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The Bible
in a Spiritual Perspective

Translated and edited by Herbert Horn from the second expanded edition of *Die Bibel in spiritueller Sicht*

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Title Picture: Alo Altripp, Work-Nr. A73/81 V “Easter Sunday”

Introduction

A First Look at the Bible

If modern readers of novels for the first time open a Bible, such as the King James Version – and in our Christian, but largely secularized culture, there are countless people who have never opened a Bible – they would find that the Bible is a book in two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament, the first with about 700–1000 pages, the latter about 200–300 pages. Both parts are divided into larger sections, so-called “books.” The New American Bible further subdivides the Old Testament into “Pentateuch,” “The Historical Books,” “The Wisdom Books,” and “The Prophetic Books.” The Old Testament contains thirty-nine such “books” and an additional fourteen so-called “apocryphal books” (their number varies according to denomination; in Orthodox and Catholic Bibles, some actually belong to the normal canon); the New Testament contains twenty-seven “books.”

Further research would teach the readers that the texts of the Old Testament were written down approximately between 950 BC and 150 BC and the texts of the New Testament between AD 35 and 130. They would at first assume that the texts were written by the authors whose names are in the titles of the “books.” But they would learn that in the Old Testament, at most some passages in the prophets come from the prophets themselves. In the New Testament, only some of the Pauline letters were definitely authored by Paul himself, and the texts listed under the name of Luke were really written by Paul’s companion Luke. The authors of all the other writings are not or not clearly identifiable.

Even more helpless, the readers would be faced with the much-discussed question of the so-called canon, that is, why just these texts are included in the Old or New Testament. Innumerable other religious texts were written in the same period alongside the Old and New Testament scriptures – and they are not included in the Bible. In addi-

tion, the readers hopelessly gets entangled in the problem of the extent to which the texts are “authentic” and to what extent they are “fake,” whereby the concept of “authenticity” or “falsification” is also unclear.

Finally beginning with their reading, the readers would discover that the Old Testament first describes the creation of the world and of human beings by “God,” who is first called Elohim in the Hebrew, later Yahweh, and then describes the fate of the first humans. But these reports are in no way compatible with the readers’ scientific worldview. Then, the Old Testament deals with the story of a people called Israel, its origins in Chaldea, its stay in Egypt, its forty years of migration through the wilderness, its entry into Canaan, today’s Palestine, its confrontation with the peoples living there, its life in a single kingdom, then in the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, its exile in Babylon, and its return. But this story is often interspersed with fairy-tale-like, miraculous events, and always in the background is the influence of a god, Yahweh, who communicates to certain persons, gives laws, punishes and rewards, and who is the actual point of reference of the events.

Our readers would superficially take the New Testament as the story of a certain Jesus and his disciples, evidently a kind of mystery school. Jesus is portrayed there as a personage who has a special relationship with God, yet is executed as a blasphemer, miraculously revives, and appears to his disciples. Since then, they proclaim him as God’s Son upon whom the well-being and woe of the world depends. The stories of the New Testament also play in a dimension of the miraculous, with the greatest miracle being the resurrection of Jesus.

Interesting stories, remarkable miracles – this Bible is a beautiful historical novel, it seems to them. In further investigations, meanwhile, they learn from theologians and priests that these stories and miracles are supposed to be of vital significance for them, two to three thousand years later. They should believe that Jesus is God’s Son, had died for them, the reader, and their sins, had overcome death, and had risen. Jesus will raise them from the dead on the last day – to blessedness, if they

believe in Jesus and obey his commandments, to damnation if they do not believe. God's plan of salvation with humanity is hidden behind the story of Jesus. The Old Testament is the report about the initiation of this plan of salvation.

Inquisitive readers wonder: They are supposed to be redeemed by events, some of which were miraculous, that occurred in Palestine two to three thousand years ago? And only if they consider them as true and recognize their meaning? They look around: In fact, hundreds of millions of Christians apparently believe them to be true in a literal sense. The Bible is for them a document of these events and statements of faith. It is distributed by the hundreds of millionfold, among Catholic laity, priests, and members of religious orders, among the members of hundreds of Protestant churches, denominations, and sects, among the many Orthodox churches, yes, also among Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and spiritualists. It is a world bestseller, translated into hundreds of languages, repeatedly commented on, discussed, and depicted in works of art – but still controversial.

Many reject the Bible precisely because of its miraculous dimension and precisely because the churches demand a belief in dogmas that are incomprehensible to the mind. For many, the God of the Bible is unacceptable because of the seeming inhumanity (already in the early days of Christianity, it was debated whether the Old Testament of the Jews should even be adopted as scripture by Christianity).

For many theologians too – whether they express it or not – Jesus is by no means the bodily Son of God, in no way arose bodily from the dead, and salvation does not remotely follow the acceptance of these dogmas as true. In their view, the Bible must be purged of such “myths,” which are only inventions of people bound to an archaic world view. It is only possible to accept the ethical example of Jesus, possibly even a supernatural reality, “God,” and the guidance of the human being and humanity by them.

But if our readers abandon the attitude of reading a novel and deal more intensively with the biblical texts, they could discover that the texts themselves demand to be read neither as only historical reports nor as novel-like events of salvific significance. Rather, they are the representation of timelessly valid laws of development for the human being and humanity. They are spiritual texts. Their stories and “miracles” express soul-spiritual realities. In this view, the history of the people of Israel becomes exemplary for the story of every single person who attains a responsible ego in face of the passions and desires, which are symbolized by foreign peoples and idols. The story of Jesus becomes an exemplary development that can become actual for every human being: After the construction of a responsible ego comes the development of the true, spiritual self, which is present in germinal form in human beings and which is embodied by Jesus. The true self arises when the ego dissolves or “dies” in it. This is salvation, that is, redemption of the true self of the human being, and the New Testament describes the laws of this path of salvation, which is exemplary, timelessly valid, and replicable by every human being.

This spiritual view of the Bible has existed through the centuries alongside the official ecclesiastical doctrine, if only in a kind of shadowy existence. The Church Father Origen, who was first branded as heretic and today is slowly being rehabilitated, Meister Eckhart, Jakob Böhme, and the Kabbalists were familiar with this view. Spirituality, however, is the essence of the Bible. Its texts are documents of spiritual experiences. Its “miracles” are expressions of spiritual processes, which would be difficult to portray differently than pictorially. The Bible does not need to be demythologized; its myths need only to be read and understood on the spiritual level. Then, it reveals its true nature. Then, numerous objections of its opponents become obsolete since they are directed only against a dogmatic interpretation and do not recognize the actual character of the Bible at all. Then, many adherents of the Bible

who sense its true value but harbored secret doubts because of incomprehensible dogmas will gain firm spiritual ground under their feet.

In today's situation of the most diverse attitudes to the Bible, it is in the first place necessary to reveal its spiritual character and its actual value. From there, the issues of the canon, the genesis of the texts, their authenticity or falsification, which are hotly debated again and again in present times, can be dealt with appropriately. Therefore, in the following, a spiritual interpretation of the Bible will be given first, which, of course, can only be done in outline and with some examples. But this forms the key with which a Bible reader studying independently could gain further insights. Once this foundation has been laid, the questions of text formation, forgeries, canon, and the relation between the Bible, theology, and the church through the centuries can be dealt with in a meaningful way.

The Bible as Scripture

The Bible, from the Greek word *biblion*, meaning “book,” is the “holy” book or “holy” scripture of Christianity. Almost all of its texts themselves require a spiritual interpretation that establishes a direct relation to the reader’s life and world experience. An overarching context connects all the separate writings into a unity. It is the context of the soul-spiritual development of humanity, exemplified and represented by and in a people, and at the same time the soul-spiritual development of each individual. This context makes the Bible a “holy” scripture, for a spiritual view of the world and spiritual experiences that are perceived as “holy” are expressed in it.

Spiritual Worldview

According to these experiences, the world was not created accidentally from a big bang. Rather, the world and all beings in it have emerged from the spirit, are maintained by the spirit, and are urged by the spirit towards their developmental goal. This spirit is intelligent order, energy, and consciousness. It is “Word,” “life,” and “light” as expressed in the Gospel of John (John 1:1–4, NRSV). God is uncreated, the foundation of all things and beings, subject to neither space nor time; God is “Word”: information that exists before all visible structure. At the same time, God is “life”: cosmic primordial energy, which, structured by information, develops incessantly. And God is “light”: By the information being reflected in the energy, it becomes aware of itself. This trinity of Word, life, and light unfolds, thereby revealing its qualities. They are expressed in nature. Nature is the “garment” of the spirit, the “letters” of the spirit with which it “spells out” itself. The human being too is an expression of this efficacy of the spirit.

Already the first verses of the Bible characterize this creative nature of God. The spirit (information) hovers over the waters (energy) and speaks, “Let there be light” (consciousness) (Genesis 1:2–3, LEB).

Divine order, power, and consciousness are in all things, create them out of themselves, and continue to work in them. God is not an anthropomorphic being who creates the world as an artisan makes products – acting on them from the outside. God creates from the inside, as information, energy, and consciousness acting in God’s own substance.

The unborn, all-pervading, all-sustaining spirit can be experienced by human beings in whom this spirit also lives and works. It is experienced as untouchable, as “holy.” And someone who authentically writes down this experience of the structure, the energy, and the consciousness of reality is writing a “holy” scripture.

But a holy scripture is “holy” in still another sense. Anyone who experiences and conveys the structure, energy, and consciousness of the spirit will convey it in such a way that it reflects the structure, energy, and consciousness of the spirit. A work of art is a work of art when it reveals the structure of reality. Likewise, holy scriptures are works of art. Their structure and their contents *correspond* to the holy and are also for this reason themselves holy.

Spiritual Development

The Bible as a whole describes a sacred development. God brings forth all things out of God, works in them, and pushes them to unfold. This creates development – development of the attributes of God and God’s creatures. These evolve to express the initially hidden qualities of God and their own qualities better and to a greater extent. In humanity as a whole and in each individual human being, the divine Trinity is active. This is expressed in the Bible as God having created humanity “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27, NRSV), but this image of God is still unconscious in human beings. It is latent and undeveloped. Human beings do not yet know their true identity – or no longer: their unlimited consciousness and being, the image of God working in them. For the time being, they know only their limited identity between birth and death, beings that grow, say “I” when referring to themselves, take up professions, found families, age, and die. They identify with space and time and matter, for they emerged as egos from these. But the aim of evolution is that their true identity, their true self, comes to light and they become aware of it. The prerequisite is that they recognize their ego, which is bound to the body, as a relative reality that is inadequate to their true nature and that they subordinate it to the absolute, true reality.

This evolution of humanity and the human being is the “holy” development that structures the whole Bible in content and composition. The Old Testament describes above all the development of a responsible, independent ego under the guidance of the “I am that I am,” namely, Yahweh (Exodus 3:14, LEB), by means of an external law. The New Testament portrays the emergence of the conscious image of God, the true, unlimited identity, which lives in freedom out of the inwardly recognized law of the spirit. Thus, there is the great composition-al dichotomy of the Bible, which corresponds to the great dichotomy of human evolution. The Old Testament is a document of the Old

Covenant, of the activity of the spirit in humanity, especially in the people of Israel, leading to the emergence of an independent ego that breaks away from the influences of matter – the “nations” – and turns to God. The New Testament is a document of the New Covenant, of the activity of the spirit leading to the unfolding of the infinite true self, in which the limited ego dissolves.

All scenes and statements in the Bible are arranged according to this worldview and this development and are at the same time its expression. For example, the story of David and Goliath: The young David, who is later anointed king, embodies the independent ego oriented to the spirit. Goliath, the hulking Philistine, is the embodiment of spatiotemporal matter, the power of the corporeal. Matter claims control over the responsible ego. It is gigantic and scary. David approaches Goliath, in the name of the Lord, who “does not save by sword and spear” (1 Samuel 17:47, NRSV), and fells the giant, expressly without a sword, without armor, without effort. Thus, the principle of matter is overcome by the principle of the spirit: The serene reliance on the divine powers in one’s own soul is in the long run superior to all claims based on physical force.

Testament

From the Latin *testamentum* meaning “legacy” or “last will.” The Old Testament represents the old legacy of God, the “Old Covenant” of the spiritual world with humanity, which is linked to the task of developing a responsible ego. The New Testament is the new legacy, the “New Covenant” of the spiritual world with humanity. After the preparation, the true self, the spiritual person, embodied by Jesus, can unfold. In 2 Corinthians 3:6 and 3:14, Paul contrasts the two testaments with each other for the first time.

The Threefold Sense of Scripture

This example makes it clear how the Bible wants to be read. Its idiom is “exemplary.” The figures of the Bible and the relationships between them exemplify principles or forces and the interplay between them. The same forces and their interplay operate on all levels of reality, in each individual human being, and in all humanity. Everywhere there is the urge that an independent, responsible ego, “David,” overcomes the certainty of the physical forces, “Goliath.” “David” and “Goliath” are historical figures but at the same time timeless, archetypal symbols of forces in human nature. The founders of the German ecology movement “David gegen Goliath” (David against Goliath) have read the Bible correctly: not as a mere story or even just a legend but as a representation of timeless laws of life valid for every present and every level of life. The right ecological insight will prevail against powerful economic interests, however improbable this may be. This type of reading is a spiritual perspective on the Bible. Also numbers, things, and above all geographical indications in the Bible usually refer not only to themselves but are at the same time symbols for soul-spiritual facts.

You can also read the Bible from a religious perspective. You would then try to recognize the “finger of God” in such a narrative. God works through David, who is God’s instrument, and destroys evil: Goliath. The whole Bible would be a representation of God’s “plan of salvation” for humanity. God would bring salvation to people in history, and it would be important to believe in this plan of salvation in order to be included in it. In this interpretation of faith, which could be called the “salvation-historical” view, the events of the Bible would remain purely external – historical. David and Goliath would not be principles in *every* human being and in *every* people.

Even the purely historical level can be in the foreground when reading the Bible. You would then determine that David, the future king of Israel, encountered Goliath, a war hero of the Philistines, perhaps in

1010 BC and against all probability defeated him. You would leave it at that.

Since ancient times, these three ways of interpreting scripture have been distinguished. For example, the Church Father Origen, who lived from about AD 185 to 254, spoke of the three ways in which scripture could be interpreted: in a “bodily,” a “soulsh,” and a “spiritual” way.¹ The “bodily” corresponds to the purely historical interpretation. The “soulsh” amounts to an interpretation according to faith in which historical events are interpreted in the sense of a salvation history, which satisfies the earthly soul’s needs such as security and love. The “spiritual” is the spiritual point of view: Timeless soul-spiritual laws, which can be experienced by every individual, are reflected in the historical or in what seems historical.

The spiritual sense of scripture is decisive, for the Bible is “holy” scripture; it speaks of the spirit, and everything external, apparently only historical, is the expression of timeless soulsh or spiritual contexts. Those who take the external, the apparently only historical, as the main thing or see in it *only* God’s salvation-historical plan, who do not recognize a parable as a parable and the individual event as exemplary, block their own access to the Bible. In that sense, the Jews since ancient times have said, “Woe to those who take the garment of the Torah (the five books of Moses) for the Torah itself,”² and Jesus said to his disciples, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that ‘they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand’” (Mark 4:11–12, NRSV).

Yes, the non-spiritual interpretations are even dangerous and inhibiting because then, for example, the “Promised Land,” instead of being the image of an inner state that every person and every society should realize, becomes a geographical piece of land, Palestine, defended by force and cunning, by which means the inner “Promised Land” cannot be realized. And then the death and resurrection of Jesus become

mere historical events to which the believers cling as a dogma from which they hope for salvation for their earthly soul and eternal life for their mortal body. They do not realize that the death and resurrection of Jesus are an invitation to them to let their egocentricity, the cause of death, die, thus reviving their true, immortal identity.

Biblical Symbols

Every thing and event can have been meant symbolically by the authors of the Bible or can become a symbol for the reader. For every thing, being, and event of the phenomenal world is a reflection of the spiritual or soul world and can therefore serve as a symbol for these. For example, the divine often reveals itself on a “mountain” – in the heights above the plane of the ordinary world. The “desert” or “wilderness” is a symbol of an inner state of loneliness and of spiritual hunger and thirst; King David represents the independence, power, and generosity of a developed ego; Jesus’ disciple Peter represents the human will open to the spiritual path; etc.

In particular, the numbers in the Bible are symbolic. Jesus appeared in public when he was about 30 years old: 30 is a tenfold 3. Three symbolizes a self-contained, articulated unit of three elements, for example, spirit, soul, and body. 30 is this unit in dynamic expression. David was also 30 when he became king, and his special force of Mighty Warriors consisted of 30 men. Or Peter caught 153 fish. 153 is $1 + 2 + 3 + \dots + 17$. 17 is the symbol for the maximum quantity of similar elements. 153 increases this symbolism by adding all 16 previous possibilities of the number of elements.

Maybe Jesus really was 30 years old at the beginning of his public ministry. Then reality itself would have been symbolic as is the case with all the historical events described in the Bible. Or the authors used the number 30 only to express a particular fact that applies to any great spiritual personality.

The “Miracles”

The purely historical and salvation-historical points of view must completely fail in narratives in scripture that are usually understood as “miracles” in the sense of being contrary to the laws of nature. Yes, this idea could even only have come about because these points of view were erroneously applied to passages that have to be read first and foremost spiritually. In addition to their practice of depicting historical or seemingly historical events as pictorial expressions of spiritual facts, the authors of the scriptures also used images taken from the sensible world to describe soul-spiritual processes that can be communicated conceptually only with difficulty or cumbersomeness.

For example, Jesus shows the scribes what a spirit-filled life should look like and hopes for their reaction. He expects that they will also really begin such a life now and that happiness and joy will mature in their own hearts and in the hearts of others as the fruits of this life. When they bring no such fruits, he deprives them of his attention and the power to attain them. They harden even more in their self-righteousness and die inside. These events stand as a picture in the New Testament (Matthew 21:18–19). Jesus sees a fig tree on which he seeks fruit and finds none. Then he curses the tree, and it withers. Is the withering of the fig tree something supernatural, a “miracle” in which Jesus demonstrates magical powers? Not at all. Here a soul-spiritual reality is expressed through a picture. The scribes are the fig tree that yields no fruit and withers in the withdrawal of the spiritual powers – the curse. In Luke, a similar reality is portrayed by a similar picture, but there, it is expressly called a parable (Luke 13:6).

Viewers on the “bodily” level will consider the scene a fiction. Viewers on the “soulish,” salvation-historical level will consider it a supernatural process and take it as a credential for Jesus’ divine Sonship and the truthfulness of the Bible. Viewers on the “spiritual” level will recognize the timeless content of the parable and relate it to them-

selves: When they do not let the truth and power of the spirit, embodied by Jesus, work in them – for the spirit is latent also in them – they will wither like a fig tree cut off from water.

Miracles

Miracles are signs of divine might and demonstrations of spiritual power through which spiritual lack and disorder are replaced with abundance and order. For example in Mark 8:1–9 (NRSV), when Jesus distributes “bread” – that is, spiritual insight – and “fish” – that is, spiritual power – he dispels the spiritual hunger of a receptive crowd. These spiritual foods are not exhausted by their distribution as would be the case with earthly food. On the contrary, insight and power multiply inexhaustibly.

Such outpourings of power will also have effects in the earthly world. The spiritually-fed will live differently than before, respond individually to the insights and powers received, and the disciples of Jesus will feel these reactions. These are the “broken pieces” that they collect after the feeding.

To depict such spiritual events, biblical authors often used images from the visible world of appearances. The readers of that time were familiar with this manner of presentation. They experienced the spiritual processes in the picture. But those who no longer see the picture as a picture but as a concrete fact in the physical world will find a contradiction to the laws of nature. But the described demonstrations of power lie on a different plane than earthly nature. They are miracles not in the sense of breaking the laws of nature but because demonstrations of special spiritual powers are something extraordinary in the earthly world.

That the miracles are soul-spiritual processes that are expressed through images becomes particularly clear in connection with the miraculous feedings, for shortly after the feeding of the 4000, Jesus warns his disciples, “Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees” (Mark 8:15, NRSV), and in Matthew, it is explained that the “yeast” is the false “teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matthew 16:12, NRSV) as opposed to the “bread” of the true spiritual doctrine that Jesus teaches.

I. Structure and Content of the Bible

The Old Testament focuses on a collective: the people of *Israel*, which can be translated as “servant of God.” The New Testament focuses on an individual: *Jesus*, which can be translated as “God saves.” The first relates to the second as preparation relates to realization, as prophecy relates to fulfillment. The Testaments have parallel structures. The beginning of the Old Testament is about the creation of the world and humanity through the “Word” of God, first the creation of the still unconscious spiritual human being, then the earthly human being, consisting of body and living soul (Genesis 2:7, KJV). This earthly human being “falls” and becomes entangled in the earthly world. At the beginning of the New Testament is the incarnation of the “Word” of God, which leads the spiritual human being to self-consciousness, loosens earthly human beings from their entanglements in the earthly world, connects them with the spiritual human being, and thus reverses the “Fall.” Paul speaks in this sense of the old Adam of the Old Testament, the “earthly” human being who fell, and of the new Adam of the New Testament, Jesus Christ, the resurrected image of God, the “heavenly” human being, who becomes “a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45–47, NRSV).

Central to the first part or Old Testament of the Bible are the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, the journey through the wilderness for 40 years, the entry into the Promised Land, and the life therein. Central to the second part or New Testament is the spiritual path of Jesus. After being “anointed” as Christ, Jesus is tempted in the wilderness for 40 days, leads his disciples to the “kingdom of God,” exemplarily “loses” the earthly ego on the cross, and arises as a spiritual self in the “kingdom of God.” The end of the first part prophetically points to the restoration of humanity through the new Adam, Christ. The second part shows in the end, us-

ing the example of Jesus, that and how each person can realize the new Adam.

Thus, both Testaments are a great representation of the history of the consciousness and life of humanity and the human being. The human being, who has emerged from the animal kingdom, breaks away from the rule of instincts and builds up a self-responsible, independent ego under the guidance of the I Am, Yahweh, the God who created the earthly human being. However, this ego also has a negative side: It selfishly isolates itself from others; it is proud; it can be greedy for power, fame, and possessions.

After building a responsible, earthly ego, however, it is important to unfold the spiritual, true identity. It can unfold only when the earthly ego gives up its negative qualities and places its positive qualities at the disposal of the true self. When earthly egocentricity “dies,” the true self can be resurrected. The human being is then under the direction of the Elohim, the God who has brought forth the spiritual human being out of itself. In that sense, Yahweh is only one aspect of the Elohim.

Elohim and Yahweh

Yahweh is the “I am that I am” (Exodus 3:14, LEB), the creator of the earthly world, not the creator of the original, spiritual world. Rather, the creator of the latter is, or better, are the Elohim, for the word Elohim is a plural. Yahweh thus corresponds to the human ego, which constructs itself from the experiences in the earthly world. Elohim, on the other hand, corresponds to the spiritual human being, the true human identity.

Yahweh is an invisible principle striving to unfold in the world and within the human being. In the human being, an independent ego, the entity of the personality, oriented to the laws of nature and the spiritual world wants to develop. This tendency bursts the bondage to instincts, which had been the condition of human beings in the animal state. Its aim is the conscious mastery of the id (in the sense of Freud) and an orientation towards the realities of the environment and of its own laws of development. It was Moses who recognized these realities and formulated them as commandments. When the ego in the state of becoming is in harmony with Yahweh, the cosmic ego, and its laws of evolution, it feels harmony; figuratively speaking, God is gracious to it. When the ego is in conflict with Yahweh, it feels discomfort and the corresponding consequences; figuratively speaking, God is angry with it. The effects correspond exactly to the causes, “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (Exodus 21:24, NRSV).

Jesus embodies the true self of the human being, free from the laws of the Old Testament and living out of the freedom of the New Testament. His ego has dissolved in the true self and lives out of it. Yahweh is dissolved in Elohim. One could therefore say that the “father” of Jesus is Elohim and at the same time Yahweh as an aspect of the Elohim. Jesus accepts Yahweh as necessary for the stage of development of the ego in the earthly world – the Old Testament laws are necessary – but assigns Yahweh a place within the overall development: Elohim, the God

of love, the God of true identity, includes Yahweh, the God of the ego, which has now dissolved in the true identity.

Elohim

Elohim is the masculine plural form of the feminine singular *Eloah*. Eloah means approximately “omnipotence, which produces everything out of itself.” The name Elohim thus means that God contains all multiplicity yet is one and that God is masculine-feminine or feminine-masculine. “Elohim” is usually translated as “God,” sometimes as “gods” in English translations of the Bible. Elohim is the totality of all spiritual forces and principles of the spiritual world, for example, wisdom (word), love (life), and consciousness (light). The spiritual beings that emerge from God, including the spiritual human being, reflect God’s qualities: wisdom, love, and consciousness, as well as femininity-masculinity or masculinity-femininity.

Yahweh (Jehovah)

The term means “I am who I am” or “I am the I am” and thus signifies the spiritual principle of the ego or centralization in the cosmos. As such, Yahweh is an aspect of (the) Elohim. It is usually translated as “LORD” in English translations of the Bible. Yahweh’s special connection with the people of Israel points to the task of this people in the development of humanity: the formation of a responsible ego. Yahweh is at the same time the creator of the visible world with its invisible vital forces and of the visible human body with the animating life force, the ego. Yahweh’s creation is an image of the spiritual world of the Elohim in the realm of visible matter.

When the human beings have developed a responsible ego under the guidance of Yahweh, they can turn to their real task: the unfolding of the spiritual human being, of the true self. Thereby, they enter the spiritual world of the Elohim of which Yahweh is only an aspect.

As ego principle, Yahweh can only be experienced within the human being and acts there as a driving force for the formation of the ego. But Yahweh is also the creator of the visible world. In it, the ego usually identifies with its visible body and visible things, thereby forgetting that it originated from the same source as all other egos. Thus, there is a separation between subject and object, the great delusion of the phenomenal world. The ego also faces Yahweh. This can lead to the ego feeling powerless in front of the almighty Yahweh and the priestly representatives of Yahweh – who represent the super-ego in the person – and seeking reconciliation with Yahweh and them in all possible ways. Or conversely, the ego projects the omnipotence of Yahweh on itself and its body, inflating and even deifying itself. In reality, Yahweh is the same in every human being and can be experienced only within.

1. The Old Testament

Both testaments can be subdivided into history books, wisdom books, and prophetic books: descriptions of the development itself, descriptions of the knowledge gained thereby, and descriptions of the result of the development.

The History Books of the Old Testament

Two Creation Stories

The Old Testament has two stories of creation. It might seem that the two stories are different representations of the same circumstances: the creation of the world and of humanity, but two different circumstances are described here. In the first story (Genesis 1:1–2:3), the all-embracing spirit, the “Elohim,” creates the spiritual world with the spiritual human being.

The spirit of God hovered over the waters and “spoke” on the first “day of creation”: Let there be light. The spirit – wisdom, intelligence, order, lawfulness, meaning – floated above the original energy/matter, the “water,” and structured it as information structures a force field. Through this structuring, consciousness, “light,” becomes possible. For the spirit, differentiated into information and energy/matter, becomes aware of itself by being reflected as information in the energy/matter. In the long run, in five further “days of creation,” through the differentiation and organization of the energy/matter, the two-sexed spiritual human being finally emerges. On the seventh “day of creation,” the spirit rests. It permeates everything that has been created with itself and again becomes aware of itself in what has been created – especially in the human being. Seven “days of creation” means seven stages of evolution. Thus, the Elohim release out of themselves structures of force lines, spiritual primal images of the plant and animal world, and finally of the two-sexed human being, who is the image of the Elohim.

In the second story of creation (Genesis 2:4–25), the I Am, “Yahweh,” an aspect of the Elohim, creates the soul world. This is “paradise.” Yahweh then creates the soulish human beings out of subtle matter, “dust,” according to the archetype of the spiritual human being, then the subtle-material realm of plants and animals according to the archetypes of the plants and animals, and finally divides the two-sexed hu-

man beings into two separate sexes. These human beings nourish their souls from the soulish powers of paradise, which are called “trees.”

Only when the soulish human beings disobey the mandatory law of development and “fall” does the gross material, visible world that we know come into existence; it is marked by death, illness, and various evils. Driven out of the soulish paradise of unity with Yahweh into the gross material world, the human beings gradually develop an ego with two sides, which is capable of responsibility but also of violence and malice: They have eaten from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Even the gross material creation is still a marvel but not comparable to paradise, which is without death, disease, and evil, and certainly not comparable to the original creation of the spiritual archetypes.

In the visible, coarse material creation, a condensed human corporeality, which is mortal in contrast to the paradise body, comes into being, and from the “evil” side of the ego originate wars and conflicts – an example of this is the fratricide of Cain killing Abel – and repeated natural disasters – one example is the flood. It too can be read as a picture of a psychic process: In the flood of self-generated passions and impulses that can no longer be controlled, people drown psychically. Only Noah stays afloat in the “ark,” a soul state of purity.

All these are not just stories from the distant past. All human beings today have “fallen” from the unity with the divine law, are constantly engaged in the “fall” of conceit, self-righteousness, and pride, and suffer from the consequences of their own fall and the fall of humanity. They are mortal and live in separation from God. That is the “sin” inherited by virtue of their earthly nature.

The two creation stories of the Bible outline in pictures a spiritual science. No materialistic science will ever be able to explain how physical and chemical processes can produce something such as life, consciousness, sense of beauty, love of truth, and religion. It will only be able to show under which physicochemical conditions organisms orig-

inated in the gross material creation, in which all these are expressed. The Bible reverses the situation. Spirit, life, and consciousness create by means of physicochemical processes organisms in which they can express themselves.

Spiritual science also is on a different level than religious materialism, which as “creationism” insists on literal *days* of creation and the creation of the world from outside, as if God were an artisan. Over the centuries, this religious materialism came into conflict with scientific materialism and gave it desperate rearguard action, for experience and reason were stronger. By contrast, a spiritual science, as represented by the Bible, rises above this contradiction and easily integrates the empirical results of modern science into its spiritual world view.

The Fall

The Fall is an existential-ontological process not a moral process. It has two phases. First, the original spiritual human beings, who belonged to the spiritual creation of the Elohim, “fell” into the soul creation of Yahweh, “Paradise,” a region of slower vibration than the spiritual world. This is the first “Fall,” the separation from the spiritual origin. It is indicated in the Bible only indirectly by the juxtaposition of the two creation stories.

Second, the task of human beings in “Paradise” would have been to build in obedience to Yahweh an ego from which the awakening of the true self and the return to the original spiritual world would have been possible. Human beings, however, were “disobedient” and in self-will sought their own way and became entangled in the material creation – the world of the opposites of good and evil: They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They identified their ego with transient phenomena. This second “Fall” is the separation from Yahweh, which is directly narrated in the Bible.

Both times, we cannot speak of moral guilt, which already presupposes a developed ego. Nevertheless, the Fall in its two phases is an unfortunate blunder of humanity, for the concentration on the world of appearances causes people to forget their true spiritual and soul being, whereby the fulfillment of their inherent purpose becomes impossible to them. A revision is only possible through beings who are in a special way connected with the spiritual world reminding them of their inherent purpose and giving them the strength to fulfill it. Then they can recognize their situation, reverse the second and the first “Fall,” and thus do away with the separation from Yahweh and then from Elohim. The Old Testament describes the first task; the New Testament describes the second.

The “Patriarchs”

At the stage of the separation of humanity from God, a renewed activity of the spiritual world begins with the aim of preparing for the salvation of humanity from this state. Yahweh, the I Am, reappears; the possibility of building a responsible ego in the gross material world is manifested in humanity. This possibility takes effect in a certain type of person, in Abraham, the first patriarch of Israel, who believes in it, who is open to it. A sign of this possibility taking effect is “circumcision” (Genesis 17:10–14). A “pagan” is dominated by their passions. But Abraham “circumcised” these passions and thereby cleared the way to an independent ego.

Isaac, his son, the second patriarch, stands for the conscious ego emerging from the background of the unconscious, the “father.” The right to exist of this ego lies in that it prepares for the true self. It therefore always has to be turned towards the spiritual laws – to God. But its development towards independence brings with it the danger that it absolutizes itself, in good as in evil, and sees itself as the measure of all things. This tendency toward absolutization, this egocentricity, must be sacrificed, which is why God demands the sacrifice of Isaac from Abraham. But Isaac himself is not sacrificed. The ego in itself and its independence are not sacrificed. Only the self-willfulness of the ego, its “Aries (ram) tendency,” its tendency toward absolutization, is sacrificed. Therefore, a ram is sacrificed in place of Isaac (Genesis 22:1–13).

Religious materialists will see here a desire of God for an actual human sacrifice and cannot explain this cruelty of God. Religious rationalists will justify God and say that God wanted to test Abraham as part of God’s plan of salvation. Spiritual interpreters, however, know that the image of the sacrifice of Isaac and the substitution of the ram refer to themselves.

Accordingly, Jakob Böhme, who interpreted the first book of Moses in his work *Mysterium Magnum*, sees in this scene the “figure”

for a process that every human being has to carry out on the spiritual path. Abraham, the man of faith, must sacrifice the self-willfulness of his ego in order to reach inner freedom. Isaac symbolizes the conscious earthly ego born from the unconscious, the “firstborn.” Abraham is willing to sacrifice the earthly ego for the divine in him even though Isaac had been promised by God as the progenitor of a great people. But he should not sacrifice this earthly ego as such but only its *self-willfulness*, the nature of the ram. So that Abraham can now keep the promised son, the ego, but sacrifice its ram nature, God sends him the ram, the ram lamb, as a substitute for the son. Böhme interprets this lamb as a symbol for Jesus, for Jesus would someday sacrifice the self-willfulness of the earthly ego in his divine powers until this ego would again become the expression of the *divine* will.

Thus, every believer can dissolve his self-willfulness according to the pattern given by Jesus, this “figure.” Thereby, the scene foreshadows the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, and according to Böhme, Abraham beholds this process in the future by “lifting up his eyes” (Genesis 22:13, LEB). In this way, Böhme connects the Old Testament with the New Testament.

The same sacrifice occurs on the exodus of Israel from Egypt. The self-willfulness of the ego of the Egyptians persists. Therefore, every “firstborn” of the Egyptians, every ego, is killed just as every self-willful earthly ego must succumb to death. On the other hand, the male Passover lamb sacrificed by every Israelite family stands for the sacrifice of self-will, giving the Israelites the possibility to move out to a liberated ego state.

Böhme emphasizes, however, that it is not enough to rely on the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus and to believe that one is already redeemed by it, for the sacrifice only gives the power to reenact it. If it is not reenacted, everything remains the same and there can be no talk of salvation.

As the third patriarch of the people of Israel, Jacob, begotten of Isaac, is the human type whose ego has been cleansed of all animal tendencies and is filled with spiritual powers. Esau, the “animal-like” twin brother of Jacob, loses his birthright. But Jacob carries out the powers of the I Am in a twelvefold way: in his twelve sons, progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel – at the same time pictures for forces in the individual. One of them, Joseph, will do great things in Egypt, the world of the “pagans,” who are at first favorably disposed toward the “circumcised.”

The Journey through the Wilderness

But the time comes when Egypt is oppressing the “people of Israel.” An ego oriented to the spiritual world has developed and wants to develop further. Greed and comfort – “Egypt” – want to keep it from this development, however, be it in a people or in an individual. A new impulse from the spiritual world, embodied in Moses, comes to help. “Moses” is the one drawn “out of the water” (Exodus 2:10, NRSV), that is, one who has already become independent and free from temporality and impermanence – the “water.” He wants to lead his people out of Egypt, and Egypt blocks him. All those who try to become independent of their environment and their body will notice how “Egypt” persistently blocks them inside and outside themselves. Only the exhaustion of all the enduring qualities of “Egypt” by the ten plagues, that is, by disappointments of every kind, makes the exodus possible.

The last plague is the killing of all the “firstborn” of the Egyptians, which, according to Böhme, symbolizes the physical death of the self-willed ego, while the Israelites have voluntarily sacrificed this self-willfulness in the form of the Passover lamb and are therefore spared.

The people of Israel leave; the waters of the sea part. The ego turned towards God traverses unscathed all temporal events determined by impulses, passions, and emotions – the water. It recognizes them and thereby distances itself from them. But the floodwaters collide over the army of Pharaoh. This is a miracle for the religious materialists. Historians try to explain it by wind, drought, and the like. Perhaps natural events really did provide the template for the picture used by the author of the text, which describes an inner process, but the real miracle is that with the help of spiritual powers, an ego focused on the spiritual world can recognize all the influences of temporality – the water – and go through them unchallenged, “dry.”

The people of Israel journey through the wilderness for 40 years, for 40 is the number of dynamic matter, the number of time, the con-

stant flow of earthly things coming into being and passing away. Surrounded by the transience of all earthly things, the whole world now becomes a wilderness for the ego. Nothing transient provides spiritual nourishment and meaning in life. The people who are growing towards independence are time and again afraid of freedom and long for the “flesh pots of Egypt”: for all the comforts that the world had offered to them before they were jolted to begin asking for the meaning of life. But they are nourished by “manna,” by divine food: The spiritual world gives them meaning in life. A column of cloud goes before them during the day: Spiritual powers manifest themselves and are clearly noticeable to their waking consciousness. At night, a column of fire goes before them: Even dreams give them orientation and strength.

And again the Israelites grumble in their solitude because they are deprived of their usual food, distractions, and comforts. They are bitten and killed by creeping serpents: a picture of remorse “creeping around” within them because of their bickering with God. But when Moses puts a brazen serpent on a staff and those who have been bitten look at it, they are spared. Serpent, *saraph* in the Hebrew text, stands for new contents of consciousness. As long as they are below the threshold of consciousness and human activity violates them, they cause pangs of conscience. But if the people consciously see them as a new high ideal, they save the people (Numbers 21:5–9).

Later, in the Gospel of John, John, himself a spiritual author, naturally interprets this passage of the Old Testament spiritually too (John 3:14). For him, it points to Christ. Just as Moses raised a serpent in the wilderness and those who looked at it remained alive, so all who “look” at a spiritual consciousness, the spiritually exalted Son of Man, and thus look at their true spiritual goal in life remain eternally alive.

The Israelites grumble again because there is no water to drink in the desert. Moses strikes a rock with his staff, and water pours forth (Numbers 20:1–13). Just as the meaning of life descends from the spiritual world as nourishment – manna – on the wanderers, so also does

the courage to face life – living water. The rock is a picture of the imperturbability of the foundations of spiritual development. This imperturbability gives courage. In this sense, Paul, as a spiritual author of the New Testament, of course also interprets this passage of the Old Testament spiritually: “our ancestors [...] all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:1, 3–4, NRSV).

It comes to the meeting of Moses with God on Mount Sinai. A “mountain” is a symbol for a high sphere of consciousness. There, in his own inner being, Moses experiences God, the spiritual world. There, he becomes aware of the laws according to which humanity must be guided in order to enable the development of a responsible ego oriented to the spiritual world. While Moses, the spiritual guide, is lingering on the mountain, the people, left to their own devices, turn to idolatry and make a golden calf for themselves. This is the ever recurring mistake on the way to responsible independence. We violate the prohibition against images (Exodus 20:4), project the invisible God as “idols” into the visible world instead of realizing God within ourselves, and believe we can manifest God through a new society, a new morality, or new rituals, for example. Moses, having returned, struggles to bring the people back on the path of their inherent purpose.

Perhaps in the second millenium BC, the migration of a nomadic people through the wilderness really took place. If so, these historical events serve the authors of the books of Moses as images of the process through which an ego oriented to the spiritual world develops, guided by inner spiritual impulses and always in danger of becoming unfaithful to its inherent purpose. And seemingly “miraculous” events such as manna from heaven, a rock giving water, and salvation through an erected brazen serpent are not miracles but also images for spiritual processes in the human being.

Commandments

On Sinai, Moses “receives” the Ten Commandments from God (Exodus 20:1–17). The first three purport: Focus first of all on God, the spiritual world. The next seven remind us that all human qualities and activities must serve the great aim, the inherent purpose of humanity – that is, they essentially belong to God – and may not be used to the detriment of others.

In addition to the Ten Commandments, Moses gives the people innumerable rules on ownership, marriage, governance, sacrificial rituals, holidays, clothing, etc. Those who violate them “shall be cut off from the people” (Exodus 30:33 and elsewhere, NRSV). Of course, the co-existence of people must be regulated. But is it necessary, for example, to prescribe that nobody is allowed to wear clothes made of two materials such as wool and linen (Leviticus 19:19)? This rule is only intended to inculcate in us: Do not hold mutually contradictory beliefs. Be of one mind. – Such rules are images whose meaning can be understood when they are seen as reminders of the conditions of ego development. And if somebody is to be “cut off from the people,” this is not to be understood as an execution – although of course certain crimes were punished – but means: Those who allow themselves to be co-opted by transitory goals and desires turn away from God and lose their inner affinity to the spiritual community.

The “Promised Land”

Under the successor of Moses, Joshua, the Israelites conquer the Promised Land, Canaan, where milk and honey flow. Surely these narratives in the Bible have a historical core. But if you take them as exact reports, then many things seem very unlikely. Israel destroys seven nations “mightier and more numerous than you” (Deuteronomy 7:1, NRSV), and Israel defeats 33 kings: 2 east of the Jordan, 31 west of the Jordan (Joshua 12). Again, the spiritual sense is crucial. This approach is all the more fitting as 7 and 33 are symbolic numbers: 7 is the number of completeness of a cycle; 33 is the number of completeness of all aspects of a guiding principle. The point is that an old consciousness, the 33 kings, is completely replaced by a new consciousness. All 33 aspects of a “pagan” consciousness oriented to matter need to be defeated and conquered for a new ego-consciousness oriented to God to take its place.

Living in the Promised Land means mainly, apart from really living in a geographical land, life in a new consciousness, in an ego state that is totally oriented towards the spiritual world. And this condition is not won once and for all. It has to be defended incessantly. Anyone who tries to concentrate for a long time on a difficult task and to reject all distractions will understand that.

All the events described in the Book of Judges, in the two Books of Samuel and in the two Books of Kings illustrate the great task of developing a responsible ego. Time and again, it is missed by leaders and kings, by tribunes of the people and members of the common people; time and again, leaders, kings, and people are corrected by prophets and referred back to their duty. The struggles with foreign peoples may also have some historical background. But they were always understood by the authors of the texts as an expression of this struggle for a new ego, for the Promised Land.

One example for many: King Saul, predecessor of King David and first king of the Israelites, receives the command from Yahweh – through the mouth of the prophet Samuel – to exterminate the Amalekites: “do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (1 Samuel 15:3, NRSV). Does God order genocide? And Saul does as he is commanded. He only spares Agag, the king of Amalek, and some sheep, cattle, and other valuables. “And Samuel said to him, ‘The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this very day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours’” (1 Samuel 15:28, NRSV). And Samuel himself draws his sword and hews “Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal” (1 Samuel 15:33, NRSV). Just because Saul feels a human emotion and spares the king, the kingdom is torn from him by God!?

The Amalekites embody a performance orientation, an aspect of the self-aggrandizing ego.³ The ego wants to take all matters into its own hands. This aspect must be eradicated by the persons who want to experience that they are embedded in the spiritual laws of the cosmos and can recognize them and carry them out responsibly. For this aspect hinders them from an inner state that corresponds to the Promised Land, where milk and honey flow – confidence and joy. Saul only partially eradicates his performance orientation: He lets the king of Amalek, the performance principle as such, live. From then on, Saul can no longer lead his people according to spiritual laws. He has cut himself off from them. But the prophet, who recognizes and carries out the will of the spiritual world, kills the king.

The more time advances, the more historically comprehensible the details become, but at the same time, they always remain images of soul-spiritual facts. The experiences of the protagonists are at the same time exemplary for experiences that every person will make in the development of a responsible ego. In the Book of Judges, legendary, mythical struggles, such as Gideon’s and Samson’s against the Philistines, are portrayed, pictures for the confrontation of the ego with the power of

the corporeal. In the First Book of Samuel, the political constitution of the Israelites changes, for the people demand kings. The first king, Saul, corresponds to an ego that loses its unquestioning unity with the spiritual world because of its performance orientation. King David, whose life is portrayed in the Second Book of Samuel, corresponds to an ego trusting in this unity, though he also makes various mistakes.⁴ Both kings are timeless archetypes. All people can experience them in their own inner life.

The First Book of Kings tells of King Solomon, son of David, the wisest of human beings. He embodies a responsible ego so naturally connected with the spiritual world that it gives him an “understanding heart” and insights into the secrets of the world. But even Solomon becomes unfaithful to his task. The love for the beauty of the world – he has 1000 “foreign” women – seduces him into idolatry. Thereby, he is also a timeless archetype. Under his successors, the kingdom splits in about 930 BC, and for about two centuries, there is a northern kingdom of Israel and a southern kingdom of Judah under various kings, some of whom do “what was right in the sight of the LORD” (1 Kings 15:11 and later, NRSV) and some “what was evil in the sight of the LORD” (1 Kings 14:22 and later, NRSV). In the latter case, only prophets such as Elijah and Elisha maintain the connection to Yahweh and to the task given by the latter.

The Second Book of Kings tells how the northern kingdom of Israel perishes forever. It is destroyed by the Assyrian kings Tiglath-Pileser III in 732 BC and Shalmaneser V in 723 BC. In the southern kingdom, the kings Jehu, Hezekiah, and Josiah exterminate all worshipers of Baals and idols. But Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquers the kingdom, leading the Jews into exile to Babylon in 597 BC and 586 BC and destroying Jerusalem with the temple. The two Books of Chronicles repeat the events of the Books of Samuel and Kings.

In 538 BC, the Persian king Cyrus conquered Babylon and in 536 BC allowed the return of many Jews to their homeland. The Book of

Ezra relates the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel (520–516 BC). The Book of Nehemiah tells of the rebuilding of the city walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah, the Jewish governor of the Persian king in Judah, against internal and external resistance as well as of the reorganization of worship (about 440 BC).

All of these are more or less historical events. But essentially, they are ciphers for experiences that all human beings will make in their efforts to come closer to the spiritual world. The many types of kings are the representations of just as many relationships and incongruities of the ego to the spiritual world. All possible states of the ego are gone through: harmony with oneself, that is, a king rules unchallenged; external domination of the ego, that is, the people suffer from foreign rule and exile; gaining new inner security, that is, reconstruction of the temple and the city; yes, even a division into two ego centers is symbolized by the division of the kingdom after King Solomon.

The Promised Land

The Promised Land lies at the end of the trek through the wilderness. For a consciousness tied to external appearances, the Promised Land is the geographical area of Palestine's greatest fertility: "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8 and elsewhere, NRSV). Seen spiritually, however, the Promised Land is an inner state of supreme happiness shared with other people, independent of external geographic conditions, and reached after wandering through the "wilderness" of inner loneliness. In the stage of human development represented by the Old Testament, this state of supreme happiness consists in the accordance of the ego with cosmic and divine laws: in righteousness before God.

Those who do not understand this symbol and consider it a concrete land will defend it with all their might, trusting that God will help them against all enemies – and provoke earthly catastrophes.

The Building of Solomon's Temple

Moses had already erected a “tabernacle” in the wilderness: a place where inner experiences could be made externally visible, reenacted ritually, and thereby strengthened. Now that the Promised Land has been seized – after experiencing and realizing the previously sought and surmised new state of consciousness – the movable tent can become a permanent facility. David's son Solomon, who is filled with the highest wisdom, is commissioned to build a temple. The outer temple site is at the same time and above all a picture of the inner temple of the human being. Therefore, all information about temple construction, architecture, and furnishings can also refer to a person's “soul space” in which spiritual forces want to become active.

In the Holy of Holies, analogous to the human head, is the Ark of the Covenant: It contains the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, for in the center of the consciousness are the laws according to which the life of the old covenant should take its course. Two winged angels, cherubs, symbols of will and thought, watch over the Ark. In front of the Holy of Holies are placed the ten seven-branched candlesticks, five to the right and five to the left, symbols of an enlightened consciousness, as well as the table with the twelve “breads of the Presence,” symbols of the consciousness being nourished twelvefold with spiritual food: with truth, meaning, hope, and patience, for example.

In the Holy stands the altar of burnt offering, analogous to the heart in which human powers and abilities are sacrificed to God and the animal qualities of human beings are consumed in the fire of the spirit.

At the entrance to the temple rise the two pillars Boaz and Jachin, for all human life has a passive side of perception and an active side of action, sensory and motor functions. They frame the door through

which the environment enters the interior and through which the interior gets into the environment.

Freemasonry, officially founded in 1717, uses this symbolism of Solomon's temple. Its members want to work consciously on their personality becoming a temple for God and that all human beings as usable stones form a temple of humanity that serves the divine architect in beauty, strength, and wisdom. Like Solomon, they rely on Hiram-abi of Tyre, for Solomon in all his ego-wisdom and ego-reason cannot build the temple alone. He needs the building material, the knowledge, and the help of a spiritually experienced master, personified by Hiram (2 Chronicles 2:12–16).

The Wisdom Books of the Old Testament

The history books of the Old Testament present objectively – externally and epically – the development of an ego oriented to the spiritual world. The wisdom books, on the other hand, describe the insights of an individual or collective soul in this process, the subjective inner side. They do this partly in the form of poetry, lyrical manifestations of the soul, and partly in the form of short dramas, such as the book of Job.

The Book of Job

God gives Satan a free hand to plunge Job, a righteous man who lacks nothing earthly worth striving for, into misfortune. This is to determine if Job, the ego that is faithful to God in happiness, also remains faithful to God in misfortune. And indeed, “In all this Job did not sin” (Job 1:22, NRSV).

This situation provides the framework for the real theme of the story. The ego raises the question of the righteousness of God. Job complains and argues with God. Three friends want to convince him that God rewards the righteous and punishes the unrighteous and that therefore there must be something wrong in Job's life. But this explanation is too simple. In the end, God punishes the three because of their shortsightedness, for on earth, it more often goes better for the godless and worse for the godly.

A fourth friend points out to Job that the egoic mind is too small to comprehend the greatness of God's wisdom. God, who creates and maintains everything and far surpasses the cleverness of the ego, finally appears majestically. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (Job 38:4, NRSV). Job realizes that it was presumptuous to want to fathom the righteousness of God. After having “seen” God, he accedes to the wisdom of God, which is inscrutable to him.

The problem of Job always occurs in the development of the ego. The ego, built from the experiences between birth and death, can only understand suffering when this suffering follows from causes initiated in this life. The ego knows nothing of destiny, of causal contexts rooted in earlier incarnations, and of an existential separation of humanity from God, which is not caused by the ego but whose result is the ego. This source of suffering must remain a mystery to the ego. To be unable to clarify this source and yet not to despair of God's justice – that is its problem and its task. Job passes the trial. He comes out of it strength-

ened and purified, and he receives back from God all the happiness he had lost.

Job cannot fathom the righteousness of God. But the author of the short drama seems to know it. The prologue shows that, inaccessible to the mind of the ego, there exists another level of reality on which Satan acts as a tool of God. Perhaps Satan is a picture of destiny, which tests and purifies human beings precisely because they no longer understand anything.

The Psalms

The five sections of the Book of Psalms contain a total of 150 songs in which a single ego or a folk ego communicates its state to God. Lost in the abyss of earthly life, the soul – every awakened soul – struggles in solitude to connect to God. Many psalms portray existential situations, the tension of an ego that is filled with spiritual longing, that does not feel at home anymore in the ordinary world, and whose connection to the spiritual world is always endangered.

Other psalms are strictly composed songs sung at processions, and still others are pilgrimage songs addressed to God, who protects, helps, and blesses. Thanksgiving and praise songs are also not missing, often resulting from the pure joy of the miracle of existence such as psalms 148 to 150.

The Book of Proverbs

This is first of all a song of praise to “wisdom,” the servant of God, and then a collection of sayings that describe a life of wisdom. Wisdom is the great teacher, the companion of God, and creates with God. “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago [...]. When he established the heavens, I was there [...] and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always” (Proverbs 8:22, 27, 30, NRSV). People who open themselves to the spiritual world become wise, even in earthly life: “those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster” (Proverbs 1:33, NRSV).

Ecclesiastes

As great a joy that earthly human beings may feel for the wisdom of creation, so much on the other hand can the transience and poverty of all earthly things and of human existence in particular affect them and make them weary. The preacher or teacher in this book, traditionally Solomon, speaks, “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9, NRSV). “I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:14, NRSV).

The Song of Songs

The Song of Songs is a wonderfully poetic composition of the relationship of two lovers, their yearning for each other, their mutual enjoyment of the beauty of their bodies, their encounters, and the dance of the bride before the bridegroom.

But there is nothing in the text to suggest that an author intended to make the love between the young people an image for something higher, such as the love of the soul for Yahweh, or of Israel for Yahweh, or for the love of King Solomon – the lover appears in his form – to wisdom. Rather, it is a popular custom, an antiphony between bride and groom before the wedding as it is still common today in many countries of the East. It is also common that the groom plays the “king” who leads his beloved home. Hence the appearance of the groom as King Solomon with his sixty wives, hence allusions such as, “Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards – for our vineyards are in blossom” (Song of Songs 2:15, NRSV), for the foxes are the young men who could be dangerous to the girl, the “vineyard.”

Later, however, this secular antiphonal wedding song was understood as a picture of the love between Israel and Yahweh, so it was given spiritual quality retroactively.

The Prophetic Books

The history books of the Old Testament depict in epic form the development of human consciousness and the emergence of a responsible ego; the wisdom books depict in often lyrical form the insights of human beings in this development. The prophetic books represent the laws of this development and the consequences of observing or disregarding these laws. They are closer to drama, for the prophet, as an individual, faces an often hostile world.

Prophets had already appeared in the history books: Moses, the greatest of all, the lawgiver; Elijah, the reformer, who proclaimed a new existence that goes beyond the fulfillment of the outer laws; Samuel, Nathan, and many others. David in the Psalms is also a prophet. But in the prophetic books, the prophets are at the center of the action. There are four so-called major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) and twelve so-called minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).

At that time, prophets were the religious, ethical, and social conscience of their people. But every individual who is faced with the task of developing a responsible ego also has a prophet inside: the voice of conscience in their own being. As such a conscience in the people and in the individual, the prophet analyzes the present situation. God “expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!” (Isaiah 5:7, NRSV). If a people (or an individual) lives in accordance with its inherent purpose and the way thereto, it is doing well in its soul, however much it may have to struggle with internal and external problems. But when goals such as prosperity, reputation, power, and enjoyment take center stage, it loses contact with the inner source of its power, even when it seems to have great successes. Thus it becomes weaker in its soul; its self-confidence dwindles; its sound judgment for reality

is lost; a fight of all against all and corruption spread and also destroy the external basis of existence.

This is what the prophets express in their words: When you remain faithful to God, your inherent aim, God will be gracious to you and you will prosper. If you become apostate like an unfaithful wife – “that faithless one, Israel” (Jeremiah 3:6, NRSV) – the judgment of God will come to you in the form of internal turmoil or conquest by foreign peoples.

Thus, the prophets embody the voice of conscience in individuals and in peoples. But in addition, they are a voice of comfort in the hearts of all those who wish to remain faithful to their innermost destiny yet are as if lost amidst the many people in pursuit of success and happiness. It is the situation of “Israel,” the people oriented to living religion and ethics, in the midst of the world of the “pagans.” But, so the prophets say, God, the true life, the law of the development of humanity, is with Israel. “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God” (Isaiah 40:1, NRSV). The prophet Ezekiel spiritually sees a valley full of dry bones. “Can these bones live?” (Ezekiel 37:3, NRSV). Can the depressed, meaningless, inwardly dead people of Israel regain courage and hope? Then God speaks to the bones, “I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live” (Ezekiel 37:5, NRSV). And the bones “lived, and stood on their feet” (Ezekiel 37:10, NRSV).

In addition, the voice of the prophets, in a people or an individual, points to the next, decisive stage of human development. “Israel,” the religiously and ethically alive human being, is in the phase of forming a responsible ego with the help of outer laws. But that is just the preparation for something new. What will come is the true human identity, conscious human life as the image of God, which now slumbers as only an aptitude within.

This true self will initially embody itself in *one* person who represents it perfectly. This is the Messiah, the Anointed, the Christ. God says through Isaiah, “I have put my spirit upon him” – that is the

anointing – “he will bring forth justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1, NRSV). The Anointed, the truth, the true human identity releases from the limited ego identity. When one person accomplishes this task, this enables and facilitates it for all others. In that sense, the Messiah will be the Redeemer for all in “Israel.”

He will be redeemer in still another sense, for when a new being arises in humanity, a new society will emerge, free from conflict, corruption, and injustice, which are the consequences of the acts of the limited ego. Yes, a new heaven – a new world of thoughts and feelings – and a new earth – a new subtle-material world – will arise, and as the true identity is consciously one with the imperishable God, death will also be overcome. “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17, NRSV). Human beings will live again in paradise, in the creation of the soul, yes, in the original spiritual creation, which is their true home.

That is why the prophets call for a change of mind. They do not call for social or political revolution as the false prophets do. They call for the realization first of a living religious and ethical attitude and then for the realization of the true self because they know that also a new society will follow from these.

The prophets do not appoint themselves. They are called. The spiritual source welling up within them makes them prophets, not self-love and ambition for power. For the individual, this means that the voice of the spiritual conscience is independent of all the social and biographical conditions of a person. Thus, God says to Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5, NRSV). The vocation of the prophet arises from an encounter with the spiritual world, and the prophets always feel unworthy of that experience and would prefer to refuse. For Moses, the spiritual world manifests itself as a “burning bush” that is not consumed. The “bush” is the symbol of the human nervous system, which resembles a bush and in

Moses is grasped by the spiritual fire of God without physically damaging him (Exodus 3). And Moses asks, Why me? “I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” Then God says, “Who gives speech to mortals? [...] Is it not I, the Lord? [...] I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak” (Exodus 4:10–12, NRSV).

Every prophet has a heavy destiny. When people live according to their spiritual conscience, there is war in and around them, for their enemies inside and out want to silence them, and even those who are receptive to the message of the prophets are often uncomprehending and do not want to leave their usual life. Elijah must flee from Queen Jezebel, who has sworn his death (1 Kings 19:1–4). Jeremiah is thrown into a cistern (Jeremiah 28:4–6) and Daniel into the lions’ den (Daniel 6). Yet the voice of conscience cannot be suppressed, for it comes from the truth, from the foundation of human existence: God gives authority and power to the prophet.

So it will be for the Messiah predicted by the prophets. He will be a suffering servant of God. “He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity” (Isaiah 53:3, NRSV).

The resurrection of the true self, as the Messiah will accomplish it, is already anticipated by some prophets. The tomb of Moses is not found, meaning that his true, immortal being has escaped the earthly world (Deuteronomy 34:6). And Elijah ascends in a fiery chariot into the spiritual world, an event which has become the center of the path of initiation of the later Kabbalah: the so-called merkabah mysticism. Merkabah means chariot or cart, a “vehicle” of thoughts, feelings, and aspirations generated by the spirit, the fire, a spiritual body with which the spiritual world is consciously experienced. Suddenly appeared “a chariot of fire and horses of fire [...], and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11, NRSV).

The last prophetic book of the Old Testament, Malachi, points to the prophet Elijah, who returns “before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the

hearts of children to their parents” (Malachi 4:5–6, NRSV). Thus, the prophets also embody the presentiment in human beings that an imperishable spiritual existence awaits them that goes far beyond the transient ego.

The Late Writings of the Old Testament (Apocrypha)

The Hebrew Old Testament ends with Malachi. Its Latin and Greek translations contain additional writings, composed in the last two centuries before Christ, whose contents are not as spiritual as the earlier writings but are “edifying to read” (Luther). They were called Apocrypha (“hidden”) by the ancient church because they led a shadowy existence alongside the texts generally accepted as spiritual.

These include the two Books of the Maccabees; the Book of Judith; the Book of Tobit; the Wisdom of Sirach, a collection of proverbs similar to the proverbs attributed to Solomon; the Wisdom of Solomon, a glorification of wisdom, also similar to Solomon’s Book of Proverbs; and the Book of Baruch.

2. The New Testament

The Old Testament describes how the Elohim created the spiritual world with the spiritual human beings, how Yahweh created the earthly world with the earthly human beings, and how the latter became entangled even deeper in the earthly world in the “Fall.” They received mortal bodies, had to live with death in mind, and were subjected to all the evils of this earthly world. And yet, this catastrophe was to be the starting point for a revision of the Fall, indeed for the overcoming of the earthly human beings and for the unfolding of the spiritual human beings. The spiritual human beings, existing since the beginning of the spiritual creation but not yet aware of themselves and their origin from the Elohim, are to finally become self-aware and to fulfill their original destiny as a new Adam.

The New Testament describes how this spiritual human identity breaks into the old, earthly creation with its ego beings, what destinies it suffers there, and what effects it produces. The spiritual human identity, the image of God, the “Word” of the prologue of the Gospel of John, becomes flesh: It incarnates in *one* ego being, in Jesus, and clothes itself in an earthly body. The “Word” assumes the “form of a slave,” as Paul puts it (Philippians 2:7, NRSV). In this way, this spiritual identity accomplishes a development in *one* human being. Jesus goes on a spiritual path where he loses the old life of the ego and gains the new life of the true self.

In doing so, he creates the path on which others, his disciples, can follow him. Induced by his powers, the true self, the “Word,” unfolds in them too. They too gain new “life” in this way. At a certain moment of their development, the consciousness of the true human being flashes up in them (Mark 8:23). They become enlightened; they recognize their real identity. The consciousness of Jesus has ignited their consciousness and has become a “light” to them. Thus, in the prologue to

the Gospel of John, it says there was life in the “Word,” and “the life was the light of all people” (John 1:4, NRSV).

This is true for “his own” who receive him and are “born of God,” namely those who from eternity exist potentially as spiritual identities and likenesses of God and can now “become children of God” (John 1:11–13, NRSV). Others of “his own” do not accept him and fight him, for the earthly world, which builds up the ego, and the earthly ego cannot readily recognize the true self. “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5, KJV).

This spiritual path of Jesus and his disciples is portrayed in the Gospels⁵ and the Acts of the Apostles by Luke. These are the history books of the New Testament. They are followed by the wisdom books: Those who know the spiritual path explain it in letters to their students. And the prophetic book of the New Testament, the Revelation of John, illustrates how finally all human inability to comprehend is overcome and a new humanity, indeed a new creation, emerges that corresponds to the original impulse of creation.

The History Books of the New Testament

The Gospels of the New Testament can be interpreted at different levels as can the entire Bible. According to the threefold sense of scripture, they can be read as historical accounts, as a “history of salvation,” or as the spiritual development of the protagonists. But if the unfolding of the spiritual identity of human beings is really their theme, then of course only the spiritual sense will be completely fitting. This means that all the events that are narrated represent a soul-spiritual lawfulness that the evangelists express with the help of historical events, seemingly historical events, and also clearly non-historical images. The soul-spiritual lawfulness is reflected in historical events but can be reflected again and again, at all times and in all cultures. The stories of Jesus and his destiny can be considered as exemplary for other possibilities of expression.

Thus, for example, there can be messengers from the spiritual world comparable to Jesus in all times and in all cultures. There will always be “Pharisees” and “scribes” paralyzed in tradition and dogma who cannot understand the living spiritual impulse and destroy its physical embodiment. There will always be a tool of physical destruction at hand: “Pilate.” On the other hand, such messengers will always find a positive echo among their students, and a “Peter,” a “John,” or a “Judas” will appear with them. At all times, people like “Peter” will deny the saviors, and people like “Judas” will betray them.

The soul-spiritual laws also apply to the play of psychic and spiritual forces in an individual. Then the scribes, Pilate, Peter, and Jesus are personifications of forces in all human beings, and their mutual relations are interactions of these forces in their souls. So all human beings have within them in principle a “Jesus,” a spiritual source of wisdom and power; all have a “Pharisee” who dogmatically fights this source; all have a “Peter” and a “Judas” who want to follow the impulses from the source but are not equal to its requirements.

The Spiritual Path

The Gospel of Luke can serve as an example of how an evangelist represents the activity of a spiritual impulse, embodied in John the Baptist and Jesus, in the world as well as how that development of the spiritual impulse can be read as a spiritual path of an individual. (Incidentally, in his Acts of the Apostles, Luke speaks as a matter of course of the “Way” of Christianity, for example in Acts 19:9. At that time, it was still known that Christianity is really a path not a belief system.) Seven major phases of the spiritual impulse or spiritual path, respectively, are represented in the Gospel of Luke, always initiated when the spiritual world “concretely” intervenes in the events.

1. It begins with the announcement of the impulse by an angel, a “concrete” messenger of the spiritual world, to Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, and to Mary, the mother of Jesus. The birth of two people is announced, who are already in contact with the spiritual world from the time in the womb.

Likewise, individuals can feel a yearning that goes beyond their finite, ego-determined everyday life. They sense that there is another, unlimited, spiritual life for which they can prepare by a special way of life in the manner of John the Baptist and which they can realize, as the disciples of Jesus did. Thus, John the Baptist and Jesus are proclaimed in them as preparation and realization of a spiritual path.

2. In the second step, the spiritual impulse is anchored in humanity. The “Word” becomes flesh; it incarnates in Jesus. John the Baptist as forerunner and Jesus himself are born. And the spiritual world is “concretely” present in the form

of the “heavenly host” (Luke 2:13, NRSV). John the Baptist and Jesus are born as simultaneously spiritual and earthly beings: Jesus is “Son of God” according to the spirit and “descendant from David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3–4, NRSV). The Holy Spirit has not begotten the earthly Jesus but his spiritual identity. The corporeal, the ego identity of Jesus, is sired by Joseph, the descendant of David.

Likewise, the presentiment that a spiritual identity is hidden within them can become a certainty in individuals. They know that they are mortal human beings, egos, born of an earthly father and mother, but that there is also a true self in them that can be begotten of the Holy Spirit and born of their pure soul – “Mary.” A possibility in these people becomes reality. John the Baptist *in them*, an ethical-religious way of life as preparation for the spiritual path, and Jesus *in them*, the realization of the spiritual path, are “born.”

3. Now the spiritual impulse goes out into the world; it becomes public. The spiritual world works in the earthly world through a preparer and a realizer. The preparer baptizes with “water,” a symbol of a person’s insight into the transience and relativity of everything earthly. The realizer baptizes with “fire,” with the Holy Spirit, giving strength to develop the true self.

And again the spiritual world is “concretely” present. Heaven opens, and a voice speaks, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17, NRSV). Jesus becomes aware of his connection with the spiritual world, his true self. And he becomes aware of his task to bring the spiritual impulse into the earthly world.

But immediately, the tempter, the “devil,” appears as the inner possibility to make the new spiritual powers serve the ego. Jesus withstands these temptations, however, and is now ready to work in the world. He teaches and preaches. Teaching and preaching convey the order and power of the spiritual world, which have a healing and cleansing effect: Jesus heals diseases and drives out “demons.” He elicits positive and negative reactions from his listeners, gathers disciples, and makes enemies.

Likewise, in an individual, the true self can clearly manifest itself in one’s own being. It functions as “water” – insight into the transience and relativity of all earthly things – and as “fire” – as the urge to unfold inherent in the true self. Individuals become aware of their task and inherent purpose – to realize their true self. At the same time, they are tempted to use the new powers for their old ego. Like Jesus, these students will then “teach” and “preach” in the world: Their spiritual insights and powers have a healing and purifying effect on themselves and others.

4. Spiritual work has an impact. What the workers have sown in their hearers comes back to them as a harvest and at the same time alters their thoughts, feelings, and aspirations. This is represented by the “transfiguration” of Jesus on the mountain. His “clothes” turn dazzling white. “Clothes” are the wraps of the soul, the entirety of his spirit-enlightened thoughts, purified feelings, and purified aspirations. And the spiritual world reappears “concretely” as a voice and in the figures of Moses and Elijah speaking to Jesus. The transfiguration is already the resurrection of the true self. The spiritual identity of Jesus has become alive and active and expresses itself through transformed, “transfigured” thoughts, feel-

ings, and aspirations. Only it does not yet possess a transformed “corporeal” organ of expression and perception with which it could perceive and act in the spiritual world. It still lacks a “spiritual body.”

Likewise, thoughts, feelings, and aspirations will gradually transform in the individual students on the spiritual path when they are permeated by the structures and powers of the true self. A new relationship to the earthly world will emerge: an interaction on a new, spiritual level.

5. But now the hardest thing must still be accomplished – the fifth phase of the spiritual path: The self-preservation instinct of the body must be dissolved. Only then can the true self build a new instrument for itself, a spiritual body. It is then no longer dependent on the earthly body and its brain as an instrument of expression and perception. Jesus overcomes this self-preservation instinct in Gethsemane with the help of the spiritual world: “not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42, NRSV). His death on the cross shows that this self-preservation instinct and egocentricity have indeed been extinguished: Jesus accepts the hatred of his enemies and every pain without reacting with vengeance or defense. His true self rests in the forces of the spiritual world. It *is* tranquility, cognition, and love and *can no longer* be reached and clouded by earthly motives.

Through the conscious dissolution of the self-preservation instinct, a “spiritual body,” the organ of expression and perception of the true self, had grown in the gross material body of Jesus, like a butterfly in a chrysalis. This spiritual body is penetrated in the grave by the powers of the spirit and brought to life as the instrument of the true self, indepen-

dent of the gross material body and brain. Like the butterfly that emerges from the pupal shell, he steps out into the spiritual world autonomously alive. This is the resurrection of the spiritual body.

Thereby death, a characteristic of the earthly ego, has been overcome, for in its place the true identity, which had been latent, has again become fully conscious and active – through a spiritual body that corresponds to this true identity. The true self and the spiritual body originate from the spiritual world and are imperishable as it is. The tomb is empty: The true self and the spiritual body have left the dimension of the earthly world, the “grave,” and live in the dimension of the spiritual world.

Again the spiritual world itself is present in this process, now in the figures of two angels (in Matthew and Mark, it is only one), who explain to the women, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5, NRSV). The true self with the spirit body belongs to the dimension of eternal life and has left the dimension of transience where everything is subject to death.

In this way, the spiritual impulse has accomplished its task in the earthly world: to bring about a fundamental transformation. The material body and the self-aggrandizing ego had seized control and suppressed the true self in the human being. Now the true self in Jesus has become free and has replaced the self-aggrandizing ego and the material body with a new ego and a new body, which serve him as willing instruments. In a single human being, Jesus, a new heaven and a new earth have emerged.

This is also the goal of each individual in the fifth phase of the spiritual path. However, it is evident in the Gospels that students do not easily achieve this goal. “Peter” in them, their moral willpower, fails in a life-threatening situation and does not hold externally to the spiritual goal. And “Judas” in them, their hope to come through the spiritual path to ideal living conditions, betrays time and again the real goal of this path. But in experiencing such recurring failure, the true self can become stronger. Only “Jesus,” the true self in the students, knows how to achieve this goal: “Not my will but yours be done.” Only “Jesus” in them, the true self opened to the spiritual world, gives them strength to surrender their own will so that the will of the spiritual world may be done.

6. The sixth phase of the spiritual impulse and path is the “ascension,” the definitive entry of the true self with its new instrument into the spiritual world.

7. And the seventh phase is “Pentecost,” the effect of the risen true self in the form of the Holy Spirit, the “Comforter” (KJV) or “Advocate” (NRSV).

Jesus, in a special way connected with the spiritual powers, goes ahead on the spiritual path without stumbling. His disciples go the path in the insight and power conveyed by him, usually with some delay. They fail in the fifth phase but catch up after the resurrection of Jesus. Pentecost is the event where the true self awakens in them too. The return of the “Son of Man” in them announces itself in the form of the Holy Spirit.

At each stage of their path, Jesus explains to them what it is all about: “those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25, NRSV). *Their* life – that is the life of egocentricity and the self-preservation instinct. Whoever voluntarily loses this on the spiritual path will find the life of the true self, immortal life. What matters is that “their life” is lost “*for my sake*.” Jesus is the embodiment of the true self. That is why “for my sake” means for the sake of the true self. Students may also lose their egocentricity for a master, an idea, a people, a belief, or an ideology. But then they would become slaves to outer authorities. Through the spiritual path on the other hand, they become free; they realize themselves. Their true identity comes to light because in its power and for their own benefit, they lose their egocentricity. Their limited ego is absorbed in the infinite self.

Jesus also says, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24, NRSV). The Gospels do not call for faith in the saving act of a redeemer who died and rose about 2,000 years ago. They call for following Jesus voluntarily. But those who want to follow Jesus and go the spiritual path as Jesus did must fulfill the conditions. They must deny themselves, “lose their life” for the sake of the true self, and they must “take up the cross,” that is, accept all the temptations and difficulties associated with the spiritual path. Jesus does not demand a martyr’s death on the cross. He points out to his disciples that they must reckon on their path with incomprehension, hate, and persecution by the people around them, which can lead to physical death under certain circumstances as in the case of Jesus himself.

Since Jesus' outward destiny – physical death on the cross and time in the grave – is an expression of inner processes, death, cross, and grave can also become images of the same inner processes in others walking the spiritual path but without suffering physical death. The “death” of Jesus is then a picture of the demise of all self-aggrandizement of the ego and of the self-preservation instinct of the body. The “cross” is an image for the hatred of the world, and the “grave” is an image for the dimension of the earthly world in general, which is abandoned by the true self with the spirit-body at the resurrection into the dimension of the spiritual world.

Spiritual Path

The Bible describes a spiritual path. The people of Israel are preparing it; Jesus is going on it until the resurrection. His disciples, on the other hand, often do not understand this path and lose their way again and again.

What was experienced in the pre-Christian mystery schools in trance was consciously experienced and carried out by Jesus. Since then, it is no longer about leaving the body nor about refining the earthly consciousness but about rebuilding the body from spiritual substances and forces until it has become a suitable instrument of the true self and consciously expresses it. Christianity is therefore the dissolution of ego-centricity on the one hand and the conscious experience and realization of spiritual principles and forces on the other.

But soon this crucial dimension of Christianity was lost. What remained was faith as a belief in dogmas and the conviction that human beings were redeemed by this belief. On the spiritual path, on the other hand, faith is only the beginning, the acknowledgment of the spiritual potential in human beings and openness to it.

The Bible describes in every detail this path of experience from the preparation in the Old Testament and with John the Baptist to the fulfillment by Jesus and his disciples.

John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus Christ

Jesus has always been seen as the second Moses and as the second Joshua, his successor. As Moses leads the people of Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness to the Promised Land and as Joshua leads the people into the Promised Land, so Jesus leads all who are receptive to his message and power from the captivity in their earthly ego-identity into the “kingdom of God” of the spiritual identity of the true self. Not for nothing do the names Joshua and Jesus have the identical meaning in Hebrew: Yehoshua and its shortened form Yeshua both mean “God saves.”

And as there are patriarchs in the Old Testament who as types embody the path of the people of Israel, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so in the New Testament there are the three types who embody the spiritual path: John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist heralds the activity of Jesus. He is the returned Elijah to whom the last verse of the Old Testament points (Malachi 4:5–6).

Jesus embodies the true human identity, the true self. As such, he is called the “Son of Man.” He lets John the Baptist baptize him with water: He goes once again through the development from the egocentric to the ethical ego. But then he also lets the ethical ego “die away” so that the true self can be resurrected.

His baptism with fire after the baptism with water makes him the Christ, the Anointed. The true identity is filled by the Holy Spirit, becomes aware of itself and the spiritual world, becomes “enlightened,” and thus becomes the “Son of God.”

Every person, not just Jesus, becomes a “Son of God” on the spiritual path. Jesus is not the only one. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, there is talk of those who can make peace through the forces of the spirit. They are “called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9, LEB) because, like Jesus, they are one with the Father; they are consciously absorbed

in the spiritual world, the Father. We can only speak of a single Son of God when the “Word” from the prologue to the Gospel of John is meant, which becomes “life” and “light.” Then it refers to a general spiritual power that is with the Father, the spiritual world, and this is a singular power. But it can be active again and again in different people and make them sons of God. “Son of God” in this sense refers to the resurrected human being, who is two-sexed. The difference between male and female is irrelevant in this state (see Luke 20:34–36).

Outer and Inner Law

The parallels to the Old Testament go even further. Just as Moses gives the external law on Mount Sinai, which enables the human being to develop a responsible ego, so Jesus describes the inner law on the mountain of the spirit. His Sermon on the Mount addresses the true self of the disciples and describes its characteristics. The true self is free of revenge, free of desire, and free of criticism. It does not judge; it does not avenge; it does not desire. That is its nature, its inner law.

“But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” (Matthew 5:39, NRSV). In the earthly world, such a maxim would have catastrophic consequences. It would be an open invitation to the most brutal person to prevail ruthlessly. But the Sermon on the Mount addresses the true self of the human being. This true self behaves in its world like someone in the earthly world who after being struck on one cheek also offers the other. It is quiet force; it does not armor itself by defensive measures. Someone who lives as a true self in this state can also act as an earthly human being in a situation of injustice in an appropriate way – without anger, without revenge. In his interrogation before the high priest, for example, Jesus clearly states the injustice done to him (John 18:23).

Many parables in the Gospels of the “kingdom of heaven” or “kingdom of God” describe the soul state of the true self. Many parables of the entry into the “kingdom of heaven” describe the conditions that persons must fulfill in order to give space to such a soul state. And yet they should not believe that they could conquer the “kingdom of heaven” by their own efforts, as necessary as these are. Our own efforts are a necessary but not a sufficient requirement. Rather, we must become “as a little child” (Mark 10:15, NRSV), free of intentions, prejudices, and speculations. The spirit blows where it wills: it cannot be forced, not through exercises, not through moral efforts. It comes unexpectedly.

Jesus also juxtaposes the inner law of the Sermon on the Mount with the outer law in the disputes with the scribes and Pharisees. He always makes it clear that observing the external law is indeed necessary in a particular phase of development of the human being and of humanity. But as soon as the time for the next step of development has come, persisting in the outer law and believing in having already been made “righteous” by observing it would be a fatal error. The next step of development is to recognize and live according the inner law of the true self. They who live by it are free since they live without hindrance out of their own being, their true identity.

Uninterruptedly, the people of Israel fight with the “pagan” peoples after entering the Promised Land. The responsible ego deals with the passions and impulses that impede the orientation to the spirit and want to take possession of the ego again. Likewise, Jesus, who embodies the true identity, constantly disputes with the Pharisees and scribes. They embody self-righteousness and dogmatism in which the previous development of the ego is partially paralyzed. And as Moses, while traveling through the wilderness, feeds the Israelites with manna, the everlasting word of God, gives them the living water of the power of God, which flows out of the rock of the unshakable strength of God, and saves them from the serpents of their pangs of conscience by raising the brazen serpent, a symbol for a consciousness directed to God, so Jesus feeds listeners and disciples with bread and fish, with the meaning of life and with courage, and feeds his disciples at the Last Supper with higher spiritual powers, creative spiritual activity, and dynamism – his own “flesh” and his own “blood” – and is himself raised on the cross as a sign. Anyone who looks at this spiritual consciousness on the cross can withstand all the adversities of the spiritual path.

In this way, the spiritual impulse is anchored in humanity like new information in an organism. Jesus has a positive effect on his hearers and disciples by stimulating the unfolding of the true self and the voluntary dissolution of egocentricity. Jesus has an initially negative ef-

fect on his opponents. However, precisely by having sought to destroy this impulse, they absorbed it even more intensely. In the confrontation with Jesus, the impression of the true self as information has become like a barb in them, which now continues to put their egocentric life in question until one day the spiritual path is recognized after all as the only means of following the inherent purpose of the human being.

Kingdom of God

The “kingdom of God” denotes the state of the true self that has become conscious and active, the state in which it experiences and realizes the order and power of the spiritual world: wisdom, love, and creative activity, a state of constant illumination and freedom from earthly conditionality. Therefore, it says in Luke, “For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 17:21, NRSV). A human being in this state is one with all others in the same state, which is why the kingdom of God is also the new community of such people.

The kingdom of God is a higher state compared to the Promised Land. The latter is the community of people with a responsible ego in harmony with the laws of Yahweh; the other is the community of people with the unfolded true self in harmony with the spiritual world of the Elohim.

The kingdom of God as an inner, spiritual state is neither identical with the supreme happiness of earthly human beings nor with the glory of a just earthly society, although just external circumstances will emerge without restriction from the internal state of the kingdom of God. “My kingdom is not from this world,” says Jesus (John 18:36, NRSV).

The “Second Coming of the Son of Man”

When people become aware of this purpose and when their true identity becomes active in them, then this is the return of the Son of Man in them. The Son of Man had worked in a visible physical body in humanity, exemplified the spiritual path, and anchored this possibility, positively or negatively, in humanity. After shedding the physical body, he continues to work as a spiritual being with a spiritual body in the mental, emotional, and will spheres of humanity and of every human being. This results in tension between human egocentricity and the “information” of the Son of Man influencing it. The evangelists describe the effects of this tension on human social relations in the “eschatological discourses” of Jesus (for example in Matthew, chapters 24 and 25). Since this tension has existed, it has always been the time of the end in humanity. And it can always happen that the information of the true self of humanity, embodied by Jesus, so stimulates the true self of individual human beings that they become conscious of it and that it becomes active in them. This stimulation is the activity of the Holy Spirit, the “Advocate” promised by Jesus to his disciples.

And the moment comes when the Son of Man shows himself to the student “on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 24:30, NRSV): in the sphere of the thoughts, feelings, and will. Jesus says to his disciples that some of them will not die “before they see the kingdom of God,” that is, before they see the Son of Man come again (Luke 9:26-27, NRSV). Thus, some of his disciples will experience the resurrection of the true self within themselves before their physical death. They will experience the return of the hitherto visible Son of Man in the sphere of their thoughts, feelings, and will, which is invisible to earthly eyes. Their “imminent expectation” is therefore fully justified, and Jesus’ prophecy has proved correct. Since then, people have repeatedly experienced the second coming of the Son of Man “on the clouds of heaven” in their own being and Jesus’ prophecy has been fulfilled for them. According to the

evangelists, the day will come when this prophecy will come true for all of humanity.

Immanent Expectation

This theological conception states that the disciples of Jesus wrongly expected his second coming as Son of Man and Messiah, the foundation of an eternal messianic kingdom, and the end of the world associated with it in the near future and that the church has to represent Jesus and his teaching on earth until the end of the world because the fulfillment of this expectation did not occur.

But when Jesus says, “the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17, NRSV), he means that the true self is consciously present in himself, Jesus. Therefore, those who, like Jesus, are on a spiritual path have the chance that the true self unfolds in them as well. After the resurrection of Jesus, there is the possibility that the true self will also resurrect in his disciples, that is, that Jesus will come back in them. Therefore, his disciples and disciples of his disciples could rightly expect the return of the Son of Man in the near future, and in some of them, this expectation was fulfilled. One example is Paul’s Damascus experience. With that, they entered the kingdom of God, the spiritual world. The messianic kingdom was realized in them. And that was indeed the end of the world for their consciousness: the end of determinacy through the world of appearances.

Many Christians of the early days no longer understood these processes and considered the return of the Son of Man to be a visible event in matter, the kingdom of God to be a political entity, and the end of the world to be a physical disappearance of the visible world. The expectation of such events could indeed not be fulfilled.

Four Gospels

All four Gospels depict the spiritual path in the guise of historical facts and images. But each evangelist emphasizes a special aspect of this path. Matthew puts the accent on the student's actions on the spiritual path. Mark clearly points out the laws of the spiritual path as such. Luke describes the effects of the spiritual path primarily on human feelings.

The Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a common basic structure. It is most clearly noticeable in Mark. Matthew and Luke add more topics, but the basic structure is preserved. These three Gospels are therefore called the "synoptic Gospels." "Synoptic" here means seen from the same point of view. One can find each major event of one of the three Gospels in parallel places in the other two. In the Gospel of John, this basic structure still shimmers through. But John has handled so many unique themes that his Gospel occupies a special position among the four. In the Gospel of John, the direct self-revelation of Christ in the mind of the student stands in the foreground.

The Gospel According to John

On the spiritual path, the thoughts of the human being are gradually enlightened. It is in the sphere of thought that the laws and forces of the spiritual world become conscious, recognizable and effective. John expresses this process through the I am sayings of Jesus. The spirit expresses itself in Jesus, who thereby becomes “anointed” with the spirit; he becomes the Christ or the Messiah. These are not any recordable words that Jesus spoke in public. The I am sayings of Jesus are the evangelist’s means of letting the spirit reveal itself. “I am he,” (John 4:26, NRSV) the Christ: I am the true self of the human being, which is illumined by the Father.

“I am the bread of life” (John 6:35, NRSV): The cognition of the spiritual world and its laws is the spiritual nourishment for the true self and gives it immortal life. “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12, NRSV): The cognition of the spiritual world and its laws makes the connections between life and the development of humanity and the world transparent to the true self. “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, NRSV): Only those who are enlightened by the spiritual world, by its order and power – “truth” and “life” – gain access to the “Father,” to the spiritual world. The light of knowledge emanating from the spiritual world leads to the cognition and realization of the spiritual world, of the “Father.” It is the way to the “Father.” Everyone who follows this path can someday say like Jesus, “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30, NRSV).

In the I am sayings of the Gospel of John, ever new characteristics of the spirit are revealed and become tangible in the consciousness of the student. What they do is illustrated in the “miracles” and stories of the Gospel. In the Gospel of John too, the “miracles” are picture stories describing the effects of the spirit in the student. For example, when Jesus transforms water into wine at the wedding at Cana, seen by itself,

it is an image of the commitment and readiness to sacrifice of the student on the path – the “water” – are transformed into a new quality through the power of the spirit, namely, into a dynamic that arises from the cognition of the spirit – the “wine.” Seen collectively, it means that the “water,” the responsibility and commitment of the ego of the old covenant, is replaced by the “wine,” the dynamic of spiritual freedom of the new covenant.

In parallel to the self-revelations of the spirit, their origin and legitimacy are always called into question in the Gospel of John, for the scribes and Pharisees, in this Gospel also called the “Jews” for short and “Abraham’s descendants,” cannot understand these revelations. These “Jews,” children of the earthly world, are in every human being: the earthly mind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not understood or “comprehended” it (John 1:5, KJV), for the earthly mind is only competent with earthly concerns and appearances. But it can also become enlightened when it opens to spiritual truths. This openness is faith. Those who “believe” in Jesus, those who open themselves to the way of life embodied by Jesus, will gradually realize what spiritual truth is. The truth will make them free (John 8:32).

In his farewell discourses to the disciples, Jesus explains these connections in detail. He consciously lives in unity with the “Father” and therefore reveals the “Father” to all who open themselves in faith to Jesus, to the spiritual world. Between him, the cognition and power of the spiritual world, and his disciples an indissoluble bond has formed, which cannot be destroyed even by physical death. Rather, after the physical death of Jesus, it continues to work in his disciples, sends the “Comforter,” the Holy Spirit, to them as soon as they are ready, and in due time will enable the return of the Son of Man in them.

Gospel

From the Greek *euangelion* meaning “good (glad) message,” in the broader sense, this refers to the message of Christianity: A person connected in a special way with the spiritual world has gone on the spiritual path of the “dying” of egocentricity and the resurrection of the true self, thus forming a “morphogenetic field”⁶ and enabling others to go the same way. The true self of every human being can be “redeemed” from its unconsciousness and inactivity in the power of a savior such as Jesus.

In a narrower sense, gospel refers the written representation of this spiritual path. The four Gospels contained in the New Testament describe with different emphases the spiritual path in every detail using the prototype of Jesus and his disciples. Other gospels have not been included in the New Testament, including the Gospel of Truth, the Gospel of Philip, and the Gospel of Thomas, all found near Nag Hammadi, as well as more fictitious “infancy gospels” of the third century, which recount fictional miraculous events of Jesus’ childhood.

Jesus: Revolutionary, Teacher of Ethics, or Savior?

In the historical view, Jesus has been seen as a social revolutionary, as a rebel against the Romans, as a rabbi who believed or did not believe in his messianic identity, and as a guru who was only declared Messiah and Son of God by his enthusiastic disciples. He has been seen as the “first new man,” as a great teacher of ethics, and as an exemplary “good person.”

On the other hand, in the salvation-historical view, Jesus is considered the Son of God and at the same time an earthly man: As an earthly man, he transmits security to earthly human beings through his love. As Son of God, he fulfilled a “plan of salvation” about 2,000 years ago. Sinful human beings had angered the Father, God. They deserved eternal damnation. But God also loves them. Therefore, to save them, God sends his Son and lets him, an innocent, vicariously atone on the cross for the sinners. Thus God’s wrath is satisfied, but also God’s love comes to expression. God redeems undeserving human beings from eternal damnation to eternal life through the death and resurrection of his Son – if they believe in these “acts of salvation.” With this, Jesus becomes the Redeemer who takes the guilt from the earthly human beings and gives them, mortal creatures, eternal life on the “last day.”

The theologian Rudolf Bultmann recognized the barbarity of these salvation-historical ideas: God sacrifices his son to satisfy his wrath? And if people do not believe in their redemption through the death and resurrection of a Son of God about 2000 years ago, should they be eternally damned? Bultmann broke with these “mythical” ideas and “demythologized” the Bible.⁷ But what was then still left if one persisted with the salvation-historical perspective? First, one misunderstands “myths” as ideas about physical facts. Then one discovers the absurdity

of these ideas and “demythologizes” the Bible, but in this way, one has also removed the essential, spiritual facts of the Bible.

Already the theologian Albert Schweitzer⁸ had wanted to accept Jesus only as a great ethical teacher. Jesus is supposed to have believed that he was the Messiah and let himself be killed on purpose in order to “summon” the end times and the kingdom of God in this way. The disciples had counted on his promises of his imminent return. When this did not occur, the belief in a reappearance in the distant future, on the “last day,” filled the gap of disappointment, and the institution of the church is to bridge the time until then.

In contrast, the spiritual view recognizes that the “myths” of the Bible describe spiritual facts. According to the spiritual sense of scripture, the Gospels exemplify the inherent purpose of the human being. Jesus unfolds the true self by losing “his” life, the life of the mortal ego identity, for the sake of the true self. Thus, he gains the true life, the immortal spiritual identity, the true self. It resurrects. The earthly ego does not resurrect; on the contrary, it “dies” on the spiritual path. Jesus, as the true self, is the Son of Man, and as the spirit-filled, enlightened true self, he is the Son of God, the Anointed, the Christ. Secondarily, he is also a critic of social injustice and political bondage as well as a teacher of ethics. But he is not just a “good person.” That would be an egoic person who makes every effort to live ethically and religiously yet at the same time reaches limits. Jesus says of himself, “No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18, NRSV).

Jesus is a savior also from the spiritual point of view. He goes the spiritual path equipped with special spiritual powers. With the “form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7, KJV), he accepted the associated separation from God, “sin,” in order to overcome it. Thus, he enables his followers to go through the same process. That is salvation. If they do not go through the process, they will not be redeemed.

Jesus accomplishes this transformation of the ego person as far as the material with the construction of a spiritual body, new “flesh,” as

a means of expressing the true self. The latter and the new “flesh” resurrect. This can already happen while a human being is still physically alive. The return of the Son of Man promised by Jesus can again and again become reality in living human beings. The “imminent expectation” is justified.

The “parables” of Jesus are processes taken from the earthly world that point to the laws of the spiritual world. In this sense, the events of all the Gospels are parables. A historical process (a special person, Jesus, goes the spiritual path and enables his disciples to go this path) becomes an exemplary parable for this path in all times. Those who take this parable exclusively as a historical fact do “not look with their eyes” that can see and do not “listen with their ears” that can hear (Matthew 13:15, NRSV). Woe to those who regard the garment of the Torah for the Torah itself.

The Wisdom Books of the New Testament

The Gospels are “epic” accounts of the experiences of Jesus and his disciples. The Acts of the Apostles by Luke is also an “epic” account. It narrates the development of the first Christian communities. In the first part, Peter is the leading figure; in the second part, Paul. Then, after the “history books” of the New Testament, individuals describe their experiences and insights in the “wisdom books.” Paul, Peter, John (as the authors of the texts are called), and others write in letters to communities they set up or to co-workers.

The Letters of Paul

Paul, the “Apostle to the Gentiles” (see Romans 1:5), the great propagator of Christianity in many parts of the Roman Empire, the theologian through whom, as many say, Christianity first gained a form accessible to the Hellenistic world of that time, stands in the same relationship to Jesus as Plato to Socrates. As Plato transmitted Socrates’ power and teachings in his works, so Paul transmitted the power and teachings of Jesus. In many of his letters, Paul also describes himself, his zeal for Jesus, his trials in the struggle for Jesus, and the source of his own power: Jesus. As a Pharisee, “breathing threats and murder” (Acts 9:1, NRSV) against the Christians according to the Acts of the Apostles by Luke, he persecuted them and had them killed. The great turning point came as he was approaching Damascus. “Suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him” and he “heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? [...] I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’” (Acts 9:3–5, NRSV).

What was this event other than that the true self of humanity revealed itself to him, which was also his own true self? What he did not want to acknowledge in himself, what he had suppressed within himself and had persecuted with boundless anger outside of himself, broke through with all the greater force in his consciousness. It was, for him, the return of the Son of Man, whom he had not known physically, “on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 24:30, NRSV): in the sphere of his consciousness.

So overwhelming was this experience that Paul was “blind” for three days. After this impact of light from the spiritual world, he was no longer receptive to any impression from the earthly world. Paul became Saul, the unconditional worker for the Son of Man in every human being, for the inherent purpose of humanity. He brought his experience with tremendous energy among the people; he wanted to stimulate them to this same experience. This was his message: “we proclaim

Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24, NRSV).

Paul symbolizes two things with "crucifixion." First, "crucifixion" means that the world kills the physical embodiment of the true self (for example, 1 Corinthians 2:8). Second, "crucifixion" means that the true self in the person on the spiritual path consciously "kills" egocentricity so that it can be resurrected. The old Adam must be "crucified" if the new Adam is to be resurrected (for example, Galatians 5:24). Paul wanted to awaken the belief in the possibility of these processes. In Jesus, they had become reality. So they could become reality in every other human being. Paul proclaimed the great paradigm of the development of humanity. Those who integrate themselves into this decisive reversal in the development of humanity and the world fulfill their own inherent purpose and contribute to the fulfillment of the inherent purpose of humanity and the world.

In addition to his central message, Paul repeatedly addresses the relationship between the law of the old covenant and the freedom in the new covenant, especially in his Letters to the Romans and Galatians. There are two major stages in the development of humanity and the human being: The development of the ego means living under the outer law; the development of the true self means living in freedom according to the inner law, the Christ. "Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed" (Galatians 3:23, NRSV). The outer law was a "disciplinary" (Galatians 3:24, NRSV) and obligated people to control their urges, thereby making them aware of their "sinful" condition, their separation from God through their desires and egocentricity. It led them to a constant fight against their urges but also showed them that this fight could not be won with moral forces.

That the true self and the associated unity with God can only be experienced when the moral struggle – which is necessary up to a certain

point of development – is abandoned was centuries later the unsettling experience of Luther, which he had on account of verse 28 of chapter 3 of the Letter to the Romans: “For we hold that a person is justified by faith” – that is, experiences union with God – “apart from works prescribed by the law” (NRSV). By faith alone! Luther expressed the coming into force of his true self and the concomitant experience of unity with God by the concept of “faith.” This faith broke through powerfully in him and was the driving momentum behind the Protestant Reformation.

With the appearance of Jesus as the embodiment of the true self of the human being, the relationship between Jew and Gentile had changed for Paul. It was clear that by following the law outwardly, the Jews were no closer to God than the Gentiles. Because of this attitude of Paul, he came into conflict with the leaders of the early Christian community in Jerusalem, who advocated that only ritually circumcised people were allowed to be confronted with the new possibility. Paul prevailed and was permitted to proselytize among the “Gentiles” even when they had not first converted to Judaism through ritual circumcision.

Another theme of Paul, with which he dealt especially in the First Letter to the Corinthians, is the contrast between the wisdom of the earthly mind, which belongs to the stage of ego development, and the spiritual wisdom of the new identity, which explores everything, “even the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10, NRSV), namely, the laws and characteristics of the spiritual world revealing itself in the human being.

This letter also contains Paul’s homage to love (1 Corinthians 13). The love that “never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:8, NRSV) is the power of God that pervades all existence and urges it towards its inherent purpose. When it becomes active in the true self of the human being – it is itself the activity of this true self – the human being is patient, free from the craving for recognition, from possessiveness, and from gloating. On the other hand, the love of the ego ceases at the least ingratitude or ir-

ritation. It is possessive, expects good conduct from others, and is intolerant. The ego cannot attain the love that never ends, despite all its efforts.

Finally, in all of his letters, Paul also describes the behaviors of people in whom the possibility of a new life is stirring and who want to consciously support this. Slowly, these people learn to live from the inner law. They gradually no longer need any external rules because they know what best serves the inherent purpose of the human being in individual cases. Nevertheless, by detailing the rules of private and community life that follow from the experience of the true self and further its growth, Paul is profoundly helpful to people gaining these insights.

The question of what the resurrection of a disciple of Jesus looks like and when it takes place plays a major role in Paul's letters. "We" – the people on the path – "will not all die, but we will all be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51, NRSV). Some will not die before the transformation takes place in them, before the true self awakens in them. For others, it will only wake up after physical death. But it will wake up in all serious students on the spiritual path. At the "second coming" of the Lord, they "will be caught up in the clouds [...] to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17, NRSV). There are some alive who will consciously experience the resurrection of their true self in the mental sphere ("in the clouds," "in the air") as opposed to the many who do so only after they have discarded the physical body.

Letters by Other Authors

In addition to the genuine Pauline letters, there are letters in the New Testament ascribed to Paul (see the section on the origin and authors of the letters) and letters by other authors.

The Letter to the Hebrews examines the role of Jesus as a messenger of the spiritual world, as Son of Man and Son of God. Jesus is compared to Melchizedek, who as a messenger of the spiritual world once met Abraham (Genesis 14:17-20), “having neither beginning of days nor end of life” (Hebrews 7:3, NRSV). Christ is a high priest of the spiritual world like Melchizedek and is of a higher rank than the angels. The whole letter is a document of the traditional Jewish esotericism of those days but beyond that expounds the new liberating esotericism of Christianity: God says, “I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts” (Hebrews 8:10, NRSV).

True, “good works” do not make people righteous. Despite all efforts to live ethically, they will not experience unity with God in this way. That was the experience of Luther. Nevertheless, good works are a necessary requirement on the path to God. In addition, good works spontaneously arise from a true self that has become active. Yes, they also have to be done consciously, documenting the spiritual experience in the outer world and thereby strengthening it; otherwise the spiritual life remains weak and is extinguished. This is the message of the Letter of James, which Luther did not understand in the light of his fundamental experience, describing it as an “epistle of straw.”

The two Letters of Peter call for a way of life that is the consequence of the true self: God says, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16, NRSV).

The first of the three letters of John is a song of praise to truth and love. Like the author of the Gospel of John, the author of these letters speaks from his true self, out of divine truth and love. That is why he appeals to this truth and love in his readership. Those who are of the truth

recognize the true self and its pattern, Jesus, the Christ. Those who are not of the truth cannot recognize it and its pattern. Instead, they become enemies, fight them with false doctrines, and try to mislead others. And those who are of love love him who is its embodiment and the one who has sent this incarnation. They receive the love, the power of the spiritual world, and live from the law of love: the law inscribed on the true identity. Therefore, they cannot help but love their fellow human beings with this love. If they did not love them, love would not be in them and they would not be in touch with God, who is love.

The Prophetic Book of the New Testament

The New Testament contains a prophetic book, the Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse of John, a text filled with tremendous drama. It is considered almost incomprehensible. But who could understand it better than the modern person? For example, a beast climbs up out the sea, with seven heads, ten horns, and ten crowns on them, and blasphemous names on its heads. The heads and horns mean kings, the text says. The beast gains its power from the “dragon,” identified as “Satan,” who has fallen from heaven to earth, a symbol of all anti-spiritual tendencies, such as materialism, nihilism, and atheism.

Has the twentieth century not most emphatically experienced that the filthiest passions, vindictiveness, greed, and cruelty, like a beast arisen from the abyss, were consecrated by demonic ideologies and personalized in rulers and leaders? And is it not blatantly obvious in the present day what pollution stemming from human behavior has accumulated in the Gaia system, how this pollution is now destructively affecting the perpetrators, and how the whole system is being ruthlessly corrected and purified? The Apocalypse of John describes such revelations of the disorder of a system and its effects, such self-corrections and corrections by the spiritual world. The original order is represented by the “Lamb,” Christ, the true self of humanity.

So far, the disorder had been protected by seven “seals.” The gross material world and the divine world had been incompatible; divine powers could not work directly in the earthly world but only through the Mosaic “law.” Through his incarnation in an earthly body and its transformation, Jesus, “the Lamb,” broke this blockade and opened the way for divine powers to flow directly into the earthly world and change it. The dividing “curtain” between the divine and the earthly was torn (Matthew 27:51). The seven seals are thus broken by the

“Lamb,” the “Lion of the tribe of Judah,” the spiritual order that has “conquered” the world (Revelation 5:5, NRSV). And now the events of the manifestations of disorder and their correction and purification take their course in three rounds, each sevenfold.

In the first round, the seven *spiritual* forces that guide all existence become manifest. They show themselves when the seven seals are broken. The “white horse” is an impulse of spiritual mental power that is capable of destroying all wrong thinking. The second horse, “bright red,” is an impulse of spiritual feeling power that exposes all false peace. The “black horse” is an impulse of spiritual life force that breaks up frozen habits, and the “pale green horse” is an impulse of spiritual formative power that kills people’s bodies, for they do not correspond to the original form appropriate to the true self. The other three spiritual powers perform their purification work on three further levels. At the same time, all those people who have kept to the order of the spirit in the midst of earthly disorder are connected in a special way with the spiritual world and protected. They are designated by the number 144,000. 144 is the number of perfect unity of spirit (100), soul (40), and body (4). The person oriented to God embodies this unity under the direction of the spirit. And “1000” expresses infinite variety. Thus, in the course of time, an infinite number of people will be among the redeemed.

With the opening of the seventh seal begins the second round of unmasking and purification. The seven *soul* powers of the spiritual world appear, vibrations that are compared to trumpet sounds. Against the background of these vibrations, all psychic debris accumulated in humanity is revealed and activated.

Everything human beings have ever done to violate the order of the spirit and the soul comes back to them on seven levels in a correcting manner: as mental illnesses, as “sores” – corruption and social chaos, as bloodbaths – the consequences of bloody crimes, and more. A first beast, already mentioned, emerges from the sea, followed by another

beast, which resembles a “lamb,” emerging from the earth. It is the great imitator, the false Christ, the propagandist of earthly power, who wants to seduce people into worshiping the “image” of the beast.

Before that, a woman, surrounded by sun, moon, and stars, had appeared in the heavens and had given birth to a son. Again a picture: A new consciousness had manifested in spiritually open human beings and given birth to the “Son of Man.” Humanity became aware of its true self, the Son of Man. But the unfolding of this spiritual identity is constantly threatened by the “dragon.”

At the sound of the seventh trumpet, the third round of unmasking and purifying begins, in which seven *material* forces of the spiritual world take effect: “the seven bowls of the wrath of God” (Revelation 16:1, NRSV) are poured out over humanity. A tremendous shake-up of the earth and the whole old order takes place. Nothing false can maintain itself any longer. “Babylon the great, mother of whores” (Revelation 17:5, NRSV), the governmental and economic system based on earthly power, honor, and wealth, finally succumbs. And the Gaia system “avenges” itself for the abuses committed against it.

Now the original order, which had made apparent and corrected all disorder, itself appears. Symbolized by “The Word of God” (Revelation 19:13, NRSV), a rider on a white horse and his army, it throws the two beasts and their armies into the “lake of fire.” The “dragon” is bound and thrown into the pit. And the kingdom of the spirit is revealed, the “new Jerusalem,” as the “bride” of the Lamb. “Nothing accursed will be found there any more” (Revelation 22:3, NRSV). The spiritual human beings, having become aware of themselves, live immortally in their original home, the spiritual world of the Elohim.

On Patmos, John sees this lawful development in a state of complete calm and freedom from all sensory impressions. The spiritual world is revealed to him, its order and power, in majestic pictures comparable to the pictures that Daniel, Isaiah, and Ezekiel had seen. Against the background of this order, as in a flash from eternity, he be-

comes aware of what is going to happen in the disorder of the world and humanity in temporal succession. There are signs in the text that the seer referred with his pictures also to concrete events in his time, for example, that the beast from the sea refers to the Emperor Nero and the whore of Babylon to Rome. But the pictures represent laws that are valid for all time. There are always human cycles and cultural cycles, and what is described always happens at the end of a cycle. This can also happen in the life of an individual. When the true self begins to work in the person as the original order, it pushes all repressed disorder up into the consciousness, cleanses it, and destroys what resists, until it can reveal itself in its glory.

II. Origin and Destiny of the Biblical Texts

1. Old Testament

Historical Origin and Authors

When and in what context did the writings of the Old Testament originate?⁹ And how can one characterize their authors? The books of the Old Testament originated in the course of about 750 years beginning in about 900 BC but are partly based on older mythical traditions.

The Five Books of Moses

Research has determined that the first four books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers) consist of three layers that were combined into one narrative. Later, a fifth book was added to these four books from another source: Deuteronomy. Together, the five books are also called the “Pentateuch.”

How should one imagine the origin of the two creation stories (see the section “Two Creation Stories”)? Researchers say that these are myths from Mesopotamia, far older than the time when they were written down. But with that, the question of their origin is only shifted further into the past. One answer would be that these myths have sprung from pure fantasy; another is that they are inspirations of the Holy Spirit. But could it not be that the writers had experienced a dimension of the spirit they called God?

The “Word” is active: God spoke and speaks. Human beings too are the result of this activity and are still maintained and urged forward in their development by the “Word.” What if they could develop a spiritual consciousness capable of retracing all the stages of the unfolding of the “Word” as in a memory? These stages are all still present in them as “annual rings” of their development. Such a consciousness would really be there. It would recognize the seven great developmental periods of the first creation, the seven “days,” which are also layers of the human being. It would also be there on the seventh day, the “Sabbath,” when God rests and penetrates everything with God’s Spirit. This is exactly what those who remember do: They penetrate with their spirit into what happened in all its layers.

Persons with such a consciousness would also experience the second creation, the creation of the human being from “dust.” They would witness the “Fall” because the “Fall” is still happening as human beings are constantly separating themselves from God. They would recognize the consequences of this separation: death, fratricide, and also the peri-

odic destruction of cultures and peoples. They would capture all these experiences in pictures, in “myths.”

In the stories of the patriarchs, Joseph in Egypt, Moses, the Exodus from Egypt, the passage through the wilderness, and the battles of the conquest, we can imagine historical substrates that were handed down orally as memories or distant legends and changed and embellished in the process. The real folk myth of Israel, however, was the covenant that God made with Abraham and whose ritual sealing was circumcision. Who experienced these events? Did anyone see with physical eyes that God visited Abraham in the form of three men (Genesis 18)?

Here someone makes soul-spiritual processes visible through pictures. For example, when God meets Abraham, it expressly says that he “looked up” (Genesis 18:2, NRSV) or “he lift up his eyes” (KJV). Recurring in many texts in the Bible, this formula states that the person is looking up into the spiritual world with a spiritual consciousness. Also, Moses surely did not receive any stone tablets from an anthropomorphic personal god on Sinai. In close connection with the spiritual world, of which the “mountain” is a symbol, he internally recognized the laws that controlled human development at the time. He formulated them and maybe had them chiseled into stone.

Who narrated or wrote down all these events, some of which were externally visible and some inwardly experienced? Perhaps those who had the experiences, perhaps companions who witnessed these experiences, perhaps people much later who “saw” inwardly what had happened before.

As different as the elements are that make up the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, the Torah, as a whole, it is a work of art. The lawful internal development of a people is depicted in it, and as these laws are universal, it also depicts the laws of human evolution from unconscious origins to conscious life, from the separation from God to the conscious return to God. Kabbalists have discovered structures in the Torah (“teaching,” “instruction,” or “law”) that are hardly acciden-

tal. The ratio 1:4, for example, plays a major role in it. 1 is the number of the spirit, 4 the number of matter. The 4 alone is meaningless; only when the 1 faces it does it have meaning. Only when a thumb faces four fingers is the hand usable. In Hebrew, every letter also has a numerical value. In paradise are the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. One symbolizes the spirit; the other symbolizes matter. If one sums up the numerical values of the letters of the expression “tree of life,” the result is 233. The sum of the numerical values of the expression “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” is 932. The two values stand in a 1:4 ratio. A structure of reality is reflected in the structure of the words that describe this reality.¹⁰

The “Deuteronomistic History”

Researchers call Deuteronomy, which was later linked to the first four books of Moses into a unity, and the biblical books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings that follow it the “Deuteronomistic history.” The fifth book of Moses, the first part of the “Deuteronomistic history,” probably dates back to shortly after 562 BC. The unknown authors of this “Deuteronomy,” this “second law,” composed it as a great farewell speech of Moses to his people before his death in which all the “instructions” resulting from the covenant of God with Israel are summarized again.

The core of the two Books of Samuel is the story of King David (about 1000–960 BC) and the Ark of the Covenant, described by researchers as the “court history of David” or “succession narrative.” This part may already have been written at the royal court of David or Solomon (about 950 BC) and is considered the oldest written testimony of the Old Testament.

Perhaps individual sections of the Books of Kings were written by chroniclers at the respective royal courts and later summarized by the compilers of the “Deuteronomistic history.” But it becomes clear that authors and editors always started from a spiritual perspective and evaluated the events from this perspective.

Other History Books

The two Books of Chronicles as well as the books Ezra and Nehemiah are attributed by researchers to one and the same author or editor, a Levite from Jerusalem who combined several sources into a coherent work. He probably wrote about 300 BC, that is, long after the events described: the rebuilding of the temple under the direction of Zerubabel (until 515 BC) and the rebuilding of the city wall of Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership (about 445 BC).

Like the Books of Judith and Tobit, the Book of Esther probably was not written before the beginning to the middle of the second century BC.

The Wisdom Books

From 332 BC, Palestine was first ruled by Alexander the Great, who conquered Persia, then by the Ptolemies, the successor kings of Alexander the Great in Egypt, and from 198 BC by the Seleucids, the Syrian successor kings of Alexander. The Book of Job was probably written during the Ptolemaic period. The Psalms, on the other hand, are a collection of texts spanning several centuries. Singers at the Solomonic temple recited them and perhaps also wrote new ones; others were created during the Babylonian exile; some were even borrowed from the new cultural environment. Most are songs by individuals of lamentation, of petition, and of gratitude. There is nothing to contradict that King David himself wrote many of them.

The Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (Kohélet) are compilations of texts partly collected at the royal courts and partly authored there. Perhaps some of the texts were really authored by Solomon himself. But their origins are very different, for example, Proverbs 22:17 to 23:11 is the Hebrew translation of an ancient Egyptian book of wisdom. The definitive editing is likely to have taken place in the third century BC at the time of the Ptolemaic rule.

The Prophetic Books

With the prophetic books, the authors of the texts become more tangible, for they are partly testimonies of the prophets themselves. The prophets admonish; they comfort; they threaten; they proclaim the laws of the spiritual world and of the development of humanity, the “will of God,” which they recognize through their special connection with the spiritual world. They do this against the background of partly foreign rule and partly social tensions.

In the southern kingdom, Isaiah, the author of most of the earliest of the four “major” prophetic books, was active in the second half of the eighth century, when Judah was practically a satellite state of Assyria. He was probably born in Jerusalem and of noble origin. The author of the second “major” prophetic book, Jeremiah, came from a priestly family and was born in the middle of the seventh century near Jerusalem. He suffered painfully from the tribulations of the politically turbulent times and had to experience the disastrous year 587 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar led many Jewish people into exile to Babylon.

Ezekiel, author of the third of the “major” prophetic books, a priest, worked in Babylon. The so-called “Deutero-Isaiah” (the “Second Isaiah”) also lived during the Exile. (The present Book of Isaiah is a composite of several parts: Isaiah 1 through 39 is about Isaiah himself; Isaiah 40 through 55 are accounts of an unknown prophet identified as “Deutero-Isaiah”; the rest of the book is a collection of various prophecies.)

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were proponents of the rebuilding of the temple during the postexilic decades. It was thanks to their activity that the “second” temple could be inaugurated in the year 515 BC.

From then on, the eyes of the prophets turned more and more to the “end times.” This reveals the influence of the Persian religion. Zarathustra had taught of a battle between light and darkness that

shapes human history and would eventually lead to a great final judgment over evil and the victory of the good. The more chaotic the social and political conditions became, the more intensely many longed for this final judgment. In Judaism too, an “apocalyptic” movement developed in which people hoped for the end-time, the “revelation” (apocalypse) of all things, as imminent or expected it already immediately. Jewish tradition linked with these hopes. Had it not been prophesied that David’s kingdom of peace would someday be revived?

In this sense, in about 500 BC, the prophet Malachi spoke of the coming Judgment Day of the Lord, and “Deutero-Zechariah” (in the second part of the Book of Zechariah, which combines the words of two prophets) spoke of the king of peace who would enter Jerusalem on the “last day” after tremendous battles.

The author of the fourth “major” prophetic book, Daniel, also spoke of a redeemer, “one like a human being” who would come “with the clouds of heaven” (Daniel 7:13, NRSV) and would put an end to all injustice. The Book of Daniel is the most recent scripture in the Old Testament and was almost certainly written between 168 and 165 BC, when the Jews, under the leadership of the Maccabees, revolted against the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

Mentality of the Authors

As far as possible, researchers have attempted to determine who the authors of the Old Testament writings were and of how many pieces these texts consist, how and when these pieces came into being and how and when they were put together into the text we have today. However that may be, no author of an Old Testament text was interested exclusively or even in the main in presenting historical events as such. Therefore, the Old Testament documents a spiritual development: the development of an ego oriented to the spiritual world. Each author describes the stage of ego development as it was in his own time. Overall, there is a line from the first impulses to this development over the formation of the ego up to the testing through all inner and outer challenges. All conceivable manifestations of this ego are gone through – in reference to the kings – always accompanied by the voice of conscience – the prophets. At the same time, the latter always point to the next developmental step: the realization of the true self. In the end, the longing for this developmental step has grown into the immeasurable: The “end time” with the Messiah is urgently awaited.

The Canon

Who determined which of the countless religious texts written between the time of King David and about the second century BC should be included in the Old Testament? Who laid down what was “sacred scripture” and what was only edifying or even unholy writing and according to what criteria? These questions refer to the canon, which comes from the Greek word for “measuring stick” or “rule.”

Reflections on the question of which writings were “holy” scriptures began when some of the Jews were exiled in 587 BC, for then the identity of the people was no longer represented by the institution of an independent kingship or priesthood, by a land, or by a temple. Therefore, the traditions laid down in the scriptures were regarded as the most important still preserved symbol of the identity of the people. During the period of Persian and Hellenistic rule in the sixth to second centuries BC, a consensus began to emerge over which writings were “holy” scriptures. In the first century BC, the canon was essentially fixed: 22 books. And late in the first century AD, this canon was confirmed for Judaism at the Council of Jamnia. 22 books: the Hebrew alphabet had that many letters; the world was built from the same number of elements. Later this number was increased by splitting some books.

The mentality of those who made this selection can no longer be determined empirically. Were they people who had spiritual experience themselves and recognized the spiritual quality of the texts? Were they believers who no longer understood the scriptures spiritually but approached them with veneration because of their “salvation-historical” interpretation and the age of the texts? Were they religious leaders who used the reverence for these texts by the faithful for their own interest in supporting their positions? Or did the selection occur automatically by the popularity of the texts among the faithful in the synagogues?

There are two possibilities. The first: The selectors recognized the spiritual quality of the texts based on their own experiences. Then it would be certain that all the scriptures in the canon are spiritual scriptures. The second: Some selectors did not recognize the spiritual quality of a text anymore. Even then, however, texts of spiritual quality could be included in the selection – as long as they could be interpreted in terms of salvation history. If that was not possible, they were not included. Furthermore, under these conditions, it was also possible to include texts that had no spiritual quality but had merely “salvation-historical” meaning. Today’s canon reflects the second situation.

The Christians initially adopted the Hebrew canon, but beside it, they used other religious texts, as the Jews also did, that had been written before the beginning of the era and were called apocryphal in the old church. In the course of time, however, these late writings, which were included in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, gained canonical rank. Luther explicitly removed them from the canon but recommended them as useful and edifying writings. As a result, Orthodox and Catholic Bibles today generally contain more “holy” canonical texts than Protestant ones. These are the Book of Tobit, the Book of Judith, the two Books of the Maccabees, the Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, and among the prophetic books, the Book of Baruch. When Protestant Bibles contain these scriptures, they are called “Apocrypha.”

Textual History

All the texts of the Old Testament were written more than 2000 years ago; the oldest ones are almost 3000 years old. In what way were they handed down? There was no book printing; one wrote on papyrus or stone, later on parchment. There were always only a few copies of the texts, and the material was of limited durability. So they had to be copied again and again. In addition, the history of their formation shows that the texts were never created in one piece and rarely by just one author or editor.

Therefore, many readers of the Bible today ask, Could there have been editors and revisers who did not have spiritual experiences themselves and did not understand the existing texts or not in all details? In attempting to “clarify,” could they in the best faith have added what was rather more misleading from the spiritual point of view? Could they have deleted passages that seemed “obsolete” to their limited perspective or no longer appropriate, even harmful, to the current needs of their believers? Yes, were there perhaps also religious leaders who were guided by priestly power interests and inserted or deleted passages accordingly? Or were there any editors who no longer recognized apparent contradictions as expressions of different aspects of a spiritual situation and therefore made “corrections” in the sense of logical and spatiotemporal coherence? Were there any copyists who did the same?

What presuppositions the editors, revisers, and copyists had can no longer be determined empirically today. And the quality of a traditional text or inserted passages can be judged only by the readers. If the readers themselves have spiritual experiences and know the traditions of the symbolic expression of these experiences, they can see to what extent a text and inserted passages reflect spiritual experiences. If they do not have such experiences and knowledge, they cannot recognize this.

In principle, we should assume that the texts reflect spiritual experiences even in their present form with all the changes, insertions, and

additions. We should assume this as long as interpretations of the symbols and the construction of the texts justify such a conclusion. Only when a passage opposes all standards of such an analysis and interpretation should we, with all due care, assume a lack of understanding among editors or copyists, and in exceptional cases also consider a deliberate deception.

Researchers have done their utmost to produce a reliable text from the existing manuscripts, the so-called “textual witnesses.” The present textual form of the Hebrew Old Testament was established between the sixth and tenth century AD by the so-called Masoretes, Jewish scholars, who took into account all the textual witnesses existing at that time. Above all, they established an authoritative reading, for in Hebrew only consonants are written, and it is left to the intelligence of the reader to deduce the associated vowels from the context. It would be as if, for example, WND were written in English and the reader would have to decide whether this should be read as wind, wand, wend, or wound. Through a notation system, the Masoretes indicated the vowels to be inserted.

Translations

Between 300 BC and 100 BC, the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek by Hellenistic Jews in Alexandria. Legend has it that the Ptolemaic pharaoh Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BC) gave the order for this and 70 scholars completed the work in 70 days with the help of the Holy Spirit. In traditional Judaism, 70 – or 72 – is the number of all elements of a cultural phenomenon. In traditional Judaism, there were, for example, 70 languages in humanity, 70 sciences, and 70 heathen peoples. “70” is therefore intended to indicate here that the entire wisdom of the scholars of that time flowed into this translation, which was therefore named “Septuagint” (from Latin, meaning “seventy”).

When referring to passages from the Old Testament, the authors of the New Testament quoted mostly from this Septuagint. Partial translations into Latin made from about AD 150, especially in North Africa and southern France, were based on it. They were very flawed, which is why Pope Damasus I commissioned Bishop Jerome to make a Latin translation directly from Hebrew. From AD 390 until 405, Jerome fulfilled this task and created the so-called “Vulgate,” the “common” translation. This was the most commonly used version of the Old Testament throughout the Middle Ages in Western Europe, and it is still used fundamentally in the Catholic Church today.

2. New Testament

Historical Origin and Authors

The Gospels

How did the Gospels come about? Luke, for example, writes in the foreword to his Gospel that he was not an eyewitness to the events surrounding Jesus but that he had gathered and put together all the information that was accessible to him. As an editor, Luke combined previously existing portions of the text. Researchers have determined that Mark's Gospel must have been one among Luke's several sources. But how did the Gospel of Mark come into being?

We can imagine that in the decades following Jesus' death (about AD 30), his disciples told their disciples and disciples of their disciples about their experiences with Jesus. They told of their first encounters with Jesus: that they felt that his way of living and being was the answer to their longing for a new meaning of life and the courage to face it. They therefore "believed" in Jesus: They strove for the life he embodied and followed him. They told that they had experienced how Jesus had unleashed the same experiences in many others so that those affected were healed of the disease of meaninglessness and freed from the "demons" of their fixed ideas. They told how Jesus had taught them that this new meaning of life and courage to face life is the "kingdom of God" that can unfold in them. They told how he had sent them in turn to pass on these new possibilities and powers. They told how gradually a mystery school was formed around Jesus as the core. They told how they realized that this kingdom of God had to be the kingdom of David foretold in the scriptures, the Old Testament, and that Jesus had to be the promised son of David and the Messiah.

But Jesus told them again and again that this Messiah would by no means establish an earthly kingdom of peace full of splendor and glory, that rather he would be killed by the representatives of the ruling religion, but that he would be resurrected, and that those who wanted to be disciples of the Messiah would have to suffer a similar fate: to lose their life, that is, to consciously deny their egocentricity for the sake of the kingdom of God within them and to accept the cross of persecution. Only thus could the kingdom of God arise within them.

They told further how they did not understand this at first; fear blocked their understanding. They told how they were terribly disappointed by the crucifixion of Jesus, but how they had then experienced that the new spiritual state in Jesus could not be touched by the death of the physical body, and how he “rose” and appeared to them with a new body in the spiritual dimension. Only then did they understand what the path of the mysteries was, what the task of the Messiah had been, what resurrection was, and that they too were called to be resurrected.

Some disciple of a disciple of Jesus who walked this path himself heard all this, understood it well, since he himself experienced it, and wrote it down. Maybe his name was Mark. He heard sayings of Jesus that had been handed down orally and in part had already been compiled in definitive collections. Also, this Mark could already fall back on pictorial stories that summarily characterized the activity of Jesus in its various phases, such as the feeding of the 5000, the feeding of the 4000, and the cleansing of the temple.

Such stories could have evolved from nuclei given in the Old Testament. For example: Jesus purified the rigidified traditional religion. There was a remark by the prophet Jeremiah about the temple as a “den of robbers” (Jeremiah 7:11, NRSV) that could have been expanded into a seemingly concrete story illustrating this purification by Jesus, the Anointed (John 2:14–17). And many other characteristics and deeds of the Anointed could be described by means of Old Testament ref-

erences, including his experiences on the “cross” with the help of the psalms. Every spirit-filled person performed such deeds and had such characteristics, Jesus as the Anointed only in perfect measure. Thus, the Old Testament accounts of spirit-filled people were suitable for describing these deeds and characteristics and at the same time affirmed the nature of the Messiah.

This Mark had further heard from disciples and disciples of disciples of Jesus of his teachings on the stages of the development of humanity: of the stage where the “Mosaic Law” applied and the new stage where a new humanity had to flourish. Jesus was the embodiment of this new humanity, the spiritual human being of the future. Also for the characterization of this identity, terms from the Old Testament were available to Mark: “Son of God” (Daniel 3:25, KJV; also see 2 Samuel 7:14), “Son of man” (Daniel 7:13, KJV).

Mark presented such characteristics in scenes such as Jesus after the baptism in the Jordan receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit and the transfiguration. He also understood what the “return of the Son of Man” was: the image of God, the spiritual human being, becoming conscious in the disciple’s own being. In some disciples and disciples of disciples, this had already happened since Jesus’ death. Therefore, the return of the Son of Man had already occurred to some members of that generation.

About AD 65, this Mark wrote down all that he had heard and confirmed by his own experiences. He brought it into an order and sequence that in every detail corresponds to the inner and outer experiences of a group on the spiritual path. The master with his special powers precedes on the path; a little delayed, his students follow him with their inferior forces, do not understand, fail, and then understand after all. And the environment reacts partly enthusiastically, partly indifferently, partly with hatred and persecution. It also became clear to Jesus’ disciples and to disciples of the disciples that the path of Jesus marked a special point, a reversal, in the development of humanity at that time.

As a literary form in which Mark could cast his report, Hellenistic biography was at his disposal.¹¹ Perhaps he developed his own form without knowing this literary pattern. In any case, if he used this pattern then it was only to exemplarily describe the course of a spiritual path, not primarily to write the earthly biography of an extraordinary person.

We can imagine that also students of the mystery schools of the Egyptian, Syrian, Persian, and Greek traditions that existed in the Mediterranean realm at that time heard about these events. And they discovered: But this path that Jesus followed and explained is exactly the path we want to follow in our school too! Only Jesus publicly exemplified and explained this path because it was apparently time to make it public. In addition, the inner processes occurring on this path were consciously experienced by Jesus and his disciples. They did not experience them only in special ecstatic states in the absence of clear day-consciousness, as this had been happening in the mystery schools up to that time.

Such mystery students could clothe the aspects of the path in other symbols than those used in Mark. Thus, “Gnostic” gospels came into being, such as those found near Nag Hammadi¹² and including collections of the sayings of Jesus as, for example, the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*. Perhaps these were real sayings of the Anointed or perhaps sayings that he could have made, indeed had to make, on the basis of his characteristics. What does it matter if they come directly and literally from Jesus, if only they are true!

Luke found such sources, for example, the hypothetical sayings source “Q” from which the modern researchers proceed as the oldest part of the New Testament, and combined them with the already existing Gospel of Mark. He came across other stories developed from the Old Testament, for example, the “childhood stories” based on suggestions from Judges 13 or 1 Samuel 1 and 2. He also found a story in which Jesus walked with his disciples from Galilee to Jerusalem,

where “Galilee” was a symbol for the work on the spiritual path and “Jerusalem” for perfection. Thus, an entirely different possibility presented itself: to depict the path not in the form of a biography but as a journey. Luke combined all that he found without paying too much attention to spatiotemporal or even logical contradictions, which had to result from the combination of such different reports. This was not uncommon in ancient times. Compare, for example, Iamblichus’ account of the life and teachings of Pythagoras in which at least three different earlier texts are amalgamated in a dissonant fashion and with constant repetitions.

As one can deduce from the style peculiarities, Luke very likely created his Gospel around AD 90. The Gospel of Matthew, similarly created from Mark and other sources, was probably written around AD 80.

In addition to the use of different sources, differences and apparent contradictions between the texts of the evangelists can also be explained by their different spiritual accentuation. For example, Luke and John report completely different words that Jesus spoke on the cross than Matthew and Mark do. Did they do bad research? No, they only put into Jesus’ mouth words that a Son of God and Son of Man hanging on the “cross” will always “speak,” even if they are not audible. These words express attitudes of the one hanging on the cross, and each evangelist attaches importance to different attitudes.

“John” wrote down his Gospel around AD 90–100. Whether it was Jesus’ disciple John is debatable. But it is obvious that he was a student of the truth who had personal spiritual experiences.

The Letters

The creation of the New Testament letters, especially the Pauline letters, is easier to understand. For example, the figure of the author of the Letter to the Romans is clearly historical. Its language is clearly to be attributed to him according to peculiarities of its style and content. The setting of this letter, that is, its function for the life of the addressees, is also clear.

Taking into account the peculiarities of Paul's mode of thought and expression, not all letters under the name of "Paul" can stem from him. Only seven letters can be clearly attributed to him. The oldest, the First Letter to the Thessalonians (the inhabitants of present-day Thessaloniki) was probably written in the early fifties and is therefore the oldest complete text of the New Testament (only parts of the Gospels are older). This is followed by the Letter to the Galatians (to some communities in Galatia in Asia Minor, around AD 55), the two Letters to the Corinthians, the second of which must have been written before the first, then the Letter to the Romans, the Letter to the Philippians, and the Letter to Philemon, all written in the late fifties and early sixties. Paul himself was probably executed during the persecution of Christians in Rome in the year 64.

The Letter to the Colossians and the Letter to the Ephesians were more likely written by Paul's disciples, probably between AD 60 and 70. The Second Letter to the Thessalonians, certainly not from Paul, was written around the same time, and the First and Second Letter to Timothy and the Letter to Titus were written not until after AD 100.

Judging by their content and diction, the three Letters of "John" could have been written by the author of the Gospel of John between AD 90 and 100. The two Letters of Peter were probably not from Peter, the second written long after AD 100. The author of the Letter of James (around AD 90) is certainly not James, the brother of Jesus. Nothing concrete is known about the author of the Letter to the Hebrews.

What is certain, however, is that he must have been a philosophically educated theologian coming from Judaism.

The Revelation of John

The last book in the New Testament is the Book of Revelation or Apocalypse of John. Was it written by John, the disciple whom Jesus loved? Hardly likely. But whoever the author may have been, in a spiritual perspective, the text appears as a description of every “end time,” understood individually and collectively, that is, any time that precedes the resurrection of the spiritual identity. In this perspective, the author is someone with spiritual knowledge, and his pictures are representations of spiritual laws.

Mentality of the Authors

What view does justice to the authors of the texts of the New Testament and thus to the texts themselves? Again, as in the Old Testament scriptures, the readers must decide for themselves, and their decision depends on their capabilities. If they have the capability and willingness to have a spiritual point of view, they will also know the meaning of symbols and the traditional use of symbols, so they will recognize which author writes from the same perspective and which text corresponds to that perspective. And if this perspective opens up all the details and the overall composition of a text satisfactorily and without contradiction, they will be able to accept it. The dictum, “You will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16, NRSV), also applies to interpretations.

Textual History

What was the further fate of the texts of the New Testament? Were there additions, changes, and deletions? And if so, in what sense? This depended on the leaders of the first communities who had access to the scriptures. These were read at the community meetings. A community leader who himself had spiritual experiences and understood what was described in the texts perhaps added some explanatory comments. Such comments would not change the spiritual nature of the texts; the texts would only have been enriched.

But what if community leaders no longer understood their quality, because they did not or could not have the experiences described in them? What if they conceived the pictures for soul-spiritual events as descriptions of physical reality? What if they conceived the virgin birth, the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, the transfiguration, and the resurrection as physical realities? And what if they wanted to believe that they would be redeemed by these “physical realities,” by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, and that one day their physical body would be resurrected? Then many things in the scriptures were incomprehensible. Then they might have had to clarify things in the sense of these beliefs. Then perhaps the “virgin birth,” the physically visible “resurrection,” and the “resurrection of Lazarus” had to be supplemented by details that showed their physical character beyond all doubt.

And when later, beginning in the second century, an ecclesiastical organization began to emerge: Was there not the temptation to make insertions that justified this organization? Is the passage with Peter, the rock on which Christ wanted to build his church (Matthew 16:18–19), such an insertion? And did not the false expectations of the immanent return of Christ have to be corrected and possible irritations connected with it prevented?

Whether and how many changes were made in this regard can no longer be established with certainty for the period before about AD 200. Manuscripts with complete books of the New Testament have been preserved only from then on. What could have happened with these books before is unknown. But in any case, many texts, such as the Gospels, were put together layer by layer and most likely were not composed by “eyewitnesses” of the events around Jesus. What does it matter if any additions were made provided they document the spirit of independent spiritual experience and therewith the truth? Are not the verses of Mark 16:9–20, half of the last chapter of the Gospel of Mark, and indeed the entire twenty-first chapter of the Gospel of John such additions? And cannot the quotation about Peter, the rock on which Christ establishes his church (Matthew 16:18–19), be interpreted spiritually in such a way that Peter embodies all spiritual students who recognize the Christ inside and outside of themselves? This realization is the unshakeable rock on which the true church of those who recognize Christ rests.

In any case, the analysis of New Testament texts from a spiritual perspective reveals that they are useful as descriptions of a spiritual path down to the last detail and that only very few passages can be conscious or unconscious forgeries. Since papyrus manuscripts dating back to AD 200 or even earlier have been found in recent decades confirming later manuscripts dating back to the end of the fourth century, it can be said that the present form of the texts corresponds to the transmitted texts back to around AD 200. However, what happened with the texts in the time between about AD 100 and 200 can no longer be ascertained. But before speculating about extensive deletions and additions, we should also take into account that the principle of textual fidelity was taken very seriously in ancient times, perhaps more seriously than today.

It surely also happened that copyists brought errors into the texts due to misunderstandings or incomprehension. But here, the original textual form can usually be reconstructed with considerable certainty

by comparing different translations and quotations by contemporary authors. It must be said that at least the modern biblical scholars have done everything to present the most reliable text possible.

Reincarnation in the New Testament?

In particular, there is nothing that would support the oft-heard view that statements by Jesus about reincarnation were systematically removed from the scriptures so that better pressure could be exerted on believers, whose supposed one life determined eternal damnation or salvation. That people at that time knew of the possibility of a *voluntary* incarnation of beings especially connected with the spiritual world is shown by passages such as Luke 9:19 or Mark 6:16 where John the Baptist is considered by some to be a reincarnated Elijah or Jesus as a reincarnated John the Baptist. Also, the statement so central to the New Testament that Jesus himself took “the form of a slave” and was “born in human likeness” speaks of this knowledge (Philippians 2:5–7, NRSV). That the concept of an *involuntary* reincarnation was familiar is proved by the passage in the Gospel of John, where Jesus’ disciples ask him about a man born blind, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2, NRSV). The question only makes sense if the questioners were convinced of a previous incarnation of the blind man.

As an explicit doctrine, however, reincarnation does not appear in the Bible or specifically in the New Testament. But to therefore suppose that later editors deleted the corresponding passages is very audacious. In any case, this doctrine did not occur in exoteric Judaism. If Jesus did not formulate it expressly, it may have been because he wanted to emphasize the spiritual path that led out of the wheel of birth and death. Everyone should strive to realize the kingdom of God, the resurrection of the spiritual self, in themselves now, in this life. A theoretical justification for this demand in the form of the doctrine of reincarnation was not or not yet necessary at the time. Does not John 9 confirm this view? Jesus says of the blind man that “he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him” (John 9:3, NRSV). What matters is that the one born blind and all who were born spiritually blind

come to the cognition of the spirit. And this cognition is the work of the spirit in them.

The Canon

Over the decades from AD 35 until AD 130 at the latest, the scriptures that are now collected in the New Testament were created. But in the same period and later, countless other Christian texts came into being: Some emerged from conservative Jewish-Christian circles, such as the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Ebionites, and the Gospel of the Nazarenes. Some emerged from the mystery schools of other religious traditions, such as the Gnostic writings.

All these scriptures are grouped together today as New Testament Apocrypha. Some of them, more edifying in character, such as *The Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the *Didache* or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, were valued as highly in early Christianity as today's texts of the New Testament.

How were the texts recognized today in Christianity as "holy" selected from the great number of writings used in the early Christian communities? In other words, how did the "canon," the entirety of the authoritative scriptures, emerge? This process took place to the extent that one of the many early Christian streams emerged as dominant. Until about AD 150, those who believed and those who knew, those with a dogmatic orientation and those with spiritual experiences, lived together in the communities and accepted each other as Christians. Valentinus, a famous Gnostic, was almost elected bishop of the Roman community around AD 140. And Clement of Alexandria (about AD 150 to about AD 215), a still highly respected theologian of the early church, described himself as a Gnostic. Over time, however, those interested in a sure dogma displaced and marginalized those with spiritual experiences. People who saw the events around Jesus in a salvation-historical perspective and less as expressions of spiritual experiences possible in each individual prevailed. On the other hand, they distanced themselves from rigid movements that were still largely de-

terminated by traditional Judaism, from enthusiasts, and from groups with purely philosophical tendencies.

Representatives of this direction organized the communities, which were soon represented by bishops. They developed a binding creed from the original spiritual experiences. This also resulted in standards by which scriptures could be judged as sacred and in means of asserting their legitimacy.

The Old Testament and the Canon of Christian Scriptures

At first, the Old Testament was considered a holy book by the early Christians too. To the extent that scriptures telling of Jesus were written and became the basis of communal life, however, it became debatable whether the Old Testament should be included in the canon of the new writings of Christianity.

A very influential Christian theologian of the second century, Marcion, completely rejected the Old Testament. For him, the God of the Old Testament was the God of the outer law, who since the time of Jesus had been replaced by the God of inner freedom. Other, more moderate leaders of early Christianity recognized that although, in principle, the Old Testament had been outdated since the time of Jesus, it was for them the expression of a necessary phase in the development of each individual and of humanity through which they had to go anew before they could advance to the freedom of the inner law. Therefore, they kept the Old Testament as holy scripture also for Christianity.

The Canon of the New Testament

From about AD 150, the question arose as to which of the new writings of Christianity so far should be binding for the communities and should receive the rank of holy scriptures. There was a consensus among the main currents of the time within early Christianity concerning Paul's letters. They could be interpreted spiritually and salvation-historically. Therefore, they were accepted by both the spiritually oriented Gnostic Christians and the salvation-historically oriented Christians. The same was the case with the four Gospels of today. For some, they were exemplary accounts of the spiritual path, expressions of always possible existential experiences at a certain period of time and experienced by certain figures. For the others, these were accounts of the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation in history by a historical Son of God, who performed miracles and redeemed the faithful through crucifixion and resurrection.

Another criterion was the age and, related to this, the question of whether a text was written by an apostle or a disciple of an apostle. It was supposed that these criteria too applied to the four Gospels, the letters now collected in the New Testament, and John's Apocalypse. The Book of Acts by Luke was also included for this reason even though it already contained spiritually flat passages in the manner of a Hellenistic novel. Other stories of apostles were excluded, as was *The Shepherd of Hermas*.

This process of evaluation and discussion lasted for about 200 years. It came to a preliminary conclusion at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. By then, the dogmatic, institutional direction within Christianity had become definitively established. "Gnostics" and "Gnostic" writings were excluded.

Therefore, texts such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Philip found in Nag Hammadi in 1945 are not found in the New Testament today. The Gospel of Thomas was certainly as old as the Gospel

of John and evidently also had an apostle or disciple of an apostle as the author. Like many other “Gnostic” writings, however, it did not conform to the salvation-historical perspective.

But the fact that the 27 writings of today’s New Testament were included in the canon does not mean that they are not “Gnostic” or not spiritual. They are mostly just as Gnostic or spiritual as the “Gnostic” writings rejected by the salvation-historically oriented church leaders. They are only not recognizable at first glance as spiritual-Gnostic texts. Because of their historical garb in which the spiritual facts are embedded, they lend themselves also to a salvation-historical interpretation. But in the spiritual sense of scripture, they are clearly accounts and explanations of the spiritual path, and only their stylistic devices (especially the narrative elements) are different from those of the “more philosophically” formulated “Gnostic” writings.

The council fathers excluded the writings they recognized as Gnostic from the canon and attached great importance to including only scriptures that satisfied their salvation-historical criteria, not realizing that also most of the scriptures they included had a spiritual-Gnostic character.

Translations

All the New Testament writings were originally composed in Greek, which does not mean that the authors and editors did not draw on already-existing Aramaic collections of sayings of Jesus (he probably spoke mainly Aramaic) or Aramaic accounts of the life, trial, and death of Jesus. As the Greek New Testament scriptures penetrated the Latin, Syriac, and Coptic language realms, translations became necessary. So the translations of the New Testament were begun around AD 180.

The Byzantine Church of the East attached importance to the nations that it had Christianized receiving translations of the Bible in their respective vernacular. Famous is the translation into Gothic by Bishop Wulfila, whose mother was from Asia Minor (mid-fourth century). This Gothic Bible spread throughout much of Europe during the Migration Period. Also in Armenia, Ethiopia, and some countries of the Orient, translations into the vernacular were made.

Cyril, who was active together with his brother Methodius as “Apostle to the Slavs,” created the oldest known Slavic alphabet and with his brother standardized the Old Church Slavonic language that initially spread in Pannonia, Moravia, and elsewhere (around AD 950). However, these lands were soon (until around AD 1000) under the influence of the Western Church, which banned Old Church Slavonic in Great Moravia in favor of Latin in AD 885.

But during the conversion and colonization of East Slavic regions, especially the eastern Russian regions of Siberia and Alaska, which belonged to Russia at that time, the Bible was translated into numerous vernaculars up into the nineteenth century. These translations were of great importance for the cultural development of these countries. The Mongols, who ruled Russia from about 1250 and wanted at least to be informed about Christianity, also used Bible translations in their language. Not until about 60 years later did they decide to convert to Islam.

Mention should also be made of the translations by the Church of the East or Nestorian Church (from about 430), not recognized by Byzantium, which spread throughout the great Persian Empire, into India, and into the interior of Asia as far as China and Japan. From the middle of the fourteenth century, however, the Nestorian churches were pushed back by Islam.¹³

III. The Bible through the Centuries

In the course of the Middle Ages, the salvation-historical perspective of the Bible solidified: Jesus was man and God at the same time. With his Father and the Holy Spirit, he formed the divine Trinity. As the Anointed, he had been sent by his Father to humanity to vicariously atone for human sins by his death on the cross and thus satisfied the wrath of God. With his physical resurrection, he overcame death, thereby proving, on the other hand, the love of God, which pardons people and raises them to eternal life on the last day if they believe in these events. As a Godman, he performed miracles and fulfilled the promises of the prophets of the Old Testament. His disciples and disciples of disciples were his witnesses. The church with its leaders had been founded by Jesus and administered salvation through the centuries. The scriptures were said to be written by eyewitnesses of the events around Jesus or at least by their disciples. The authors were thus guarantors for the belief in the events described. Yes, they had even been inspired by the Holy Spirit in the writing of their texts so that their writings were literally true.

The Bible between Judaism and Christianity

This “salvation-historical” interpretation of the Bible, of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, had to lead to conflicts with Judaism, which also considered salvation history. For orthodox Jews, only the Old Testament was scripture; the New Testament was the false message of a false Messiah. They were convinced that they would continue to occupy a special position among the peoples and to be the subject of the special attention of God. Had Yahweh not promised believers the land of Palestine for all eternity? Would not a Messiah come someday who would establish a final political realm of peace and destroy all the peoples hostile to him?

Reactions of the “heathen peoples” to this conviction of the followers of Yahweh to be the chosen people could not fail to materialize. The Christians also looked with a salvation-historical view to the Old Testament. But they were convinced that the Messiah, the Redeemer, had already come, embodied in Jesus. Only, the Christians thought, the Jews did not recognize the Messiah and killed him, the Son of God! What a crime! The New Testament described these events for the salvation-historically oriented Christians as well as the salvation of the faithful through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

But the “Promised Land” is an inner “kingdom of God,” and Yahweh is not an anthropomorphic being but an aspect of the invisible spirit: “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24, NRSV). And the New Testament describes a spiritual awakening of humanity that happened with power in Jesus.

In the Jewish people, the struggle at that time was between attachment to tradition and overcoming tradition through a new spirituality. The same struggle between the letter that kills and the spirit that gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6) still occurs in every people, religion, and indi-

vidual. People can be at the Old Testament stage and then have two choices: to consider this stage as a preparation for a new way of life and, when the time is right, to transition to that spiritual way of life, the New Testament stage. But they can also reject the new way of life because the outer law of their Jewish or Christian faith offers them more security while the new signifies endangerment. In this case, they will also understand the New Testament as the outer law, as a dogma to be believed, even though the New Testament is precisely a document of living spiritually out of the inner law of freedom.

Christians who understand the New Testament as a rule of faith and Jesus as an outer redeemer are still living at the Old Testament stage – and also fail to recognize its spiritual aspects. Conversely, Jews who read the Old Testament spiritually and live accordingly stand on the basis of the New Testament. They then do nothing other than what Jesus did and live according to his example even if they reject Christianity as a dogmatic system. Such dispositions have been recurrent in the history of later Judaism, for example in Kabbalah and Hasidism.

A true reconciliation between Jews and Christians will only be possible if both recognize the spiritual foundations of their religions and scriptures. Then they will realize that they are based on the same foundation.

Islam and the Bible

Muslims too regard the Bible as holy scripture except that in their conception, it also contains errors in comparison with the Koran. For Muhammad, Abraham (Arabic: Ibrahim) was the progenitor of the three religions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for Abraham recognized that there is only one God and “surrendered” to this God (surrender = islam, see Quran 2:131). Therefore, Islam also accepts Christianity and Judaism as religions that can lead to God. Almost every second page of the Quran refers to figures and events of the Old and New Testaments.

The Old Testament speaks of two sons of Abraham: Ishmael (Genesis 16) and Isaac (Genesis 21). Ishmael is the son of the Egyptian maid Hagar; Isaac is the son of the free woman Sarah. Paul interprets the passage spiritually: Hagar is the Old Covenant, which gives birth to bondage; Sarah is the New Covenant, from which freedom emerges (Galatians 4:22–27). We could also say that Abraham, a person turned towards God, can have two different “offspring” or develop two different identities: a law-abiding, limited ego and a spiritual, unlimited true self.

For a historical and salvation-historical interpretation, Ishmael is merely the ancestor of the twelve Arab tribes and Isaac (via Jacob) of the twelve tribes of Israel. According to Muhammad, God did not ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac but Ishmael (Quran 37:99–112). Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arabs, was for Muhammad the more important son of Abraham. Also on the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, the pilgrims reenact the events around Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21:9–21): how Hagar wanders with Ishmael in the waterless desert, foresees the death of her son, and is shown a well by God, which saves them. With that, the pilgrims approach spiritual experience.

Islam sees the dogma of the divine Trinity as a major error of Christianity: God is three persons in one, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This

contradicts the oneness of Allah, called Yahweh in the Old Testament. In addition, for Muslims, Muhammad is the final prophet; Jesus and many others are his forerunners.

Here too, conflict occurs because the Bible is interpreted historically and salvation-historically. At the level of the senses, there can really be only *one* divine person, *one* I Am, *one* ruler of the world. The dogma of the divine Trinity is the projection of a situation in the spiritual dimension onto the temporal dimension where it is impossible. Three people in one is impossible in terms of time and space. Seen spiritually, however, it concerns the creative, active principle (Father), the receiving, passive principle (Holy Spirit), and the conscious being (Son) arising from them. All three principles work simultaneously in all things and beings and are God. If both religions left the plane of the senses and the related external interpretations of their scriptures and encountered each other on the spiritual plane, this issue would dissolve into nothingness.

The Bible within Christianity

For centuries, the salvation-historical interpretation of the Bible and its associated dogmas were taken for granted in Christianity. They were sanctioned by the authority of the church. For centuries, this view was proclaimed from the pulpits and underpinned by philosophy, theology, and art. Inconsistencies and contradictions in the Bible were rationalized, overlooked, or if that was no longer possible, the mind was declared incompetent. Faith, not experience, was the supreme authority.

But then a struggle broke out between faith and knowledge, between authority in the interpretation of the Bible and free reflection. It continues to this day, although it was and is essentially completely unnecessary shadowboxing because it is based on the erroneous assumption of both sides that the Bible is nothing more than the basis for a dogmatic belief system. Some attack the Bible; others defend it. If one were to recognize that it is an expression and representation of spiritual experiences and laws, the opposition of faith and knowledge would be meaningless. Nevertheless, this opposition has determined the history of the church in the centuries since the Reformation.

Unsettling the Authority of the Church

First, the authority of the church was tremendously shaken by the Reformation. Luther and other Protestant reformers translated the Bible into the respective vernacular of their language and made “scripture” the sole basis of faith. This gave individuals scope for their own interpretations even though the Protestant churches more or less clung to their interpretative authority.

With the Renaissance and Humanism, science withdrew from the guidance of theology. In the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, people began to critically question the salvation-historical dogmas. What was reasonable about what was said in the Bible and in the ecclesiastical dogmas? Could a loving God who cruelly sacrificed his Son be reconciled with reason, which also came from God after all? Was salvation without the cooperation of the individual commensurate with the dignity and responsibility of human beings in whom God worked as in all creatures? Were miracles acceptable as breaches of the laws of nature given by God? In the nineteenth century, the “search for the historical Jesus” began. It became apparent that significant parts of the traditions about Jesus were unhistorical.

Historical Criticism of the Bible

Enlightenment and historicism then led to so-called biblical criticism,¹⁴ a current prevalent especially in Protestant theology. Theologians asked themselves: What do we actually believe? On what is our faith based? Are its foundations, the biblical writings, sound? Do they stand up to an examination by reason and empirical research? With the mind questioning faith in this way, a second shock was introduced, which turned things upside down and left a heap of ruins, the extent of which is still not admitted.

When faith rested on “historical facts,” such as the “facts” of sense perceptible “miracles,” the “fact” of a sense perceptible physical resurrection of Jesus, and the “facts” of certain sayings of Jesus, especially of his self-designations as Son of God and Messiah, and when faith relied on the historical testimonies of eyewitnesses to these “historical facts,” then it had to be undermined to the extent that these “facts” became questionable.

It first became clear that inspiration by the Holy Spirit cannot mean that the texts are literally true. Persisting in this belief violates them and leads to absurdities. Thus, the way was clear to interpret the texts as a means of expression of their authors in one way or another.

Then it turned out that many texts of the New Testament could not have been written by apostles and eyewitnesses. Some did not come into being until the beginning of the second century, that is, long after the events around Jesus. Some had only been attributed to apostles; the real authors are unknown. Thus, another pillar of faith crumbled. It had been thought that the sayings of Jesus reproduced in the Gospels were heard and written down word for word by his disciples. It had been believed that the miracles and resurrection of Jesus as the greatest miracle had been seen physically and then recorded by eyewitnesses.

But even if it had been eyewitnesses and earwitnesses, were their perceptions reliable? Did they not just attribute certain qualities to Jesus that they *wanted* to see in him? Was his resurrection not just a compensatory illusion after their messianic hopes were dashed? So were the statements and acts of Jesus reproduced in the Gospels authentic? Also his statements about himself? Some even went so far as to question whether Jesus had existed at all. It was impossible to prove from the sparse indications of contemporary historians or from the evangelical texts. Was he perhaps just a myth or a construction of people who craved so much for a savior that they assembled an artificial figure from the indications of the prophets, traditional mythical elements, and their own fantasy?

The reliability of the disciples and disciples of disciples of Jesus had to be doubted. But even if they were reliable, do “miracles” a person performs prove that he is a son of God? Can Beelzebub not perform miracles as well? And do statements by Jesus about himself that he was the Son of God prove that he really was? That someone calls himself Son of God and ultimate authority is not yet proof of the truth. And if it cannot be proven that Jesus is the ultimate authority, then the truth of his statements about the kingdom of God and the way there also cannot be proven, even if their wording could be ascertained ever so clearly.

All of these activities of science undermined the authority of the dogmatic belief system built on the salvation-historical interpretation of the Bible. What remained to many was perplexity, abandonment of the Bible, or a reaction of “now more than ever”: Some believed the dogmas nevertheless, against all objections of the critical mind.

But those who realize that the struggle between faith and knowledge could only flare up under the erroneous presuppositions of the salvation-historical interpretation of the Bible will turn away in relief from this fruitless confrontation and can gain a new, spiritual relationship with the Bible. To them, the Gospels turn out to be depictions of a

spiritual path even if they are composed of so many layers and elements. They do not care whether their authors were eyewitnesses or earwitnesses to the events around Jesus. Important to them is only that they were connected with the spiritual impulse embodied in Jesus and wrote from their own existential experience. They see that the miracles, parables, and sayings of Jesus are illustrations of experiences on the spiritual path.

Historicity of Biblical Events

Many events depicted in the Bible were likely historical or were based on historical events. But to the authors, all historical events are important only insofar as they are expressions of soul-spiritual facts. The external historical events surrounding the people of Israel in the Old Testament and Jesus and his disciples in the New Testament are an expression and side effect of the fact that the people of Israel are preparing a spiritual path while Jesus and his disciples are walking this path.

The same soul-spiritual facts can be precipitated again and again, at all times, that is, they become history and can repeatedly become history. They are timeless although the historical garments in which they are clothed change in the historical process and the soul-spiritual facts can shine through more or less clearly and deeply. Since the precipitation of soul-spiritual facts in the history of the people of Israel and Jesus was particularly perfect, it can be regarded as exemplary for all similar precipitations at other times and serve as an image for them.

IV. A New Attitude to the Bible

The Bible is spread all over the world today, translated into countless languages. But does it also have the prestige and the effect that correspond to its spiritual quality? It has lost a lot of credibility over the centuries, and many are no longer able to take an unbiased view of it.

It has lost credibility because the faithful, dogmatic interpretations have caused enormous damage. The Inquisition, the disregard of foreign religions and cultures by dogmatic Christianity, and the mutual support of state and church have rendered a disservice to the credibility of Christianity. The loss of credibility of Christianity has resulted in a loss of credibility of the Bible – and vice versa.

Furthermore, for centuries, Westerners were obliged to accept incomprehensible dogmas as true, were denied the ability to have independent spiritual experiences, and thus were also deprived of encountering testimonies of spiritual experiences. This has created a barrier for many. They believe that they should not and may not approach the Bible independently. Many have become materialists and atheists in this way even though there are spiritual potentialities in them. No one told them and could make them believe that religion and the Bible are of a spiritual origin.

Others turned to Eastern religions where they hoped to be able to have their own spiritual experiences and so satisfy their spiritual needs. If these people were to recognize the blockages induced in them by culture and education, they too could find a more direct spiritual path in the Bible that is more appropriate for Westerners.

Those who succeed in setting aside the usual interpretations of the Bible will gradually discover that the Bible tells of conditions that are inherent in them. It talks about their true self, about the path that leads to the unfolding of this self, and about the obstacles that stand in the way of this unfolding. They will be able to find in it a paradigm for their own development and conduct, indeed also for the development and

shaping of their society, and for the development of humanity in general.

In a newly gained spiritual independence and freedom, they will then recognize that the scriptures of all religions are based on spiritual experiences, similar to their own, and express them only with different symbolism. They will be able to distinguish which aspects of spiritual experiences are emphasized by the respective scriptures, yes, that these successively reveal ever deeper insights into the spiritual dimensions, depending on the stage of human development, and describe ever more incisive experiences on the spiritual path. In Christianity, after the spiritual identity has unfolded and is connected with the spiritual world, this spiritual path goes from a total transformation of the realm of human thinking, feeling, and willing to the transformation even of the material body: from the gift of the spirit and the transfiguration (enlightenment) of Jesus up to the demise of the instinct of self-preservation (symbolized by the crucifixion) and the resurrection of a new, spiritual body.

The Bible is international, for with the Christ impulse everything national is relativized. With him, the true self of the human being, which is rooted in the spiritual world, has re-entered human evolution. And since all people have the same root in the spiritual world, they are in principle bound together by their true identity across all national boundaries. Therefore, the Bible, which expresses this connection, is a book for all of humanity just as the Tao Te Ching and the Bhagavad Gita, which also refer to the spiritual root common to all human beings, are books for all of humanity.

Resurrection

The resurrection is the Bible's greatest miracle. After his death on the cross, Jesus is taken down from the cross, lies in the grave for three days, and rises from the dead on the third day. In these events, spiritual happenings are expressed: The special manner of death on the cross, which may well have been historical, shows that Jesus' earthly ego and earthly instinct of self-preservation had "died" completely. The deposition from the Cross symbolizes the final dissolution of all attachments to the world of matter. Staying in the grave means regenerating the true self. The resurrection shows, on the one hand, the becoming conscious of the true, spiritual self, which had been as if dead under the cover of earthly desires, impulses, and illusions, and on the other hand, the true self becoming active with the help of a spiritual body. The latter consists of thoughts, feelings, aspirations, and organs nourished by the spiritual world. This spiritual body can perceive and act in the spiritual world. The true self and the spiritual body are immortal as is the spiritual world and are only perceptible to spiritual eyes. Therefore, after his resurrection, Jesus appears only to his disciples, who have already developed spiritual eyes, not just to any human being, Pharisee, or scribe.

However, this resurrection, particularly as the becoming conscious of the true self, can take place while the physical body is still alive. The death of the physical body is not a prerequisite. In any case, resurrection is not the revival of the physical body so that you could photograph it. But it is also not only a process of consciousness but at the same time, the construction of a new, immortal body, a new "flesh," and thus, the overcoming of death.

The resurrection and overcoming of death by Jesus is not an event by which the believer automatically participates in the resurrection on the last day. It only creates the possibility for others to do likewise on the spiritual path. If this is not done, it remains without consequences. Jesus wanted people to be his followers (see Mark 8:34, Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23).

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About the Author

Konrad Dietzfelbinger, PhD, with degrees in sociology and German studies, was born in 1940, worked as a reader and publisher from 1980 to 1990 and has since been working independently as a writer, publisher, and translator in Munich. His main interest is Christian spirituality and mysticism. He published writings by Lessing, Schelling, Goethe, and Eckartshausen and wrote among others the books *Kafka's Secret*, *Schopenhauer's Legacy*, *Nietzsche's Illumination*, *Illumination by Salvation – Gnosis*, as well as four volumes with the Nag Hammadi texts, which he reformulated and commentated. His books on the four Gospels have also been published: *The Spiritual Path of Christianity – The Gospel of Mark as a Model*, *The Birth of the True Self in the Human Being – The Message of Jesus for Our Time in the Gospel of Luke*, *Jesus – the Perfect Spiritual Human Being – Mystery Wisdom in the Gospel of John*, and *Become Perfect – The Purpose of the Human Being in the Gospel of Matthew*. More recently, the trilogy *The Fall and Resurrection of Christianity*, *The God in the Human Being*, and *Apocalypse Today* was published. Of these books, *The Birth of the True Self in the Human Being* and *Apocalypse Today* have been translated into English and published.

Endnotes

1 See Origen, *De principiis* [*On First Principles*]. Translated by G. W. Butterworth. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973.

2 See Rabbi Simeon in Zohar III:152a.

3 See Friedrich Weinreb, *Selbstvertrauen, Aggression und Depression. Geschichten des Alten Testaments als Dramen der Seele* [*Self-Confidence, Aggression, and Depression. Stories from the Old Testament as Dramas of the Soul*]. Munich and Zurich: Piper, 1995. Pages 22ff.

4 See note 3.

5 See Konrad Dietzfelbinger, *Der spirituelle Weg des Christentums. Das Markusevangelium als Modell* [*The Spiritual Path of Christianity. The Gospel of Mark as Model*]. Munich: Diederichs, 1998.

6 A key concept by Rupert Sheldrake in his and Matthew Fox's book *Natural grace: dialogues on creation, darkness, and the soul in spirituality and science*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.

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11 For details, see G. Mussies, "Logion und Erzählung" ["Logion and Story"] in *Die hermetische Gnosis im Lauf der Jahrhunderte* [*The Hermetic Gnosis through the Centuries*]. Haarlem: Rozekruis Pers, 2000. Especially page 233.

12 See the complete one-volume English edition edited by James Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, San Francisco: HarperOne, 1977. For a complete collection in German with commentaries by Konrad Dietzfelbinger, see *Nag-Hammadi-Texte in 4 Bänden*. Andechs: Dingfelder Verlag, 1988–1994 and Königsdorf: Königsdorfer Verlag, 2004–2010.

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14 See the articles “Bibelwissenschaften I–II” [“Biblical Sciences I–II”] in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* [*Theological Encyclopedia*], Volume VI. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1980.

