

## Karl Boegner

### Tomberg, Anthroposophy, and Catholicism

#### *An Issue on Valentin Tomberg*

*Info 3, May, 1988, Page 3, Translated by James Morgante and Richard Wentzier*

Of Baltic origin, Tomberg encountered anthroposophy (but never Rudolf Steiner personally) in 1917 and soon developed into an important and beloved speaker in the Anthroposophical Society.

All of that was among the things lost because the conflicts that befell the Society after Steiner's death in 1925 and Tomberg sought entry into the Catholic Church. He has from then until this very moment been one of the most controversial figures on the scene. His conversion is attacked with little understanding and the mere mention of his works still provokes consternation. They are as little known as he is.

We offer in this edition a biographical sketch of Tomberg by Wolfgang Garvelmann (page 5), as well as an interview by Eberhard Mannigel with Tomberg's no less controversial publisher, Martin Kriele, who is a Catholic *and* an anthroposophist (page 11). Karl Boegner, the leader of the Berlin Study Center of the Anthroposophical Society and someone quite familiar with Tomberg, responds on page 16 to the publication of his various writings in a friendly but critical way.

How incompatible are anthroposophy and Catholicism? First, Rudolf Steiner often and vehemently raged against the church and its grasps at power. It likewise was a thorn in his side through a few determined opponents. Steiner's conception of Christ clashed in many respects with that prevailing in the Catholic Church (why anthroposophy must still be Christian institution unfortunately can't be pursued in this issue). Beyond that, dogmatism and papal infallibility don't jibe with anthroposophy's principle of freedom, which stresses individuals and their spiritual development. Here, knowledge, not belief, and personal initiative and responsibility, not obedience, are the fulcrum, even if only as a goal that is in many cases still unattained.

In the fourth paragraph of the bylaws of the Anthroposophical Society (1923), Rudolf Steiner wrote that anyone can be a member "without distinction of nationality, occupation, religion, or scientific or artistic belief". The sole condition is that one "see some justification for the continued existence of such institutions as the School of Spiritual Science at Dornach's Goetheanum". One could scarcely have built more freedom into it. It means, however, that for members to join the Catholic Church isn't proscribed, at least from the Anthroposophical Society's side. Catholics may likewise become anthroposophists. Steiner is even said to have urged a few individuals to pursue with renewed vigor their work in and for the church.

With all tolerance--which, by the way, can also be found in Catholic circles--awareness of the diametrical opposition between the church and the society in goals (hierarchy vs. freedom) as reflected in their organization and the fundamental difference in their spiritual paths (belief vs. knowledge) must nonetheless be retained. Its a question of different paths leading to different goals. That doesn't mean, however, that anyone who feels them worthwhile couldn't take both paths. I take a bicycle *and* the streetcar.