

## Article

# The “Christology” of Bely the Anthroposophist: Andrei Bely, Rudolf Steiner, and the Apostle Paul

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**Abstract:** The article focuses on R. Steiner’s perception of the Gospels and the impact of that view on Bely’s works. The latter had always valued Steiner’s lectures on Christ and the Fifth Gospel, the “Anthroposophic” (relating to the philosophy of human genesis, existence, and outcome) Gospel, the knowledge of which had been received in a visionary way. In addition, Bely was an esoteric follower of Steiner and often quoted from Apostle Paul’s 2 Corinthians, “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men”. The citation occurs in Bely’s philosophical works (*The History of the Formation of the Self-Conscious Soul*, “Crisis of Consciousness”), autobiographic prose (*Reminiscences of Steiner*), the essay “Why I Became a Symbolist . . .”, and letters (to Ivanov-Razumnik and Fedor Gladkov). Bely’s own anthroposophic and esoteric ideas relating to the gospel sayings are also examined. The aim of the research is to show through the example of one quotation the specifics of Bely the Anthroposophist’s perception of Christian texts in general. This provides a methodological meaning for understanding other Biblical quotations and images in the works of Bely because anthroposophical Christology is also the key to their deciphering.



**Citation:** Spivak, Monika. 2021. The “Christology” of Bely the Anthroposophist: Andrei Bely, Rudolf Steiner, and the Apostle Paul.

*Religions* 12: 519. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070519>

Academic Editor: Dennis Ioffe

Received: 4 June 2021

Accepted: 6 July 2021

Published: 10 July 2021

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**Keywords:** Andrei Bely; Rudolf Steiner; Apostle Paul; gospels; anthroposophy; *The History of the Formation of the Self-Conscious Soul*; Crisis of Consciousness

Ye are our epistle written in our hearts,  
known and read of all men: Forasmuch as  
ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle  
of Christ ministered by us, written not with  
ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not  
in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of  
the heart. And such trust have we through  
Christ to God-ward. (2 Cor. 3: 2–4)

One of the eccentric peculiarities of the unique culture of the literature at the end of the turn of the 19th–20th centuries is well expressed by the term “the Occult Renaissance”, suggested by English historian James Webb (see the “Classical Monography”, [Webb 1971](#)). The scientific–technological revolution, the social program of the radical social transformation, the crisis of positivism, the success of ethnography, and so on, created in the second half of the 19th century the impression of a global change in the worldview paradigm. In these conditions the demand for spiritualism and similar “psychic phenomena” traditionally classified as superstitions was created, and mystically minded intellectuals were at that time trying to explain it with the aid of the classical sciences combined with occult knowledge. In addition to the usual Freemasonry, theosophy, the teaching of George Gurdjieff, and so forth also flourished. Examples of the famous West European writers involved in the Occult Renaissance include Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Gustav Meyrink, René Daumal, William Butler Yeats, and Christian Morgenstern ([Hanegraaff 2013](#)).

In Russia, the Occult Renaissance (Bogomolov 1999; Szilard 2002) coincided with the Religious Renaissance (Zernov 1963), appearing in the heyday of religious and philosophical thought (V. Solovyov, P. Florensky, V. Sventsitsky, V. Ern, S. Frank, N. Berdyaev, S. Bulgakov, and others), in the activity of religious and philosophical societies in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and in the interest expressed towards symbolist writers in the religious foundations of life (D. Merezhkovsky, Z. Gippius, V. Ivanov, and others).

Andrei Bely (whose real name was Boris Nikolayevich Bugaev; 1880–1934), the poet, prosaic, linguist, thinker, symbolist theorist, and mystic, was in that sense a bright voice of this epoch.

The religious exaltation peculiar to him since childhood appeared not owing to his family tradition and education, but, quite the opposite, contrary to them. The future writer's father, the famous mathematician Professor Nikolai Vasilyevich Bugaev "was a determined denier of the church, dogmas, traditions and he hated 'mysticism'. However he didn't oppose rites, i.e., he received a priest with a cross out of social politeness". Nevertheless he actively promoted "the basic principles of science", "the slogans of Darwinism", and others. "All his aunts and uncles from the side of his father were either outright atheists or indifferent; the brothers and sisters from the side of his mother expressed the same unconcern . . . ". His mother, Alexandra Dmitrievna Bugaeva was also indifferent to the questions of religion, and his "only traditionally believing grandmother was constantly mocked by his father and mother". Bely remembered " . . . tradition was mocked in our home; < . . . > I was mechanically taught two or three prayers and they didn't demand any religious signs . . . " (Bely 1994, pp. 423–24).

However, it was typical of Bely to perceive with great enthusiasm the images of the Old and New Testaments coming from the depths of his soul, as he thought. At the age of seven or eight, he devises "games of New Testament" hiding it from his parents, he lives through "the Descent of the Holy Spirit on two or three tiles of his parquet floor" in his parents flat (Bely 1994, p. 423). Having entered the scientific faculty of Moscow University under the influence of his father, he was obsessed with the idea of the "private" apocalypse (happening in one country or even in one city—Moscow) and in his first book, the *Second Dramatic Symphony* (1902), he describes how the "private" resurrection from the dead was happening at the cemetery of Novodevichy Convent (Lavrov 1978; Lavrov 1995).

His great interest in Christianity was combined with his interest in other religions and mysticism. From 1896 he was "getting interested in the problems of Hypnosis, Spiritualism and Occultism; he is under the huge impact of reading *Quotes from the Upanishads, The Tao* by Lao Tzu" (Bely 2016, p. 41). He read with great interest the books by Elena Blavatskaya and theosophic literature (see *Touching to Theosophy* in Bely 2016, pp. 751–54 and *On Theosophy in Russia*, Carlson 1993). He must solve a dilemma—how to join the Christian esoterics with oriental religions and mysticism. He was helped in solving this dilemma by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), an Austrian philosopher and visionary, and the author of the anthroposophy that began to spread all over Europe and was popular in Russia in 1910s. Bely regarded Steiner's teaching as a revelation: it was Steiner who introduced the Christian element in theosophy. This allowed Bely to remain a true Steinarian and Anthroposophist (Spivak 2006) and to consider himself at the same time a true Christian (although from the point of view of the Orthodox Church this was certainly rather dubious).

The aim of this article is to show the acceptance by Bely the Anthroposophist of the Christian texts. Reading them in the occult key with regard to Steiner's statements and relying on his own esoteric experience, the writer radically rethinks them. The research is based on the example of one quotation from the Epistle of Apostle Paul which was many times quoted by Bely. This has a methodological meaning for the understanding of other Biblical quotations and images in the works of Bely because anthroposophic Christology is the key to their deciphering.

Andrei Bely met Rudolf Steiner in May 1912 in Cologne, where rather unexpectedly even for himself, he had come with A.A. Turgeneva from Brussels. He had been driven there by vague intuitions and mystical omens. In Cologne, Steiner welcomed his Moscow

guests and invited them to his lecture “Christ and the XX century” (March 8th) (Bely 2014, pp. 737–88).<sup>1</sup>

Soon Bely became a regular participant at Steiner’s lectures and he began practicing esotericism under Steiner’s guidance. Many of his friends who had remained in Russia were less than enthusiastic that Bely had readily accepted the anthroposophical discipleship. “All Christians suspect Steiner to be a follower of Luciferianism and to have a biased interpretation of Christ”<sup>2</sup> (Bely 2006, p. 199)—thus did Bely explain the reasons for the negative and unfair (in his view) attitudes of his previously likeminded acquaintances to his new idol, and he argued with them. Among the arguments in defense of his idol, the main one, according to Bely, was that Steiner, who at the time was the leader of the Theosophic Society in Germany, was more than just a regular theosophist, but instead a true Christian (Bely 2006, p. 199). What followed was that accepting anthroposophy was not an abandonment of the former spiritual path of Bely the Symbolist, but rather its rightful and logical continuation.

On May 7th (20) 1912 he wrote to E. K. Medtner (Bely and Metner 2017, vol. 2, p. 302; here and further highlighted by Bely):

“< . . . > I was, I am and I will be one who professes the name of Christ and truly experiences *His Forthcoming*. < . . . > And that is why I now going to Steiner: Christ and Russia!”<sup>3</sup>.

Bely spoke enthusiastically about his impression shortly after he had heard that first lecture of Steiner, “while the trail is still hot”. The very title of the lecture seemed to have already played a decisive role in the choice of Steiner as teacher. Bely proclaimed to N.P. Kiselev on May 7th (20) 1912:

“I must declare that I listened to the lecture of Steiner ‘*Christ and the Twentieth Century*’. It was as if this lecture was read specifically for me. All my doubts of his understanding of Christ were *dispelled* by this lecture. His understanding does not impinge upon the *Creed*, nor does it hamper the Orthodox teaching *revealed in reason*, rather it extends it, and speaks about what has not yet been revealed in history < . . . >”. (Bely and Metner 2017, vol. 2, p. 303)<sup>4</sup>

He wrote about this to his mother in May 1912:

“We lived for 3 days in Cologne and we heard three lectures. We had a half an hour talk with the Doctor. < . . . > You simply cannot imagine what kind of man he is: you can see his aura (the light around him) with your own eyes. He was giving a lecture about the coming of Christ being close at hand. I have never heard such a thunderous, powerful speech in my life. It was as if his face was being torn apart, and from his face there shone another face, etc. We were absolutely amazed < . . . >”. (Bely 2013, p. 153)<sup>5</sup>

In his letter to A.A. Blok from May 1st (14) 1912 he covered the themes touched upon at the lecture in greater detail (Bely and Blok 2001, pp. 459–60), but still concluded his narrative by giving a portrait of the lecturer as preacher.

“Toward the middle of the lecture his voice strengthens and he seems to be cutting himself off the crowd with his palms drawing some radiant line between the crowd and himself. After drawing each line he seems to loom larger, then leaps at the crowd—with his palms: and Asya and they hear these slaps in the face again. Beams of light fill the hall, and among these beams I see his transparent face shouting terribly enormous things. < . . . > He finishes by shouting at fourfold volume: ‘*Those who have understood what is the superhistorical Christ cannot help knowing that the Jesus of history was real. And He is coming*’. That is how his lecture on ‘Christ and the XX Century’ concludes. When he finished I was so shocked I couldn’t help shouting from amazement: ‘*What is this?!*’”. (Bely and Blok 2001, p. 460)<sup>6</sup>

Bely would refer to his impressions from this lecture in later life. In his work, *Notes of an Eccentric*, Bely wrote that “in Cologne, at the lecture announced on billboards as ‘Christ and Our Century’ he had heard the inner ‘Voice’ that had subsequently directed him in his life” (Bely 1997, p. 302). In his later reminiscences Bely emphasized that his first impression of Steiner the lecturer and Steiner the teacher had been the most faithful one:

“< . . . > the first moment of our meeting < . . . > remained in me to the last: “Steiner speaks in hearts at the very moment when all words have been exhausted”” (Bely 2000, p. 260)<sup>7</sup>

Andrei Bely joined the anthroposophical movement at the very time when the themes of the New Testament and Christ in the life of a man and humanity (“The Christ Impulse”) dominated Steiner’s lectures. Steiner’s “Christology” from the middle of the 1910s can be regarded as the basis of Bely’s autobiographical works, as well as of his works of creative writing and nonfiction. Bely developed these ideas of Steiner most fully in *The History of the Formation of the Self-Conscious Soul* (“История становления самосознющей души”; 1926–1931). This two-volume treatise, only recently published (Bely 2020, vols. 1–2), is Bely’s most fundamental philosophical, historiosophical and anthroposophical work<sup>8</sup> (Odessky 2011; Spivak 2011; Stahl 2011).

In it the writer proceeds from the fact that “Christianity is the moment of changing the ideas about man, God, the universe, the spirit, the flesh of history”. “The Christ Impulse”, as Bely demonstrated, changed the very course of humanity’s history, the result of its influence is the coiling of the straight line of history into a helix (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 184).

The theme in the first volume of *The History of the Formation of the Self-Conscious Soul* is the process of the birth of Christian Gnosis. Bely analyzes in detail flashes of Christian intuitions in antiquity, parses the teachings of gnostic sects, then passes on to the Gospels, regarding them originally as “historical documents”. In the chapter devoted to this question, the writer refers to the opinions of the Church historians on the questions of textology and dating of the Gospels: the authorship and the time of writing, the sources of the Biblical texts, their most ancient layers, and later insertions. He literally stuffs the chapter with the names of authoritative scholars and a retelling of their sensational concepts. Bely, however, does not do that to align with any one of these viewpoints. His aim is just the opposite: to stigmatize the criticism of the Gospels as being flagrantly inadequate to the essence of the subject. According to Bely’s scathing characterization, to write like the luminary scholars “they must be either absolute cranks as far as a living perception is concerned < . . . > or respectable grave-diggers without eyes, or ears, or bel-esprits, their wit derived from logical abstractions, or half maniacs, no matter how convincing their arguments sound < . . . >” (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 127):

“The formal exegetes of the Gospels such as German scholars, or those claiming that Christ never existed . . . do not see the details that a more mature eye, developed by constant exercise can see. They do not see the style that is unique in the Gospels, no matter which parts we might divide them into; they do not hear the sound that is also unique and which the Apostle recommends that we listen to: ‘Discern the spirits’<sup>9</sup>. Those who consider that Christianity appeared a few centuries earlier or later do not have the talent of telling the *times* which the Apostle refers to: ‘one must have the ear, the eye, the spirit, the rhythm of the time’<sup>10</sup>—this is the Leitmotif running through the early Christian records < . . . >” (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 125)<sup>11</sup>

Bely opposes those who interpret the Gospel into parts not on the basis of the facts or scholarly doctrines, but on arguments of a different sort. According to his view, to perceive the Gospels correctly one needs to “appeal to the style, the eye, the ear, the time, the colors of the images that had never been encountered either before, or after (not in poetry, nor in *narrative poems* of the Gnostics, nor in systems of thought)” (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 126). The Gospels, broken apart into quotations, die, in the sight of the “learned men”, but in the sight of those who have mastered “the art of *hearing* and *seeing*”—they “like the dying

mustard seed, begin to yield fruit". As Bely categorically states, "it has been proven item by item that they [the Gospels] do not exist on paper, they are being restored < . . . > in us and they become the writings in our *hearts*, rather than in *letters*".

According to Bely, the Gospels are a living tradition of not just words, but of gestures, rhythm, intonation: "from mouth to mouth, from ear to ear, from the sparkle in the eye to the sparkle in the eye" (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 134).

True Christianity, according to Andrei Bely, is by no means "what the grave-diggers consider Christianity (dogma, cult, custom, ritual, etc.)", but something else:

"< . . . > Christianity in Christianity is what penetrates the images of Christianity given in the Gospels; and if the Gospels are not Gospels, i.e., the Gospels of Gospels: *'the epistle in the hearts'*, that Paul refers to: and it is the style, the spirit, the rhythm that the Gospels are imbued with < . . . >". (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 128)<sup>12</sup>

Bely's long-winded elaborations lead to an inescapable conclusion: "the Gospels appeared like an "epistle written in our hearts" (Paul), but the canonical Gospels are just reflections of those living Gospels" (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 1280).

It appears that Bely, on the one hand, refers to the well-known, even popular quotation from the Second Epistle of Paul to Corinthians:

"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men: For as much as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward < . . . >". (2 Cor. 3: 2–4)

On the other hand, Bely associates the "epistle written in the hearts" that Paul mentions with a source not included in the Biblical canon, and nonexistent in the material world, not "existing in writing": that is the "living Gospels", "the Gospel of Gospels", "an inner Gospel connected with the four written Gospels" that sprang from "the depth of the personal experience of the Pentecost" (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 164).

"Such is the amazing, in my personal view, explanation of the event of the Descent of the Holy Spirit provided by Rudolph Steiner as the key to the tonality for the theme of the Gospels. There is one key to them: the *Gospel* from the Holy Ghost as the *Fifth* of the four Gospels; the key to the fifth Gospel is the experience of the life in Christ by those who have developed in themselves this life as witness of the experience that the life of the 'I' in Christ is the inner veracity". (Bely 2020, pp. 178–79)<sup>13</sup>

Steiner began speaking about the Fifth Gospel in the course of the lectures he gave in Christiania (Oslo) on October 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th, 1913<sup>14</sup> (Steiner GA 148 2009<sup>15</sup>). Bely emphasized that "he was one of very few people present at the *revelation*" who were honored "to see the doctor at the moment when he first discovered the crown of all his words about Jesus Christ" (Bely 2000, p. 507). From the first lecture, Bely perceived Steiner's performance as a special symbolic "gesture" as a "step" to "establishing another connection with us (our 'New Testament' with him)" (Bely 2000, p. 515).

In these lectures in Christiania, Steiner claimed that the Fifth Gospel, or the Anthroposophical Gospel, is as ancient as the other four Gospels, but it does not exist in the written form, rather it can only be revealed to the eyes of a clairvoyant. It was exactly like a visionary's story that the writer perceived the whole course of lectures. Bely remembered Steiner as "pale, excited, agitated, as a person who just that previous instant had seen a Vision" (Bely 2000, c. 508) and "for the first time giving an account of what had been seen" (Bely 2000, p. 510): "< . . . > he arranged the facts of the course < . . . > as they had been seen in the Astral world: the facts were placed in the order opposite to the natural perception" (Bely 2000, p. 510).

The starting point of the narration for the lecturer in the astral world in the so-called "Akasha Chronicle" was the moment when the Apostles awoke from their sleep. According to Steiner that sleep lasted much longer than described in the canonical Gospels: it started

when Christ was praying over the chalice and it ended when the Holy Ghost descended on the fiftieth day—Pentecost (Steiner GA 148 2009). However, this was not a dream in the usual sense. It did not, as Steiner described it, “prevent the Apostles from performing their daily routine activities, going out or coming back . . . So those who lived with them did not seem to notice the state of mind they were in” (Steiner GA 148 2009).

Nevertheless the consciousness of the Apostles was clouded and they lived as sleep-walkers, not perceiving adequately anything that passed before their eyes. It was as if they had slept through everything that happened at Golgotha and thereafter: the death on the cross, the laying in the tomb, the resurrection, the meetings with the resurrected Christ, the ascension . . . They saw all these events in a dreamlike manner. “But the time came when the Apostles had the sensation that they had awoken after a long sleep. The Pentecost commemorates that awakening. < . . . > They were awoken by the primeval force of love that fills and warms the universe, as if that primeval force had sunk into the soul of every one of them”, and “little by little, like dreams, rising from the depth of our subconsciousness, of our soul, the memories of days they had lived rose in their consciousness, in the souls of the Apostles. < . . . > They lived through the entire time again, day by day”. However “now they recognized everything they had seen before in a normal way”. The Apostles could remember and appreciate the events that they had witnessed only because on the Day of the Descent of the Holy Spirit they were “impregnated by universal love” (Steiner GA 148 2009), or the Christ Impulse, that descended onto them, piercing and enlightening their hearts.

In the *Reminiscences of Steiner* Bely noted the main points of Steiner’s course:

“Lecture One: we are in the Impulse; that is why we observe the history of the impulse in reverse: from ourselves to the Apostles, i.e., seeing . . . beyond Jesus Christ and the hearts of the Apostles: the heart is the Round Table at which all the 12 Apostles are sitting with Christ among them < . . . >.

Lecture Two—the foundation of such an opportunity: the descent of the Holy Spirit, the source of the Impulse; 12 Apostles in the Holy Spirit and the 13th Apostle—Paul in Damascus (and now each of us is a ‘Saul’, who can become Paul); the connection of the ‘12th’ with ‘13th’ is the connection of ‘12’ in the Impulse with each of us. < . . . > That is the source of the 4 Gospels: earthly memories through the prism of one who has slept through and later had revealed to—in the regions where the 13th, the villain-persecutor, from Damascus, already sees the same light of the event; nowadays everyone can be a ‘rememberer’, a participant in Golgotha, like a thief-persecutor; to whom it is said: ‘Today shalt thou be with me in paradise!’. < . . . >

The Biography of Jesus—these are the final lectures summoning us to hear the Christ Impulse in ourselves. < . . . > It is to the *Beginning*, prior to the baptism, before history, before Christianity, that this course leads us; but we and the XXth century are the ‘end’ < . . . >

It is we who are revealed in the imminent Second Coming of Christ—that is the very impact of the course!”. (Bely 2000, p. 511)<sup>16</sup>

For Bely, the most important thesis for understanding Gospel textology was that the Fifth Gospel was “the reality of the witness of the Apostles taken, not at the moment of writing, but at the moment of awareness informed with the Descent of the Holy Spirit,” (Bely 2000, p. 510). In *The History of the Formation of the Self-Conscious Soul* it is specified that the Gospels would appear absolutely contradictory if one perceived them as external evidential testimony, and their value cannot be understood without “a profound spiritual experience”, without that “gnostic experience that Paul was teaching about; the Gospels are revealed in it, and not only in the Gospels of the four evangelists read rationally” (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 164).

Bely juxtaposes Paul, “the Apostle of self-awareness” (Mischke 2011) and the ideologist of the “epistle in our hearts”, to the Apostle Peter who symbolizes the past (the

traditional church) and the Apostle John who symbolizes the future. Paul's testimony of Christ proves to be the most important and meaningful for the modern world ("Paul teaches us the approach to the Gospels"—Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 163), because unlike the other Apostles, and like a person of the XXth century, "he was not acquainted with Christ personally", but he knew "Christ's light that had flashed on him; he then opened Christ within his 'self'; and recognized Him as already leading humanity < . . . >" (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 163). Bely writes about this in "Crisis of Consciousness"<sup>17</sup>: "Paul did not see Christ, but he knew: he had seen the coming in his heart, humanity had become free < . . . >" (Bely 1996, p. 31). He explores this more extensively in *The History of the Formation of the Self-Conscious Soul*:

"Let us emphasize that we rely mostly on the Apostle Paul's experience for our knowledge about Christ; this was an internal experience: Christ came to Paul from the depth of his heart < . . . >; Paul understood very well that Jesus Christ is the light of the world, the bread of life, the key unlocking the door of the heart, the very door of your exit or the way, the resurrection of life, the truth and the true vine; from the wise light cast into his heart open like a door, he came to an understanding of the personality of Christ < . . . >". (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 177)<sup>18</sup>

The factor of "heart" in the description of Paul's mission is constantly emphasized by Bely with repeated references to his Epistles: "Paul's heart is enlarged like the sun: 'our heart is enlarged' (2 Cor. 6:11)" (Bely 1996, p. 69). Or: "The Church of Paul is the connection through the heart; or—the correspondence of hearts: 'Ye are our epistle written in our hearts' < . . . >" (Bely 1996, p. 34).

The well-known quotation acquires new meaning in Bely's interpretation. Just as "the other Apostles were chosen in a human way", i.e., they came to the Church directly through Jesus, "but Paul came through the Spirit", so that "Paul was the chosen one" (Bely 1996, p. 40). Steiner emphasized several times that "Apostle Paul had passed through the Hebrew prophetic school of his time" (Steiner GA 148 2009). The Apostle Paul received the "initiation given to him by grace": "For he came to Him not by proper study through the ancient mysteries, but through grace on the way to Damascus when the Risen Christ appeared, so I call that an initiation given through grace < . . . >. He recognized the Risen Christ. And since then he has proclaimed Him . . ." (Steiner GA 142 2009).

Bely goes further, claiming that the reading from the heart of the Gospels by Paul is explained by the fact that he is "esoteric" or, in fact, an "Anthroposophist".

"Paul here is someone esoteric; < . . . > the key to the Wisdom 'of wisdoms' of this world, from *anthropism* (paganism) and *sophism* (Judaic law) selected by Paul; he is a true *Anthroposophist* < . . . >". (Bely 1996, p. 59)<sup>19</sup>

In this connection, it is precisely as an esoteric experience that we should understand the words from *The History of the Formation of the Self-Conscious Soul* noted above about "Paul's experience < . . . > being an "internal experience" and that one cannot understand the Gospels without a profound spiritual experience < . . . >—the very gnostic experience that Paul had taught . . ." (Bely 2020, vol. 1, p. 164). The Commandments of Paul, the esoteric, reverberates in Bely's recital absolutely anthroposophically, including some occult work on different parts of the human body and primarily on the heart:

"< . . . > the Apostle advises: 'be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind!'<sup>20</sup>. The renewing of one's mind is the path of meditation, of yoga of perception; thought, as it is growing stronger, is introduced into the body via the heart < . . . >". (Bely 1996, p. 63)<sup>21</sup>

This provides the esoteric and anthroposophical context to the semantics of the "heart" in Bely's beloved quotation from the Second Letter to Corinthians:

"Paul naturally shows us that we are a fiery 'correspondence of the heart' with Christ: 'You are . . . Christ's epistle, written . . . by the Spirit of the Living God

... on the tables of thine hearts'. 'The Tables' of thine heart < ... >'. (Bely 1996, p. 68)<sup>22</sup>

In *Reminiscences of Steiner* Bely described his teacher as a disciple of the "Esoteric Apostle" and his successor: "Doctor Steiner loved and understood the "Unjust" ardent Paul burning in his heart with all his heart". "He spoke like Paul; he was silent like John" (Bely 2000, pp. 272, 497). Undoubtedly Steiner is likened in the memoirs to other evangelical personages (Lagutina 2015), but the continuity concerning Paul goes by way of the "heart". Bely emphasizes "heartedness" as his most important feature: "I would rather point to the heartedness in the Doctor, that could never be answered equally < ... > (Bely 2000, p. 296). We can hardly speak about the heartedness as an exclusively psychological feature. Steiner, according to Bely, was one who "reads in hearts" (Bely 2000, p. 388), "listens to hearts" (Bely 2000, p. 343), "speaks with all the strength of his thought and fire of his heart: from *heart to heart*" (Bely 2000, p. 338).

The words "from heart to heart" sounded extremely clearly in Steiner's lectures about Christ:

"< ... > at other moments he spoke to *hearts*; the expression: 'from heart to heart'—he would say this with such a clear, loving smile when he spoke about the 'infant' Jesus < ... >; he was himself a heart; or to be more precise: his mind was in the place of his heart; and the *mindful heart* blossomed; the 'heart', not the 'mind of the heart'". (Bely 2000, p. 496; also: Bely 2000, p. 343)<sup>23</sup>

In a number of descriptions, Bely "shines light" on the complex initiation methods that Steiner practiced himself and which he taught his esoteric students (Kazachkov 2015; Stahl 2015):

"Meditation over the Name is the way < ... >. It summoned one to something greater: to the ability to praise the Name by inner breathing extinguishing the outer verbal sound: toward the birth of the *word* in the heart". (Bely 2020, p. 497)<sup>24</sup>

Sometimes it is stated directly that the source of Steiner's knowledge of the "heart" about Christ was "spiritual-scientific research", i.e., clairvoyance:

"He was an inspiration: not merely imagination! The words about *Christ* are inspirations: they are thoughts of the heart < ... >. The Doctor kept silent about Christ with his head; but he spoke with his *sun-heart*; the words of his courses about Christ are expirations: not of oxygen, but merely of carbon dioxide, hinting at the process of the secret of life. < ... > *he* stood not at *these* doors—*he* was standing by other doors < ... >,—consciousness grew dim. There was another door—the *heart!* He was summoning us to *that* door ... < ... >". (Bely 2000, p. 496)<sup>25</sup>

In his course of lectures in 1923, "Contemporary Spiritual Life and Education", Steiner said that the "new initiation", already available to the contemporary individual familiar with anthroposophy, "will introduce with a clear light into the human heart that which leads to the awakening of the spirit in the heart and soul of a person, to his religious perception" (Steiner GA 307 2018). This process will require from anthroposophists the creation of a new communicative medium—a "hearted" one.

The language for communication between people needs an airy, sensual medium. If people can understand each other through some deeper elements of our soul, through the thoughts that carry with them feelings and the warmth of the heart, they find a means of communication besides language. But for this international means of understanding of each other we need a heart (Steiner GA 307 2018).

"In this case we speak, as it were, about the language of those dedicated that will function < ... > in the pure element of light passing from soul to soul, from heart to heart" (Steiner GA 307 2018).

Symbolically, Bely placed these very words of Steiner about the language "from heart to heart", "to which Anthroposophy aspires", as the epigraph to the chapter "Rudolph



Steiner in the Theme of Christ" in his *Reminiscences of Steiner* (Bely 2000, p. 493). This, obviously, also explains the meaning of the "language of the heart" in which Steiner spoke about Christ and the words of Apostle Paul:

"There was another door—the heart! He summoned us to that door . . . < . . . >. Outside the language of the heart ('ye are an epistle written in our hearts'—says the Apostle to us) there is silence". (Bely 2000, p. 496)<sup>26</sup>

The anthroposophical esoteric praxis described in relation to Steiner and Paul, the "Apostle of self-awareness", was also well known to Bely who had been accepted in 1913 into the "'Esoterische Stunde' (meetings for the disciples of Steiner using the methods of spiritual science for themselves < . . . >" (Bely 2016, p. 137).

In his letter to P.A. Florensky from Dornach of 17th February 1914, Bely compares the "school of experience" in Orthodoxy to the "experience" of anthroposophy, pointing to the fact that "both schools, while accepting the heart as the spiritual Sun and life center, differ in the way of 'the immersion of the mind into the heart'" (Bely 2004, p. 479). Naturally, Bely proves the advantage of the anthroposophical way as the method "< . . . > not the training of the mind juxtaposed to the heart, but rather a free immersion of the mind realizing itself in the heart < . . . >; this is the rule of the school that drew close to me < . . . >" (Bely 2004, p. 479), as well as the aim-setting guidelines:

"The Heart is the Sun; < . . . > inside the heart you perceive the gleaming of the sun; it becomes Christ's heart. But Christ came not only for the Earth, < . . . > but for the entire Cosmos: the Church has failed to stress the cosmological meaning of Christ < . . . >. We must < . . . > draw a starry line through the sun into our earthly heart". (Bely 2004, p. 481)<sup>27</sup>

In the *Material for a Biography* it is mentioned that after Steiner's course of lectures in Christiania about the Fifth Gospel, Bely "< . . . > became acquainted with the "Christ Impulse" (Bely 2016, p. 140), in the *Reminiscences of Steiner*"—that "in Christiania the moment of the Descent of the Holy Spirit was demonstrated" (Bely 2000, p. 514). At that time, as the writer admits, he was convinced that "the Holy Spirit would soon descend" upon him as it had on the Apostles and that "God's voice" would emanate from him as well (Bely 2016, p. 141). Bely perceived Steiner's words about the mystical role of the Pentecost and the "Christ Impulse" piercing the Apostles if not as offering guidelines to action, then as a guideline to experience the world, as the basis for comparison of himself with Paul: "< . . . > in the 'Fifth Gospel' I'm 'an Apostle' among 'the Apostles' < . . . >" (Bely 2000, p. 514).

Bely recounts his work on the meditation about Christ assigned by Steiner (Kazachkov 2015) and he dropped the "Word" into "the heart", following the advice of experienced occultists: "< . . . > one must be able to pronounce the words known to you not with the lips, nor the tongue, nor the larynx; then the words sink into the heart; and acquire enormous power!" (Bely 2016, p. 144).

These experiments resulted in visions in which the events occurring were perceived as the way of initiation<sup>28</sup>:

"< . . . > somebody (it seems like the Doctor) < . . . > slit the sign of the cross on my forehead < . . . >, and so a drop of either blood from my forehead, or a drop of balm, or my own 'I' dripped into the Chalice, into the Holy Grail; but this chalice was no longer a chalice, but my own 'I' and the drop was my consciousness having plunged into my heart: < . . . > and when the drop touched the Chalice, Christ united with me: and streams of indescribable love and the Christ Impulse surged from me, in me, through me; and at that moment I awoke < . . . >. It became clear to me: no, this was not a dream, it was a real initiation". (Bely 2016, p. 145)<sup>29</sup>

Soon, however, the way of initiation was interrupted. Not only did the regular meditations cease providing the desired result, but, in fact, they led to the opposite, a serious illness: "Cardiac neurosis is the name of that bizarre illness" (Bely 1997, p. 363).

Bely had to find another meaning and way in anthroposophy, other than via the occult. However, the mystical experience that he had acquired proved to be enough to remember the esoteric and anthroposophical meaning of the Apostle's words about the "epistle of our hearts", the best of which was derived from works such as the "Crisis of Consciousness", *The History of the Formation of a Self-Conscious Soul*, and the *Reminiscences of Steiner*.

It should be noted that the quotation from the Second Letter to the Corinthians, that was so dear to his heart, was used by Andrei Bely in another context as an epistolary formula. For example, in the letter to Ivanov-Razumnik from 18th March 1926:

"< . . . > Our correspondence is always in my heart, i.e., I always write to you in the heart, in the words of the Apostle Paul, 'You are an epistle written in our hearts'. (I might be misquoting, because I'm writing this off the top of my head); I walk constantly with an epistle to You in my heart; < . . . > there is an enormous need to transform *this correspondence of the heart* into a conversation from the heart < . . . >". (Bely and Razumnik 1998, p. 346)<sup>30</sup>

In the letter to Fyodor Gladkov from 17 June 1933:

< . . . > я был радостно взволнован Вашим письмом; но эта радость, радость отклика (со-вестия: «сердце сердцу весть подает», «вы—письмо, написанное в сердцах», ап<остол> Павел) тут же стала переходить в горечь < . . . >.

"< . . . > I was joyfully excited by Your letter; but this joy, the joy of response (co-news 'one heart sending news to another heart', 'You are an epistle written in our hearts', Ап<ostle> Paul)<sup>31</sup> has begun to turn to bitterness < . . . >". (Bely 1988, p. 765)

In both cases the words of the Apostle Paul, it seems, do not contain any esoteric "measure". They are in the realm of psychology: they express a warm feeling towards a correspondent who is far removed from the anthroposophical discourse and thus incapable of recognizing it. Quite another case is the use of that quotation in an autobiographical essay "Why I Became a Symbolist . . ." (1928). The essay was addressed to anthroposophists and contained scathing criticism of the entire institution of the Anthroposophical Society. Understanding the polemical ardor of his own work and obviously foreseeing a possible negative reaction from "the people of his own circles", Bely concluded it with a defiant attack against those who would not want to accept the "epistle of the heart":

"The time of writing has passed; now comes the time of reading of what is written in the heart; for nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest. But whoever does not have the *writings* in the heart and who refuses to understand the words of the Apostle ('*Ye are the epistle written in our hearts*'), will not understand me.

I know that very well". (Bely 1994, p. 493)<sup>32</sup>

It is possible, however, that here Bely was attempting to follow the dictates of Steiner who, in his course "Modern Spiritual Life and Education", established the necessity of a new language "coming from soul to soul, from heart to heart". "Contemporary civilization needs such a means of communication", Steiner proposed, emphasizing that "it will be used not only for the higher order, but for everyday life" (Steiner GA 307). Bely used the image of a "epistle of our hearts" in this way. If in the "Crisis of Consciousness", *The History of the Formation of the Self-Conscious Soul*, and the *Reminiscences of Steiner* the Apostle Paul's words serve to clarify questions of the "higher order", in contrast, the letters to his friends and the essay "Why I Became a Symbolist . . ." express feelings and thoughts of "everyday life"<sup>33</sup>.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declare no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- 1 The reference is to Steiner's lecture "Vorverkündigung und Heroldtum des Christus-Impulses der Christus-Geist und Seine Hüllen: Eine Pfingstbotschaft".
- 2 The letter of Bely to N.P. Kiselev, E.K. Medtner, A.S. Petrovsky, M.I. Sizov dated May 7(20), 1912 from Brussels ([Bely and Metner 2017](#), vol. 2, p. 303).
- 3 "<... > я был, емь и буду исповедующим имя Христово и реально чувствующим *Его Приближение*. <... > И потому я теперь иду к Штейнеру: Христос и Россия!".
- 4 "Я должен заявить, что слышал лекцию Штейнера 'Христос и XX век'. Эта лекция была точно нарочно для меня прочитана: все мои сомнения в его понимании Христа *рассеяны* этой лекцией. Его понимание не посягает на *символ веры*, ни на православное *раскрытое в разуме* учение, а углубляет, говорит о еще не раскрытом в истории <... >".
- 5 "В Кельне мы прожили 3 дня, слышали три лекции. Имели получасовой разговор с Доктором. <... > Ты просто не можешь себе представить, что это за человек: его аура (свет вокруг) прямо видна глазами. Он читал лекцию близости пришествия Христа. Такой громовой, сильной речи я не слышал никогда в жизни. У него словно разрывается лицо, из лица светит лицо и т.д. Мы были совсем п отрясены <... >".
- 6 "К середине лекции голос крепнет, ладонями себя то отрезает от толпы, проводя меж собой и толпой какую-то световую линию, и после каждого проведения линии точно вырастает, то кидается на толпу—ладонями: и опять те же с Асей слышим удары по лицу. Какие-то световые клубы наполняют залу, и вот из световых клубов вижу только сквозное лицо, которое кричит нам вещи громадные—до ужаса. <... > Кончает четырехкратным криком: 'Кто понял, что такое *надисторический Христос*, тот не может не знать, что *Иисус истории—подлинный*. И Он—*близится*'. На этом кончается лекция 'Христос и XX век'. Когда он кончил, я невольно вскрикнул от потрясения: 'Что же это?!'".
- 7 "<... > первый миг встречи <... > остался последним во мне: 'Штейнер говорит в сердцах тогда именно, когда все уж слова исчерпались'".
- 8 See the article of M. Odessky, M. Spivak, H. Stahl, where the history of developing the treatise and its main ideas is considered in detail, "It must be: 'History of the Becoming of a Self-Conscious Soul' by Andrey Bely" opening the first volume ([Bely 2020](#), vol. 1, pp. 5–84).
- 9 Cf.: 1Cor. 12: 10; 1John. 4: 1–3.
- 10 Cf.: Rev. 2:29; Mk. 4: 9.
- 11 "Растаскиватели Евангелий на составные части, как немецкие ученые, или утверждающие, что Христа и не было, <... > —не видят того, что видит более развитой, ибо упражнявшийся в зрении глаз: они не видят стиля, который единственен в Евангелиях, на какие бы части мы ни разложили их; не слышат звука, который тоже единственен, и которому советует внимать апостол: 'Духов различайте'. Передвигающие время появления христианства на несколько столетий совершенно не имеют дара различать *времен*, на который тоже ссылается апостол; 'имейте ухо, глаз, дух, ритм времени'—вот лейтмотив, проходящий сквозь ранние памятники христианства <... >".
- 12 "<... > христианство в христианстве—это то, что пронизало образы христианства, данные в Евангелиях; и если Евангелия—не Евангелия, то есть Евангелие Евангелий: '*сердечное письмо*', о котором говорит Павел; и оно—стиль, дух, ритм, в котором пересекаемы Евангелия <... >".
- 13 "Таково изумительное, по моему личному мнению, объяснение события сошествия Святого Духа, данное Рудольфом Штейнером как ключ к тональности темы Евангелий; ключ к ним—один: *Евангелие* от Святого Духа, как *Пятое* четырех их; ключ же к пятому Евангелию—опыт жизни во Христе тех, которые развили в себе эту жизнь, как свидетельство опыта о том, что жизнь 'Я' во Христе—внутренняя достоверность".
- 14 See chapter "I have offered up my life according to the letter of 1913: a reply to the 'Fifth Gospel' of Rudolph Steiner" in the book: ([Spivak 2006](#), pp. 58–68).
- 15 GA—Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe, Bde. 1–354. Dornach, 1955—heute. At the site of the "Library of Spiritual Sciences" the German original text and the Russian translation are provided.
- 16 "Лекция первая: мы—в Импульсе; и поэтому: озирающие историю импульса в обратном порядке: от себя—до апостолов, т.е. видящие ... вслед за Христом Иисусом и сердца апостолов: сердце—Круглый Стол, за которым все 12 апостолов с Христом меж ними <... >.  
Лекция вторая—основа такой возможности: сошествие Св. Духа, источника Импульса; 12 апостолов в Святом Духе и 13-й апостол—Павел в Дамаске (а ведь каждый из нас теперь 'Савл', могущий стать Павлом); связь '12' с '13-м'—связь '12' в Импульсе с каждым из нас. <... > Вот—источник 4-х Евангелий: земные воспоминания сквозь призму проспанного, открытого потом,—в регионах, где и 13-й, разбойник-гонитель, из Дамаска, уже видит тот же свет события; в наши дни потенциально дан в каждом 'воспомятеть', участник Голгофы; это ему сказано: 'Нынче будешь со Мною!'. <... >

Биография Иисуса—последние лекции, призывающие расслышать импульс Христа в себе. <... > *К началу*, лежащему до крещения, до истории, до христианства, ведет конец курса; но ‘конец’—мы и XX век. <... >

Мы, показанные в неизбежном Пришествии—вот удар курса!”

17 The last part of Bely’s “Crisis of Consciousness” (1920) was published under the name “The Gospels as Drama” (Bely 1996).

18 “Подчеркнем: о Христе мы знаем более всего из опыта Павла; опыт был опыт внутренний: к Павлу Христос приходил из глубины его сердца <... >; Павел более всего понимал, что Христос Иисус—свет миру, хлеб жизни, ключ, отпирающий сердечную дверь, самая дверь, выход из нее или путь, воскресение жизни, истина и лоза; от умного света, брызнувшего в его открытое, как дверь, сердце, шел он к уразумению и личности Иисуса <... >”.

19 “Павел здесь—эзотерик; <... > ключ к Мудрости ‘мудростей’ мира сего, с *антропизма* (язычества) и *софизма* (закона иудейского) Павлом подобран; он—подлинный *антропософ* <... >”.

20 Rom. 12: 2.

21 “<... > апостол советует: ‘Преобразуйтесь обновлением ума’. Обновление ума есть путь медитации, йога познания; мысль, укрепляясь, вводится в тело сквозь сердце <... >”.

22 “Естественно показывает нам Павел, что мгногневая ‘сердечная переписка’ с Христом: ‘Вы... письмо Христово, написанное... Духом Бога Живаго... на скрижалях сердца’. ‘Скрижали’—сердечные <... >”.

23 “<... > обращался он в миги другие к *сердцам*; выражение: ‘от сердца к сердцу’—с какой ясной, любовной улыбкой он говорил это, когда говорил о ‘младенце’ Иисусе <... >; сам он был—сердце; вернее: ум его был в месте сердца; и *умное сердце*—цвело; ‘сердце’, а не ‘сердечный ум’”.

24 “Медитация над Именем—путь <... >. Взывал к большему: к умению славить Имя дыханием внутренним с погашением внешнего словесного звука: к рождению—*слова* в сердце”.

25 “Он был—инспирация: не имажинация только! И слова о *Христе*—инспирации: сердечные мысли <... >. Доктор молчал о Христе—головой; и говорил *солнцем-сердцем*; слова его курсов о Христе—выдохи: не кислород, а лишь угольная кислота, намекающая на процесс тайны жизни. <... > не при *этих* дверях стоял он—при других <... >,—сознание мутилось. Была иная дверь—*сердце*! Он звал к *этой* двери... <... >”.

26 “Была иная дверь—*сердце*! Он звал к *этой* двери... <... >. Вне *сердечного* языка (‘вы—*письмо* наше, написанное в *сердцах*’—говорит нам апостол)—молчание”.

27 “Сердце—Солнце; <... > внутри сердца познаешь блеск солнца; оно становится Христовым сердцем. Но *Христос* пришел не для земли только, <... > для всего Космоса: Церковь не указала на космический смысл Христа <... >. Надо <... > провести *звездность* сквозь *солнце* в земное наше сердце”.

28 Concerning Bely on the way of his initiation see: (Glukhova 2015; Obolenska 2009; Seryogina 2015; Spivak 2006).

29 “<... > кто-то (кажется, Доктор) <... > ножичком сделал крестообразный <... > разрез на моем лбу <... >, отчего не то капля крови со лба, не то капля еля, не то мое ‘я’ капнуло в чашу, в Грааль; но эта чаша была уже не чашей, а моим сердцем, а капля была моим сознанием, канувшим в сердце: <... > и когда капля коснулась Чаши, то Христос соединился со мной: и из меня, во мне, сквозь меня брызнули струи любви несказанной и Христова Импульса; тут я проснулся <... >. Мне стало ясно: нет, это не сон, а подлинное посвящение”.

30 “<... > переписка меж нами всегда, т.е. я всегда Вам пишу, всердце,—по выражению апостола Павла: ‘Вы—письмо, написанное в *сердцах*’. (Может, цитирую не так,—на «память»); я хожу всегда как бы с письмом всердце к Вам; <... > огромная есть потребность превратить *сердечную переписку* в *сердечный разговор* <... >”.

31 See the interpretation of this quotation from the letter to Gladkov in the context of Bely’s theory of the “word”: (Torshilov 2015).

32 “Пора написаний прошла; наступает пора прочтений уже в сердце написанного; нет ничего тайного, что не стало бы явным. Но кто не имеет *письмян* в сердце и откажется от понимания слов апостола (‘Вы—*письмо*, написанное в *сердцах*’), тот меня не поймет. Мне это хорошо ведомо”.

33 I thank Oksana Chebotareva and Tom Beyer for translating the article into English.

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