were photocopied onto one sheet of paper (front and reverse), which was then circulated. Here is the content of these two pages:]

*Let us briefly consider the steps that the Christ will take in the space available to him because of the karma of the Mystery of Golgotha for humanity – the karmic result of humanity's past behavior toward him.*

I.

*Humanity judged Christ: now he has the possibility of judging humanity. Judgment by Christ does not mean retribution, however, since the Christ must bring an end to the principle of retribution in the world. Christ's judgment means that he will awaken conscience; he will be able to work spatially and take steps that awaken the conscience of human beings.*

II.

*The first inkling of Christ's return in the etheric will be a wave of elemental feelings of conscience. Feelings of shame will seize people with elemental power. A consuming power of shame will arise in the soul, and people will not know its source. Thus we can say that Christ's appearance in the etheric will be heralded by the blushing red of human shame. People will experience an overwhelming force of disappointment in the values they have treasured as "truth" and "beauty." In a sense, people will have to reassess all the values in their souls. In the state of Kamaloka, one has to experience a re-evaluation of life's values, owing to the rays of World Conscience; now people will have to experience a re-evaluation of all their values in life, because they will experience those values through the effect of Christ, who will weave through horizontal space.*

III.

*Because Christ was scourged in the past, another step in space is now at his disposal karmically. Christ will not only awaken human conscience, but also inwardly touch people. Just as he received the blows of scourging, he will likewise be able to reach, touch, and move people. He will touch those who are in despair and instill comfort and courage in them. This moving touch is a consequence of the scourging, and it will cause courage to flow for a new effort of creativity. Some will say: We'll begin afresh, because everything we have created thus far will not stand up to his light. To a certain extent, the first day of creation must begin again within the human kingdom. People will not gain the courage for this out of themselves; rather, they will gain it from the inner touching that comes from the Christ as the karmic consequence of the scourging he experienced.*

IV.

*And because Christ was crowned with thorns in the past, he will give tasks to individuals and groups of people and show them how to serve his work. He will crown people with duties of love. We know that there are certain concepts of "duty" that exist in the world. Nevertheless, "duty" will eventually lead humankind to catastrophe, because everything evil that enters the world will, in fact, be pursued by people out of a sense of duty. When he returns in the etheric, however, Christ will assign tasks of love to people and groups, whereas the notion of "duty" – a giant with feet of clay – will fall and be shattered into a thousand fragments. Instead of duty, there will be a love for one's task.*

V.

*In the past, Christ had to carry the cross on which he would be crucified; now Christ will heal people's infirmities when he reappears in the etheric; there will be a healing of destinies. Those who carry their crosses will have the strength to carry them – through the healing of soul and body.*

VI.

*At the Mystery of Golgotha, when Christ was crucified, he said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). These words contain what he seeks to accomplish in space and what was granted to him as the karmic consequence of the crucifixion – that people might become conscious of what they do. The karmic result of the crucifixion will not be to bind human beings as though they were crucified, but to open their eyes. A new clairvoyance will be awakened through Christ, so that human beings will be able to see and know what they do. This is karmic clairvoyance – seeing karma. When people act today, they do not know the karmic consequences of that act. In the future, however, people will know what they are doing. Karmic clairvoyance is Christ's answer to the crucifixion, which took place because people did not know what they were doing. These are the karmic steps of Christ in space; their cause goes back to when he was a man and had to walk the path of suffering to which human beings had condemned him. Thus Christ changes the negative into the positive. The return of Christ in the etheric is his response to the way he was treated when he lived among humankind as a man.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Valentin Tomberg, *Christ and Sophia. Anthroposophic Meditations on the Old Testament, New Testament, and Apocalypse* (Great Barrington, MA: Steiner Books, 2006), pp. 393-394.

These two pages attributed to Rudolf Steiner circulated far and wide. For many years they were read and believed to be Rudolf Steiner's words. Even Rudolf Grosse, who at the time (about 1980) was the head of the Anthroposophical Society founded by Rudolf Steiner, believed that these two pages were authentic Steiner and read them out at the culmination of a lecture he held for teachers of religion at a conference at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. This fact deserves to be mentioned, as it indicates the source from which Valentin Tomberg spoke – the same source as Rudolf Steiner. What was this source? Here with Rudolf Steiner's words concerning this:

[The teacher of the Essenes] Jeschu ben Pandira once prophesied the Christ Event as a *physical* happening. And if Essene teaching is to be renewed in our days, if we are resolved to shape our lives in accordance with the living spirit of a new Bodhisattva, not with the spirit of a tradition concerning a Bodhisattva of the past, then we must make ourselves receptive to the inspiration of the Bodhisattva who will subsequently become the Maitreya Buddha. And this Bodhisattva will inspire us by drawing attention to the near approach of the time when in a new raiment, in an *etheric* body, Christ will bring life and blessing to those who unfold the new faculties through a new Essene wisdom. We shall speak entirely in the sense of the inspiring Bodhisattva who is to become the Maitreya Buddha and then we shall not speak of how the Christ is to become perceptible on the physical plane ... *With the knowledge gained from the inspiration of the Bodhisattva himself* we declare what form the future manifestation of Christ will take.<sup>4</sup>

With these words Rudolf Steiner makes it quite clear that his source of knowledge for the return of Christ in the etheric is gained from the inspiration of the Bodhisattva himself. In this connection it is interesting to consider the point in time when Valentin Tomberg held the lectures "The Four Sacrifices of Christ and the Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric" – in 1938, seventeen years after Rudolf Steiner made the following communication:

Referring to Jeschu ben Pandira as an earlier incarnation of the Bodhisattva who will become the Maitreya Buddha, Rudolf Steiner – in response to a question from Friedrich Rittelmeyer – said: "*Jeschu ben Pandira* [i.e. the reincarnated Jeschu ben Pandira] *was born at the beginning of this century, and if we live another fifteen years, we shall notice his activity.*"<sup>5</sup> This remark, made in August 1921, points to a birth in the year 1900 or thereabouts. It also indicates the beginning of the activity of the Bodhisattva [who will become the future Maitreya Buddha] in the 1930's. Rudolf Steiner thought that this activity would become noticeable by about 1936.

One possible conclusion that may be drawn from the above is that both Rudolf Steiner and Valentin Tomberg received their inspiration – in talking about the return of Christ in the etheric – from the source indicated by Rudolf Steiner: the Bodhisattva who was incarnated in the century before Christ as the teacher of the Essenes and who will become the future Maitreya Buddha, and who (according to Rudolf Steiner's remarks to Friedrich Rittelmeyer) reincarnated around 1900 and began his activity in the 1930's. The question as to the relationship of Valentin Tomberg (born 1900) with this Bodhisattva is too far-reaching to be discussed here. The most important point – as demonstrated above – is that both Valentin Tomberg and Rudolf Steiner drew upon the same source of inspiration when they spoke about the reappearance of Christ in the etheric.

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<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Lectures on the Gospel of St. Matthew* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965), pp. 184-185. Words in [ ] added by RP.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Powell, *Hermetic Astrology*, vol. I (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Foundation Press, 2006), p. 78 discusses this quote by Rudolf Steiner and indicates the source. Friedrich Rittelmeyer, who was the founder of the Christian Community, had several deeply esoteric conversations with Rudolf Steiner and made notes thereof which later came into circulation.

Speaking to Friedrich Rittelmeyer in August 1921, Rudolf Steiner was very specific about the incarnation in the twentieth century of the Bodhisattva who will become the future Maitreya Buddha. When he spoke in 1910 about this Bodhisattva, he was less specific and pointed to his incarnation in a more theoretical way:

The great Essene teacher, Jeschu ben Pandira, once pointed prophetically to the Christ who would come as the Lion born from David's line ... And if – I say this merely as an indication – it were to be the happy fate of humanity that Jeschu ben Pandira – who was inspired at that time by the great Bodhisattva, the future Maitreya Buddha – should incarnate again in our epoch, he would consider the task of supreme importance to be that of pointing to the etheric Christ in the etheric world; and he would emphasize that the Christ came once, and once only, in a physical body. Let us suppose that Jeschu ben Pandira – who was stoned to death approximately a hundred and five years before the Christ Event in Palestine – were to reincarnate in our time and announce the imminence of a revelation of Christ, he would point to the Christ who cannot appear in a physical body but is to become manifest in an etheric form, as he was revealed to Paul at Damascus. By this very teaching Jeschu ben Pandira could be recognized, assuming him to be reincarnated ... This is a sure sign by which Jeschu ben Pandira could be recognized, were he to reincarnate in our epoch ... It is quite true that a reincarnation of the greatest possible significance might take place in our epoch and be unrecognized or treated with indifference.<sup>6</sup>

While drawing attention to the possibility of a twentieth century incarnation of the Bodhisattva who will become the Maitreya Buddha, Rudolf Steiner also indicated that this incarnation could “*be unrecognized or treated with indifference.*” In September 1910 Rudolf Steiner spoke – as quoted above – in a theoretical way about this incarnation. In a lecture held just over one year later, on November 4, 1911, Rudolf Steiner indicated that this Bodhisattva “*is already now in incarnation*”:

Who was this Jeschu ben Pandira? He is a great individuality who since the time of Buddha – some six centuries before our era – was incarnated once in practically every century in order to further the progress of humankind ... We have therefore to speak of the successor of the Bodhisattva who at that time rose to the rank of Buddha. The successor of the Bodhisattva who became Gautama Buddha was the individuality who incarnated a hundred years before Christ as Jeschu ben Pandira, a herald of Christ in the physical body. He is now the Bodhisattva of humanity and will remain as such for 3000 years reckoned from the present time. Then in his turn he will also ascend to the rank of Buddhahood. He will therefore have needed 5000 years to become a Buddha. Since the time of Gautama Buddha, this Bodhisattva has incarnated once almost every hundred years and is already now in incarnation. *He will be the actual herald of Christ in his etheric form*, having in that earlier time proclaimed in advance the advent of the physical Christ. And many among us will live to experience the fact that in the 1930's there will be people – and later in the century in increasing numbers - who have sight of Christ as an etheric figure. *Spiritual science exists in order to make preparation for this ...* In 3000 years from now the Bodhisattva referred to above will become Buddha, and his teachings then will cause impulses to stream directly into humanity. He will be the one foreseen by human beings of ancient times: the Maitreya Buddha, Bringer of the Good.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Lectures on the Gospel of St. Matthew* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965), pp. 182-183.

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Steiner, “Jeschu ben Pandira: a Herald of the Christ Impulse,” *Anthroposophical Quarterly*, vol. 11 (Summer 1966), p. 29.