



## **Rudolf Steiner and Western spirituality**

### **Report on the ‘100 Years Rudolf Steiner Conference’ at Harvard Divinity School**

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Dan McKanan, director of Harvard University's Program for the Evolution of Spirituality, opened and accompanied this exceptional event on 15 and 16 December 2025. The operational preparation lay in the hands of Henry Holland (Scotland, Hamburg) and Aaron French (Denmark), both of whom are active in the field of Western esoteric research. Their work on the young Rudolf Steiner and the rebirth of outsider philosophy, commissioned by the State University of New York Press, is scheduled for publication in 2027.

The Conference was exceptional in three respects:

- For the first time, an American university not only honoured the diversity of Rudolf Steiner's life's work, but people from all parts of the world gathered on site and online to gain a deeper insight into applied anthroposophy through 74 panel discussions and three keynote lectures – covering science, art, and various fields of practice such as biodynamic agriculture, Waldorf education and social therapy, art and architecture, social threefolding, medicine, and the movement of religious renewal, the Christian Community.
- A balanced and realistic picture of the current reception of Steiner emerged, in which critical contributions about Steiner's life's work found their place alongside extremely moving descriptions of the fruitfulness of anthroposophical initiatives. A refreshing atmosphere of tolerance and openness to discussion prevailed among the participants.
- All contributions will be edited for publication and will remain accessible via the Harvard Divinity School archive. Workshops are also planned to continue the discussion of Steiner's Western esotericism.

For me, one highlight was the lecture by Boas Huss from Ben Gurion University, whose research focuses on the history of Kabbalah and Western esotericism. He spoke about the Jewish-Israeli reception of anthroposophy. Despite Steiner's critical statements regarding the Zionist movement, no other country in the world has more Waldorf schools in relation to its total population than Israel, including even a Waldorf-inspired school in an Orthodox Jewish neighbourhood. Biodynamic agriculture, anthroposophical medicine, supportive education and social therapy, eurythmy, biography work – these are highly valued for their deeply human orientation and ethics, even if, of course, the Christian character of anthroposophy is not usually emphasised. This lecture also made it clear how many people of Jewish origin were friends of Rudolf Steiner and how widespread the reception of anthroposophy was, especially in Jewish circles, which is why anthroposophy was able to take root in Israel in the wake of the wave of emigration and the influx of Holocaust survivors.

The other highlight was the panel contribution by Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, professor of African philosophy and religious traditions at Veritas University Abuja, a Catholic university in Nigeria founded in 2002. He spoke about the intersection of esotericism and human transformation in Rudolf Steiner's Christology. In doing so, he not only traced the development of Steiner's Christology in a way that enabled participants to obtain a feeling for Steiner's understanding of Christ and his encounter with Christ in midlife with astonishing intensity; he was also able to show the inner connections that exist between African spirituality and a non-denominational Christianity, such as can be taught by anthroposophy. The aim of his presentation was to contribute to a deeper understanding of Steiner's spiritual science and its significance for personal transformation, for inner spiritual growth, and for the richness of esoteric knowledge.

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