

# THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

## **1. COMING TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF MICHAEL**

(A personal picture)

When I first began my study of Anthroposophy, in my early twenties, it was with a study group of the Anthroposophical Society. This group was called the Michael Group, but (like Parsifal) it never occurred to me to ask why the group was called what it was, and who was Michael? and why a study group of the Anthroposophical Society would call itself the Michael Group?

A few years later the Waldorf school got under way and I had the good fortune to be a founding and pioneer teacher. But in this setting the name of Michael kept cropping up, and especially with the celebration of the festivals. I was more and more confronted with the gaps in my own religious upbringing. I had no real knowledge or experience of Michaelmas or St. John's.

So what was this about Michael as the Autumn Archangel? All the associations of Michael's sword with meteoric iron, the red in the blood, courage, strength of will, purposefulness, etc.?

And further, Michael as the "Countenance of Christ"? and the "Spirit of the Age", (but Time Spirits were Archai, and Michael was an Archangel!)

Even later came the Michael School, and its centrality in the stream of esoteric Christianity, and the central place of that in the Anthroposophical Society.

As the Being of Michael seemed to be ever present, I decided to make a conscious effort to inform myself about this Being. I discovered that the field of study was vast and even though I have been at it, on and off, for over twenty years, my understanding is barely beginning. So take this contribution as a "work in progress".

## **2. WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT MICHAEL (From an exoteric point of view)**

1) It is a very common first name for Protestants, Catholics and Jews. Mike, Michael, Michel, Michele, Misha, Mika, Mikhail, etc. There are numerous churches and schools named after this being. (In Hahndorf near Mt Barker, the Lutheran church is called St. Michael's, and the Anglican retreat on Mount Lofty was called St. Michael's Retreat. There are many hospitals, landmarks and even cities named after him, like Michael Mount, St. Michel).

2) It is clear that this is not an earthly being. Unlike Gabriel (in the Annunciation), Raphael (as in the Book of Tobit), Michael has not descended to earth.

### 3) BIBLE SOURCES

#### (a) Book of Daniel.

10:13 "Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me."

12:1 "Michael, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people."

(b) Epistle of Jude.(NT) V 9. "Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee."

(c) Revelation, 5:2. "And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice,

Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?"

Revelation 12:7, "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, (8) And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven."

4) These few biblical references are scarcely enough to account for the widespread representation of Michael in art and literature, in mythology, and especially in religious poetry. eg. *The Dream Song of Olaf Asteson*, a very old Scandinavian poem which was translated into English at the end of last century.

*From the South there rode a host;  
In holy calm they came.  
At their head rode Michael  
Who stands at Christ's right hand.*

Later "*First rode Michael "Lord of Souls"*", occurs four times. He is described as carrying a horn and scales weighing the souls of all.

His name appears in many Celtic prayers and verses, such as *Michael the Victorious*. and *Michael Militant* (From "The Sun Dances: Prayers and Blessings from the Gaelic" collected and translated by Alexander Carmichael. Christian Community Press, London, 1966, p.105-107.

*Thou Michael the victorious,  
I make my circuit under thy shield,  
Thou Michael of the white steed,  
And of the bright brilliant blades,  
Conqueror of the dragon,  
Be thou at my back, Thou ranger of the heavens,  
Thou warrior of the King of all,  
Michael the victorious,  
My pride and my guide,  
O Michael the victorious,  
The glory of mine eye.*

5) Irish Christianity, from the 5th to the 12th centuries had a monastic foundation which was devoted to the archangel Michael.

6) Michael remains the patron saint of a number of knightly orders. (such as the Order of St. Michael and St. George). In Michael's manifestation as St. George, who also fights the dragon, he is the patron saint of England. It was St. Michael who inspired Joan of Arc.

### **3. QUALITIES AND TASKS ATTRIBUTED TO MICHAEL**

- Always some important task is given him, usually in support of Christ.
- He holds the scales and judges souls.
- He holds evil in balance in order to give human beings themselves the opportunity to conquer.
- Above all he  *fights*.
- With his sword he instills courage.
- He is always ready to help human beings, but help must be asked for.

- He emphasizes initiative and will.
- Unlike other spiritual beings, he seems to be in ceaseless activity.
- He is not easy to comprehend because he does not appear to be near to us.
- He cannot be pictured, like the Christ, in the form of a man, nor even as god-man.
- He remains inexorably a super-human, a spiritual being.

## **5. STEINER'S RESEARCH AND WRITINGS ON MICHAEL**

Almost all that Steiner tells us about Michael is new, as virtually none of this information is available from other sources. Basically,

- Steiner writes that Michael is especially concerned with the spiritual tasks of human beings, and is therefore especially close to those who are engaged in a conscious spiritual task, such as the many endeavors striving to unite the forces streaming from the spiritual world with practical life on earth (and for this reason he is especially close to anthroposophists and their endeavors).
- Steiner describes Michael as the "countenance of Christ", therefore must be distinguished from the Christ being and seen as His servant and herald.
- Steiner describes Michael as "the fiery thought-king of the universe". (more of this later).
- It is worth noting that although Steiner knew and "lived with the question of the being of Michael for decades", it was only towards the last 15 months of his life that he felt that he had "earned the right" to speak openly about him. You can read about this inner battle (against the opponents of Michael) in *Karmic Relationships*, Vol. 8, lecture 1 (1924). It was after the founding of the Anthroposophical Society (Christmas Foundation Meeting of the Anthroposophical Society) Dec/Jan 1923/24 that he began to lecture widely about Michael and his task.
- The groups of letters to members, published as *The Michael Mystery*, are concerned with Michael, Michael's activities in the spiritual world, and in relation to human beings, and what Michael wishes to convey to us about our tasks as human beings.
- In respect of our tasks, Christ is not such a teacher, but Michael, as the "countenance of Christ", (ie. Christ's being) and through whom Christ is active, has the responsibility of explaining to human beings their cosmic task.

## **6. ABOUT THE RANK OF MICHAEL**

Some specific information about the rank of Michael includes the following:

- Michael holds the rank of archangel.
- Archangels are also called by Steiner, Spirits of Fire.
- Archangels are two ranks above the human.
- They went through their human stage (having waking ego consciousness) on the "Old Sun" stage of the Earth's evolution - as described by Steiner.
- The various Folk Spirits (or Folk Souls) also hold the rank of archangel, and each is responsible for a particular people at a given time. Michael was the Folk Spirit of the Hebrew people for the period that he acted as the "countenance of

Jehovah".

- INSERT: Jahve was that one of the seven Elohim who received the mission of guiding the Hebrews. Jahve was too exalted a being to be either perceived or approached directly. According to Steiner, Jahve's "countenance", whom the Hebrew initiates perceived, was always Michael. The mission of the Hebrew people was to make it possible for the Christ to incarnate into a human body, and for this purpose special preparations had to be made through 42 generations so that appropriate bodily sheaths could be provided. In the course of fulfilling this mission the Hebrews would also help to make it possible for the human ego to incarnate within individual human beings, a necessary element in the developing of human freedom. Michael participated in this development.
- If the archangels perform their mission successfully, they rise in the ranks of the hierarchies, first becoming an Archai or Spirit of Personality, with the responsibility for the progress of all humankind for a certain period of time.
- However, Michael and six other named archangels do not seem to have risen in the hierarchies at all, but must have renounced such promotion for the sake of their continuing mission - which is to act as spiritual leaders of a relatively short period - usually about 300 to 350 years.
- These seven archangels are called by Steiner "Planetary spirits" - each being the ruling spirit of the beings of one of the planets. (including in this sense, the Moon). Since these seven archangels follow each other always in the same sequence, a particular planetary influence is always predominant on earth, immediately following another.
- Michael is the "Planetary Spirit" of the Sun, and therefore is (like this "planet") in a certain position of dominance over the other spirits, always succeeding Gabriel (the Spirit of the Moon), and succeeded by Oraphiel, the Spirit of Saturn.
- The rule of the seven archangels requires a total of 2,160 years which is 1/12th of the Cosmic Platonic Year of 25, 920years. (This is the time it takes the sun to precess the entire zodiac and return to its starting position).
- The period during which each planetary spirit rules varies. According to Steiner, Gabriel had a particularly long period of ruler-ship in the early modern period, holding office from 1510AD to 1879AD (369 years) until Michael took over from him. The current period is ruled by Michael and will continue until about 2200AD.
- For your interest, the other names and dates of the archangel rulerships are:
 

MICHAEL	Sun	Sunday	550BC-200BC
ORIPHIEL	Saturn	Saturday	200BC-150AD
ANAEL	Venus	Friday	150AD-500AD
ZACHARIEL	Jupiter	Thursday	500AD-850AD
RAPHAEL	Mercury	Wednesday	850AD-1190AD
SAMAEL	Mars	Tuesday	1190AD-1510AD
GABRIEL	Moon	Monday	1510AD-1879AD
MICHAEL	Sun	Sunday	1879AD

Reference from *Karmic Relationships* Vol 3, lect. 4 (Dornach 8th Aug. 1924). Also in *True and False Paths in Spiritual Investigation*, (Torquay 11th Aug. 1924), lect. 7.

- Although it seems that the rest of the ruling archangels return to their ranks (so to

speak) after their ruler-ship, in *The Michael Impulse and the Mystery of Golgotha*, in *The Festivals and Their Meaning (Michaelmas)*, Steiner says that Michael's position as ruling archangel is to be taken by an angel who has risen to the rank of archangel because the individuality whom he had accompanied up to then (mainly Gautama Buddha) no longer returns to Earth to incarnate, thus freeing the angel for other tasks. Thus it would seem that Michael will no longer carry out his former tasks but will rise to higher ones.

- It remains certain that Michael could so easily have been "promoted" before, since he always carries out his tasks with utmost diligence, self sacrifice and courage. But it is in keeping with his own sense of his mission, in relation to the freedom of the human being, that he would renounce any promotion that would have taken him further from the human sphere.
- Michael has from earliest times been responsible for human evolution. Steiner seems to continually emphasize that Michael is the one spiritual being, aside from the Christ, who is the most concerned with humankind, believing in its mission and always helping humans on their way, consistent with their freedom. Christ and Michael may do their utmost to help humans, but even they cannot compel them to be free, and at the same time fulfill the task with which they have been entrusted.
- Not all the archangels (the other planetary spirits) have believed humans capable of carrying out the task of transforming the Earth from the planet of Wisdom to the planet of Love. (See Steiner, *Karmic Relationships*, Vol. 3, Chap. 11, Dornach Aug. 1924).

## **7 THE NEW AGE OF MICHAEL**

During the last Gabrielic ruler ship many changes, with respect to human consciousness, have occurred. One of the greatest has been a turning away from the spirit and a turning towards the earthly. Materialistic thinking, especially in the dominance of empiricism in science, greater self consciousness (egotism) with its concomitant dangers of increased anti-social behaviour, and a rejection, (beyond sentimentalisms or dogmatic fundamentalism), of the spiritual in the human being and in the world (including the spiritual world which surrounds us).

In 1879 Michael took over the role of ruling Time Archangel and he

- seeks to co-ordinate the forces of the cosmos (the spiritual worlds) for the benefit of human beings.
- His impulse now is to lead humankind once more to "read in the book of nature", to recognize the supersensible in the immediate sense world, (the spiritual in the material) and thus rescue thinking from a mechanistic rule.
- He works for all those who seek a path to spiritual science.
- He seeks to establish his temple in human thinking so that understanding of Christ as Sun Being may arise again.
- He is the spirit of strength who enables us to find living ideas, living concepts and living feelings in place of dead theories.
- He strengthens the development of individuality which finds itself in the unity of a cosmopolitan consciousness.
- Michael's impulse of cosmopolitanism leads to the overcoming of nationalism, racism and ethnic conflict.
- He also brings the power through which human karma (disordered by the influences of opposing beings) may be brought back into order.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the previous Michael age, people on earth sought to serve Christ as the great Sun Spirit, through reverent observation of the sunrise, sunset and the Sun at Midnight. Today, Christ has become the Spirit of the Earth, and human beings must find again their true nature as sun beings in order to serve Him for the redemption of the earth. Michael as the ruling Archangel and Time Spirit is a guide in that process.

Prepared by Alduino Mazzone for a lecture April 1997.