

Before Birth and Beyond Death

The Transformation of the Human Being.

On the day that Karl Koenig registered as a medical student at the university in Vienna he wrote in his diary: "The sea of materialism will rush in upon me, but I shall stand fast. The world and the Universe are full of God and full of angels and wonders, full of goodness and anger and full of will".

Today nearly one hundred years later, this sea of materialism has rushed in like a tsunami, and it is pertinent that this volume is published now to make available what – like a prophetic spirit – Karl Koenig brought to the world, and which has the power to be and continue to be helpful and even life-preserving in these darkened times.

His deep questioning as a student and pointers from teachers who perceived this led him to a fascination with embryology, which interest continued throughout his life, and to Anthroposophy.

Therapeutic education and social therapy show that human need is the foundation of all forms of community building and that human suffering and experience are like the anvil upon which the tools necessary to build, sustain and ensoul these communities are hammered into shape and being.

Human suffering and death were not absent from the life of this man: the Christmas Story which inspired so many in the Camphill communities he founded had the dedication of March 11th 1947: March the 11th was the date of the Nazi invasion of Vienna in 1938, the date of the still birth of his wife Tilla's 5th born child in 1942, the date of the burning of the Grand Master of the Knights Templar in 1314. He wrote the Christmas Story after the death of some of the children in the care of Camphill, which made him ask himself the question of community building after death, if - when having laid aside the inadequate tools they had while on Earth - they may not form a spiritual community finding a common task for the future.

Both the gates into and from life became profound points of study and research as becomes evident from the lectures and articles here included in this little volume. His discovery of Rudolf Steiner's work gave him the longed-for courage, knowledge and forms of research to begin to understand and enter into what lies beyond these gates.

The book is divided into three parts as well as an introduction by Michael Bruhn and an Appendix.

The first part: 'About those who have died' consists of a series of lectures given by Dr. Koenig in Newton Dee in Scotland in March 1958, and is divided into three chapters: the first about these two gates, the second about bridges to those who have died and the third about the path beyond death.

The last of these was given on March 30th , Palm Sunday that year of 1958.

He begins with the difficulty we experience in trying to gain entrance to the realm of the dead: "We should take this to heart and remember it, for time and again we have to take these efforts against the odds that our present age continually sets up by endeavouring to cloud, to hide, to cut off the so-called dead from those who are living here on earth. This is why last time I brought some of the ideas of Rudolf Steiner as exercises of imagination with which we can train the one tool which is given to us here on earth - the power of thought - in order to reach up to the world of the dead."

He describes how we can use our imagination to change this thought-world from a desert into a beautiful flower-garden where the dead can come and be nourished (p.37).

He also points to the often two-foldness of Rudolf Steiner's themes that are intimately connected. "The two go together, this needs to be recognised"- this is in reference to the lecture in which Rudolf Steiner speaks about his nourishment of the dead from the living thought-world of those on the Earth, and the lectures on the Fifth Gospel (p.45)

Further on Dr. Koenig says: "This my dear friends, can be our Easter message this year: in spite of everything that happens, human beings do not perish but live on as the spiritual content of this earth. In spite of everything that we have to meet today, this conviction, this certainty, this determination, this absolute 'yes' to the future of human kind, this we should inscribe into our hearts in the name of Christ...Today dear friends, is not only Palm Sunday, but also the anniversary of Rudolf Steiner's death. It is the thirty-third year after he passed into the spirit realm and left his body which he wore during his life. It is due to him that human beings can meet in the way we have met tonight, and that one is able to hear such a message - even 33 years after his death..... Let us take this with us because by so doing those who have died will be with us. They will know that not only has Christ risen as the light within their midst, but also that humankind on earth is not lost (p.52-54)

Two poems follow: first a moving poem about Adalbert Stifter who committed suicide (p.57)

I remember a conversation with Rudi Lissau, who was with Dr. Koenig in Vienna just before the war “the suicide city”. In this conversation Rudi Lissau spoke of the difference between the Father and the Son in the way Rudolf Steiner spoke about suicide. In speaking about suicide, he spoke about the fact that one does this only ever once, because of the torment and suffering in consequence, and how – beyond murder – this is the greater sin, a sin against the Holy Spirit. Yet, when Rudolf Steiner was confronted with a suicide and a suffering mother, he was the most understanding, healing and helpful comforter.

Karl Koenig writes about Adalbert’s inner experiences in this latter vein (p.58):

‘You saw all those
Who stood by you,
Given to guide and aid,
Yet their help was hindrance
Their love obstruction
And their affinity the fetter
Which rendered hopeless
Your attempted refuge
From the dungeon of yourself’.

And at the end (p.63):

‘Oh, become once more a human
And come,
Descend to Earth again!
Find here
The Word and also Mercy
From the Christ Himself.

Oh, have once more the courage
For being human
And all that was so wrong
Will Good become.’

The next poem (p.64-69) is called Transformation and deals with the path between Death and Birth: ‘the human form falls to ash – Out of eagle-breath-wings To earth below.’ Then come the awe-inspiring journey and the shedding, and the angel who takes ‘all this’ and offers it to the higher beings who gift this transformed substance on the re-entry towards life on Earth: ‘arm

by arm and leg by leg' towards a new body, head to limbs and limbs to head, ashes to the salt of the Earth.

The book's next offering are essays on Birth and Death and starts with the way the child experiences death, covering fairy tales and the Fall and the two main experiences that stand at the two gates of birth and death: shame and fear: these primal experiences in Adam and Eve, and the relationship of these two to the blood and the nervous system.

Dr. Koenig has been able to give an extraordinary understanding of how these are connected both in our bodies, in illness, in our consciousness, in the way these are expressed and experienced after birth and before death, of the restless nature of the blood as the river of forgetfulness and the resting head and nervous system, of the quick turn-around of the cells in the blood and the long lasting cells in the nerves.

Both the profound meaning of the actual physical body and the imaginative description of the experiences in this article is worth the book many times over. Dr. Koenig speaks of the protection of the lens of the eye and the drum in the ear against our being overwhelmed by sense impressions and our own too strong reaction to these if we were not protected in this way.

As I was reading to review this book at the same time as studying Guenther Wachsmuth's book on the ethers, this reminded me of the way that Dr. Wachsmuth described the slowing of the combustion processes (and the heart as regulator) to protect the organism against being overwhelmed, through the change from warmth combustion to the cool flame, from oxygen to ozone, the working together of the warm and the cool poles to enable life through balance. (*The Etheric Formative Forces in Cosmos, Earth and Man*, pp 222/223.) This can also be experienced through the Warmth Meditation, which Rudolf Steiner gave to young doctors and therapists through Helene von Grunelius. Dr. Koenig ends this article thus (p.91):

'Shame is the repercussion of the moment when Adam and Eve discovered their nakedness. Fear is the repercussion of the other moment when they learned that death is the result of the awareness of nakedness. Through the Fall, the human soul was able gradually to be born in the nervous system.....It was through Christ that the redemption of the Fall was initiated. Only by accepting Him into the life of the human soul can shame and fear be overcome.'

In Chapter 5 (p.92-96) the moment of death within the yearly and daily rhythm is considered.

First writing about the weather and illness, mortality rates and the time of year as also the illnesses of diphtheria and scarlet fever he quotes extensively from specialists that published around the time of his writing.

In the appendix which follows, there are some notes in Dr. Koenig's handwriting (p.99), and an obituary of Wolfgang Beverley (p.100/1), showing clearly Dr. Koenig's attitude and feelings for the individual human being with his clear view of the battles but also the achievements of the human soul on his journey from birth to death and the gratitude for having known him.

Then in a letter to the wife of Ernst Frahm (p.103/4), Dr. Koenig writes:

'I am deeply convinced that diseases do not cause death, but that death - if it is so determined - will attract the disease that it needs in order to loosen the connection between the soul-spirit and the bodily form.'

One cannot help wondering that an understanding such as this could give the questions regarding the present time a different colouring.

There follows an excerpt from his diary (p.105), notes on his lecture on suicide given in 1963 (p.106) and notes for the last lecture series he gave in 1966.

(p.111) On the basis of these notes, one feels sorry not to have been able to hear him speak these lectures or to be able to read what he had to say about many of the subjects that are only just mentioned in the notes: thalidomide, disasters, old people, the insane, miscarriages etc. There is mention of the gate of birth as the Moon gate and the gate of death as the Sun gate.... And 'It is the karma of humankind that confronts us: the children are calling, the old ones are waiting. Christ spreads out his arms and waits for fulfillment.' Then further notes that make one wish that one had been there: the spirit germ and the earth germ; the Sun general - human, the Moon individual - human.

Egoism, Spirit germ and Down Syndrome. The four group souls....

After these tantalising notes, there follows a remarkable article by Richard Steel about Dr. Koenig's researches and artistic representations of Rudolf Steiner's Calendar of the Soul (p. 115):

'It has always struck me as significant that Karl Koenig began his intensive, life-long studies of the anthroposophical Calendar of the Soul in the year 1933, knowing or sensing - we don't really know which - that this symphony of 52 verses was the right inner work to counterbalance the forces of evil and death that were already closing in like a dark cloud over Central Europe.'

He points to his discovery of the 'cosmic reality of the architecture' and concentrates on the four crosses that bring together polar opposites across the circle of 52 verses, those that strongly bring out these two gates of Birth and Death and expresses the comfort that Karl Koenig receives from these when confronted by suicide. In his diary when preparing for lectures given in 1963

Karl Koenig writes: 'I begin during the morning to write down my thoughts about suicide in a more extensive manner. The four verses of the Calendar of the Soul are a great help with this, as they have to do with the battle between I and world. With this guideline I can work through the four main motifs that lead to suicide. That is a very helpful recognition that has come to me.'

As I said in the beginning of my review, it is evident in the life and work of this man, that his Soul was ever touched and inspired by the experiences and meetings with suffering and death, and the resulting serious and strong striving for the Spirit. The gates of birth and death, the figure of Judas that he mentions and suicide are part of this. (p.119)

While reviewing this volume, it was a rare privilege to see the recent outstanding Michael Hall Class 12 play, 'the Last Days in the Life of Judas Iscariot' which bring the two aspects of the Truth and the Law and the Mercy of Christ very strongly to the fore.

There are printed images to show the particular crosses related to the gates of birth and death (pp. 116, 117, and 119) and one which he drew of the four points: St. Johns and Christmas; Easter and Michaelmas, as they ray out into the circle of the year. (p.123)

Dr. Koenig noted the day after he spent the night in the room of Eberhard Schickler and given the address at the funeral after his suicide: 'The night was one of the most difficult I have ever experienced. I can feel the waves of his thoughts'. (p. 123)

And at the end of his life he writes: 'The curative educational attitude needs to express itself in all kinds of social work - in pastoral care, in the care for the elderly, in the rehabilitation of mentally ill and physically handicapped people, in the guidance of orphans and refugees, of suicidal and desperate individuals'. (p. 124)

In the last chapter before the final notes, entitled: *Soul death - or 'second death'* Richard Steel continues: 'Not only the metamorphosis of the cross found artistic expression through Karl Koenig. It was during his internment in 1940, when he was in a special way preparing the inner aspects of what was to become the Camphill movement, that he drew pictures for each verse.'

Richard then proceeds in masterly way to help us penetrate into these images beginning with this proviso: 'To complete this reflection on Koenig's studies of death within the Calendar of the Soul we should therefore take a look at the pictures of the individual verses in question.... Although we have no indications

as to the contents of the pictures by Karl Koenig himself, and without wanting to interpret art too strongly that would narrow down the work to mere intellectual symbolics, nevertheless, it is noteworthy how this picture shows the opposite of the natural death processes that are in verse 33 for November.... In August it is not the 'natural' death that we face, but a step towards the 'second death' or 'soul' death that is described in the Apocalypse of John.... Karl Koenig reminds us of a connection between these two verses of death and the words spoken in the Childrens' Service, as it is the being of Christ standing at these thresholds (pp. 125,126):
'That leads the living into death that it may live anew;
That leads what is dead into life that it may behold
The Spirit'.

With this very incomplete picture of the huge content that is contained in this slight volume of 134 pages, I hope to have inspired the wish of readers to read all of it for themselves.

The book is well researched with plentiful notes, a comprehensive bibliography and index.

Paulamaria Blaxland-de Lange June/July 2021