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VALENTIN TOMBERG: A PLATONIC SOUL

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A key to understanding Valentin Tomberg as a Platonist is given through his relationship with Elisabeth Vreede (1879-1943), one of Rudolf Steiner's closest co-workers.

Concerning Elisabeth Vreede, Rudolf Steiner indicated that she had incarnated earlier than planned and that she did this in order to meet Rudolf Steiner on Earth. He also saw her in connection with the Platonic stream.¹ It is well known that at Plato's Academy in Athens astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, and music were taught. Mathematics and astronomy have always been cultivated in the Platonic stream. Rudolf Steiner indicated this explicitly in connection with Elisabeth Vreede.

In his lectures on Karmic Relationships Rudolf Steiner outlined how the people gathered around him belonged more to the Aristotelian stream. In this respect Elisabeth Vreede was an exception. She had incarnated earlier than planned in order to meet Rudolf Steiner. Because she came early, she had a very limited circle of friends.² Those with whom she was karmically connected were not yet incarnated. However, upon meeting Valentin Tomberg she recognized him immediately as a significant figure from the Platonic stream and decided to actively support his deeply Christian anthroposophical impulse. She organized lectures for him and she was the person from whom it was possible to order Tomberg's *Biblical Meditations*.³ She formed the bridge between the two great spiritual streams of the twentieth century:

Rudolf Steiner	Aristotelian stream
Valentin Tomberg	Platonic stream

When Elisabeth Vreede was excluded from the Vorstand of the Anthroposophical Society, this meant the exclusion of the Platonic stream to which she belonged. It meant also the exclusion of the one whom she recognized as the leading figure of the Platonic stream, who – as she clearly saw and acknowledged in her Foreword to the first English edition of the *Studies of the Old Testament* – was capable of carrying on spiritual-scientific research along the lines of Rudolf Steiner. If she had remained in the Vorstand, Valentin Tomberg – as her protégé – would have been introduced to the members of the

¹ Rudolf Steiner, *Die Weihnachtstagung zur Begründung der Allgemeinen Anthroposophischen Gesellschaft 1923/1924* (GA 260, Rudolf Steiner Verlag: Dornach, 1994), p. 272: "Thus you will see how well founded it was that above the door of Plato's school stood: 'God geometrizes!' And one can penetrate into the essence of a Platonic teaching...only through mathematics...I will let this realm be taken on in future by Dr. Vreede as leader" [meaning, leader of the newly founded Mathematical-Astronomical Section of the School of Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland].

² M.P. van Deventer and Elisabeth Knottenbelt, *Elisabeth Vreede: Ein Lebensbild* (Natura Verlag: Arlesheim, 1976), p. 41.

³ Recently published in English translation in one volume (432 pages) under the title *Christ and Sophia: Anthroposophic Meditations on the Old Testament, New Testament, and Apocalypse* (Steiner Books: Gt. Barrington/Massachusetts, 2006), available also from the Sophia Foundation.

Anthroposophical Society as a spiritual researcher and Tomberg would have had the possibility of gaining widespread acceptance for the fulfillment of his mission, which was to teach concerning the coming of Christ in the etheric realm (as referred to in his seven lectures entitled *The Four Sacrifices of Christ and the Reappearance of Christ in the Etheric* published as an Appendix at the end of the recently published book *Christ and Sophia*).⁴ One cannot understand the destiny of the Anthroposophical Society in the twentieth century if one does not know about this and if one does not clearly see that forces were at work to bring about a split between the Aristotelian and Platonic streams represented by Rudolf Steiner and Valentin Tomberg. Elisabeth Vreede did all she could to work against this tragic divisive tendency. She devoted much time and energy to leading people together.

The following quotation from Elisabeth Vreede's biography shows how she was always firmly against anyone being excluded from the Anthroposophical Society. She knew and recognized that all should be able to find a place within the Society and should be allowed to express themselves. She carried the central concerns of the Anthroposophical Society in her heart and she was aware of preparing the way for others who would come later – representatives, like Valentin Tomberg and Willi Sucher,⁵ of the Platonic stream. Her concern was that the Platonists should also find their place within the Society:

The Being of Anthroposophy I have always felt to be a newly created spiritual Being – created with the help of Dr. Steiner – so to say the first hierarchical Being generated by human beings. This Being is very young and relatively undeveloped, like a child – a Being that has to develop further through our working together as a “community of spiritual knowledge” and under the guidance of its creator from the spiritual world. Precisely on this account I find it so painful when again and again such hostile attacks are launched against some active members with a view to excluding them from this work of co-creation of the Being of Anthroposophy.⁶

Elisabeth Vreede's words were not heeded. In fact, she herself became the victim of a hostile attack, which led to her being excluded from the Vorstand of the Anthroposophical Society in 1935.

Elisabeth Vreede's clear recognition of Valentin Tomberg, referred to above, is expressed in her words of introduction to his *Studies of the Old Testament*:

Readers will do well to apply to these Studies the methodic principle we also learned from Rudolf Steiner: that the truths of esotericism must sustain *each other*... The very fact that these Studies – as the author pointed out in his preface to the original (1933) edition – are founded on the Anthroposophy of Rudolf

⁴ Ibid., pp. 357-402).

⁵ Willi Sucher (1902-1985) was also a Platonic soul who was recognized by Elisabeth Vreede and encouraged to develop a new star wisdom (astrosophy) – see Willi Sucher, *Cosmic Christianity and the Changing Countenance of Cosmology* (Steiner Books: Gt. Barrington/Massachusetts, 1993), pp. 9-24 for a brief biography.

⁶ M.P. van Deventer and Elisabeth Knottenbelt, *Elisabeth Vreede: Ein Lebensbild* (Natura Verlag: Arlesheim, 1976), p. 10.

Steiner, will make it easier for the reader, from the basic truths already known to him [or her], to understand and weigh whatever in these pages reaches out beyond Dr Steiner's teaching...It should go without saying, and the author himself has made it clear, that such communications as are here contained do not absolve the reader from the responsibility of exercising his [or her] free judgment – submitting them to the test of independent thought and meditation and experience, even as Rudolf Steiner required us to do with his own teaching upon spiritual science.⁷

This is interesting, coming from Elisabeth Vreede, who was one of Rudolf Steiner's closest co-workers, that she considered Valentin Tomberg's work to build upon Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science and to “*reach out beyond Dr. Steiner's teaching*”. She referred to “*the many deeply spiritual and sublime reflections that are here contained*.”⁸

Through Elisabeth Vreede, Valentin Tomberg was invited to hold lectures at various anthroposophical gatherings. One such conference was the Summer School of the Anthroposophical Society in Great Britain held in Bangor, North Wales, in August 1938. There he held four lectures entitled, “*The Spiritual Hierarchies and their Working in the Twentieth Century*.”⁹ In her report of the conference, Dorothy Lenn wrote: “*We strove to follow Valentin Tomberg as he led us to esoteric heights, to ever loftier summits of the spiritual worlds...Mr Tomberg spoke of it [the location where the conference was held] as a place which enriched him inwardly, which breathed old remembrances, a place in which it was good to speak out great things. He spoke of the Druid mysteries, and how it was important that we should be there, continuing what had long been done on the hills of Penmaenmawr*.”¹⁰

Among the approximately two hundred people who attended the Bangor conference was the young Willi Sucher, who was a co-worker of Elisabeth Vreede in the Mathematical-Astronomical Section of the School for Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, and who was the pioneer of a new star wisdom, Astrosophy. On this occasion Elisabeth Vreede and Willi Sucher took the opportunity to climb the hill above Penmaenmawr (near Bangor) to visit the ancient Druid stone circle there, which had been visited by Rudolf Steiner in 1923. Years later Willi Sucher wrote, “*Thus we took farewell of one another, at least for the time being, in the proximity of witnesses of an age-old star wisdom, and with a deep feeling of responsibility for its future*.”¹¹

⁷ Valentin Tomberg, *Christ and Sophia: Anthroposophic Meditations on the Old Testament, New Testament, and Apocalypse* (Steiner Books: Gt. Barrington/Massachusetts, 2006), pp. xxxi-xxxii.

⁸ Ibid., p. xxxii.

⁹ Valentin Tomberg, “The Spiritual Hierarchies and their Working in the 20th Century,” *Shoreline*, vol. 5 (1992), pp. 36-51. Available in German translation in volume 1 of the biography by Liesel Heckmann, *Valentin Tomberg (1900-1944)*, (Novalis Verlag: Schaffhausen/Switzerland, 2001), pp. 546-562. As the journal *Shoreline* is no longer published, it is intended that the English original of these four lectures will be made available again in a future issue of *Starlight*.

¹⁰ “Valentin Tomberg: Some Facts, Some Questions,” *Shoreline*, vol. 2 (1989), p. 51.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 51.

These “*witnesses of an age-old star wisdom*”, the great Druid stone circle at Penmaenmawr, were referred to by Valentin Tomberg in his fourth lecture at the Bangor conference:

Druid culture was a high soul life. The twelve stones were the outer manifestation of the 12-petalled lotus [flower]. The heart perceived the mystery of the Sun. This was a heart esotericism, therefore not written down. Only the stones remain because the soul is dead. The resurrection of the soul is the rediscovery of the Sophia Being.¹²

In the same lecture, Valentin Tomberg gives some very important insights into the relationship between Sophia and the Archangel Michael and the second coming of Christ. We shall return below to the relationship between Sophia and Michael as a key to understanding the relationship between the Platonists and the Aristotelians, two spiritual groups in our time who have the task, in working together, to help prepare humanity in relation to the second coming of Christ – the Platonists who are oriented primarily to Sophia and the Aristotelians to Michael. Now, however, let us focus on the role of Michael and Sophia with respect to the second coming of Christ, which is a return in an etheric body – in contrast to his coming two thousand years ago in a physical body.

In preparation for this event [the second coming], Christ has to take shape again, but this time in an etheric, angelic form. He will take, or borrow, the form of an Angel who is NOW [1938] in a state of consciousness which it is important to understand. This Angel is a personality [elsewhere Valentin Tomberg refers to this Angel actually as an Archangel working on the level of an Angel and bearing the name “Archangel Jesus”] who can only give information when asked inwardly. This personality is unselfish to the degree of having no activity except for other people. If there were no questions at all in her surroundings, she would experience a kind of swooning of inner consciousness. This is the present state of this Angel, because she meets no active questioning from humanity. She is in a sort of death [condition], awaiting resurrection, which will take place in human consciousness... The resurrection of the soul is the rediscovery of the Sophia Being. Her relation to the heart power of Michael gives her back the imaginative power of which she was robbed by Lucifer and which gave rise to fantasy. In the realm of fantasy Sophia cannot speak. She can only communicate with those who by effort reach her sphere. However, her union with Michael brings her in touch again with humanity. The lowest point of [Sophia’s] contact [with humanity] is [through]the swooning of the angelic being. Sophia gives a kind of “motherly covering” to this being into whom will descend the Christ. Sophia bears the Angel closest to her heart, and in this Angel will Christ be born.¹³

To return to our initial theme – Valentin Tomberg: a Platonic soul – this is brought out in a wonderful way in Christopher Bamford’s Introduction to the book *Christ and Sophia*,

¹² Valentin Tomberg, “The Spiritual Hierarchies and their Working in the 20th Century,” *Shoreline*, vol. 5 (1992), p. 51.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

and I would like to close this article by quoting from this Introduction and then from Valentin Tomberg's first lecture (from the seven lectures on *Inner Development*) about the Platonists and the Aristotelians:

Aristotelians and Platonists should work together, but during the period when Tomberg was active in Anthroposophy, the mood was Aristotelian. As a Platonist, he was controversial almost by definition. Likewise, as a Platonist (and a Russian) he had an ineradicable affinity for Russian Orthodoxy, which again made him "different". It presented the problem of a "religious" temperament (again essentially Platonist) which, rather than turning toward nature and to visible history as the Aristotelians did, turned to Christ and the Christ Event as the heart of Anthroposophy, and hence to the heart and inner meaning of history, nature, and cosmos. On this basis... Tomberg sought to ground Anthroposophy in biblical revelation. Startling in its ambition though this might have been, it certainly was not orthogonal to Steiner's own intentions, because for Steiner, too, the Mystery of Golgotha was indisputably the "turning point of time"...

Something must still be added in conclusion. For Tomberg, as an anthroposophist, Sophia – as cosmic intelligence and ultimately, therefore, the source of our cognitions – is closely connected with the Archangel Michael. The Archangel Michael for Rudolf Steiner and for anthroposophists is at once the regent (or ruler) of our age, the Guardian of the Threshold who mediates cosmic intelligence to humanity, and the founder of a cosmic spiritual school, whose earthly reflection Anthroposophy seeks to be. In the first lecture ("The New Michael Community") in *Inner Development*, Tomberg shows the intimate relationship between Michael, Sophia, and Christ. He speaks of Platonists and Aristotelians coming together to form a new "spiritual knighthood" under the name *Michael-Sophia in nomine Christi* ("Michael [and] Sophia in the name of Christ").¹⁴

Rudolf Steiner speaks of two streams within the anthroposophic movement: the Platonists and the Aristotelians. The Platonists are those in whom the new clairvoyance will appear in the form of karmic seership. The Aristotelians will have a clairvoyance with regard to the secrets of nature... These two groups must work together; there is no other way for it to be. They will *have* to work together... The men and women of Sophia [Platonists], [human beings] of revelation, will walk the path together with the men and women of knowledge [Aristotelians oriented toward Michael]. The Platonists [Sophia] will stand guard with the Aristotelians [Michael] at the threshold of the spiritual world... This community was begun through Rudolf Steiner, through the founding of the anthroposophic movement, through the revelation of the mission of Michael, and through the misfortune that we later experienced. We are summoned by the voice of Rudolf Steiner; we are tested by the misfortune now coming to us [1938]. What we must awaken in the depths of our souls is *earnestness* in regard to the spiritual and outer worlds, and *fidelity* to the spirit, each one according to his or her position in life. We can conduct ourselves in every way, in speech and action,

¹⁴ Valentin Tomberg, *Christ and Sophia: Anthroposophic Meditations on the Old Testament, New Testament, and Apocalypse* (Steiner Books: Gt. Barrington/Massachusetts, 2006), pp. ix, xxxiii.

according to the demands of everyday life. But let us keep one province free from compromise; let us remain *true to the spirit*, independent of all teachings and teachers, of all organizations in the world. Let us remain faithful to the inner voice of truth and conscience! Then we are in the school that is preparing for the future Michael Community – the community that will bear the motto: *Michael-Sophia in nomine Christi* (“Michael [and] Sophia in the name of Christ”).¹⁵

¹⁵ Valentin Tomberg, *Inner Development* (Anthroposophic Press: Gt. Barrington, Massachusetts, 1992), pp. 31-32. Words in brackets [] added by RP.