

Concerning Leadership in the Anthroposophical Movement

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First begun in August 2008, this essay considers how Rudolf Steiner understood leadership in the Anthroposophical Movement in the case of the Anthroposophical Society. It does so because there seem to be conflicting views on this topic, yet Steiner himself seems to be quite clear in this regard in the course of the 1923 Refounding of the Society.

In Rudolf Steiner's own words

In the English version of the Proceedings of the Christmas Conference,¹⁰⁶ Rudolf Steiner says he does not see contradictions in what he says, so in what follows Steiner's own words have been used and highlighted in grey in order to understand his image.

The Council (Vorstand¹⁰⁷) of the Society and the leadership of the School are *two* things (134).

In Para 15, the Council of the Society is identified as a group of people with initiative for the cause of Anthroposophy (62), it is responsible for the Society (162) and bears the initiative for the leadership of the Society (148). Its task is simply that of fulfilling the statutes (115).

In two instances, Rudolf Steiner also describes how the Council widens or enlarges itself. Firstly, the General Secretaries and other officials of Country Societies are 'advisory members' of the Council, meaning equal members of the Council when in Dornach (64). The General Secretaries are an externally supporting Council, exactly equal to the central Council at Dornach (115). Secondly, the leaders of the sections are advisory members of the Council (60).

Though Steiner may not see these things as contradictory, they certainly present conundrums. In taking on the presidency of the Society as well as the leadership of the School, two 'things' became linked – Society and School.¹⁰⁸ Even so, he distinguished between the leadership of the School, i.e. the leaders of the sections (88), and the leadership of the Society, meaning the Council (seemingly in their direct capacities, not as section leaders).

With Rudolf Steiner, presumably, the section leaders together are the leadership of the School (88). Rudolf Steiner is the leader of the School; the leaders of the sections are a collegium. As such, they administer the School (148). Elsewhere, the leadership of the School (as the soul of the Society) is the Council enlarged to include the section leaders (162).

However, Rudolf Steiner uses yet another leadership concept: the leadership *at* the Goetheanum is the Council. When joined by the leaders of the sections (as advisors) it is the leadership *of* the Goetheanum (129/130).

Thus, Steiner appears to have three leaderships in mind – the Society, the School and the Goetheanum. To what, though, does the Goetheanum refer? It is especially important not to think that 'the Goetheanum' means the building; rather it is the 'invisible Goetheanum' (see several references in the Christmas Conference). Therefore, a key nuance would appear to be not *the leadership at the Goetheanum*, but *the leadership of the Goetheanum at the Goetheanum*.¹⁰⁹

A further clue (or complication!) may lie in the ideas of the Goetheanum [as] the soul of the Anthroposophical Movement (143), but the School as the soul of Anthroposophical Society (162). Does

¹⁰⁶ All page references are to *The Christmas Conference 1923/4*, Anthroposophic Press, New York, 1990. CW 260. The translation from the German has been relied upon, meaning the translation is assumed to be 'correct' as regards Rudolf Steiner's nuances.

¹⁰⁷ In Switzerland, a Vorstand is a council of a membership organization elected out of the membership. In the case of the Anthroposophical Society, it was offered to the membership for affirmation (by applause, in fact). This is what Rudolf Steiner meant by an initiative, not an executive Vorstand, and so when the word 'council' is used here it is always meant in the sense of a council that takes initiative, not a council that is subject to a higher incidence of governance. And one that seeks affirmation by its membership. This should not be understood as 'carte blanche' governance, for any public initiative needs a fruitful relationship with its context – neither dictating to it nor being dictated to by it.

¹⁰⁸ Since Steiner describes the School as the soul of the Society, it seems reasonable to assume the Society is the body of the School.

¹⁰⁹ The point being to distinguish between the 'spiritual Goetheanum' born out of the destruction of the first building with that name, and the replacement edifice, also known as the Goetheanum.

the Movement, therefore, lie 'outside' or 'around' the Society, with the School within it? And is the Goetheanum a reference to the spirit of both Society and Movement?

Extended and continued 21 December 2012

In speaking variously about leadership, Rudolf Steiner left us with something of a challenge, concerning which, a few years ago, in conversation with him concerning the travails of the Anthroposophical Society today, Sergei Prokofieff told me, "Everything depends on how one understands 'the leadership of the Goetheanum'." More recently, as a solution to dissonance in the relationship between the Council and the High School Collegium, a new organ has been created under the guidance of Friedrich Glasl called 'the Goetheanum leadership'.¹¹⁰ What are we to make of all this?

As already noted, one way might be to distinguish between the leadership *of* and the leadership *at* the Goetheanum. If ever a difference between prepositions counted for a great deal, this is it, for if we understand the first aright, the second will come right also. Not through external arrangements, but via reorientation of our souls.

Since one can argue that the anthroposophical path as such, leading from the individual soul to the spiritual world (and vice versa), exists independently of the Society, depending only on an "open-minded human nature", as Statute 3 of the refounded Society reminds us, one can also wonder why the question of leadership need concern us at all. Why, in fact, does the Society exist? Why was it refounded?

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Surely the answer to this question is: in order to bring order into the karma of those human beings who, through the Society to begin with, start out on the long journey of overall karmic reunification? For this, the 'grid' drawn by Rudolf Steiner on 27th December 1923 (see sketch) serves as an unspoken manual for how to reciprocate his uniting of his karma with that of humanity. With its three classes

providing a vertical dimension and its sections a horizontal one, the grid illustrates how one 'rises' through the classes, so that the Michael School can permeate civilisation by working 'down' through the, now 11,¹¹¹ Sections, central to which is the Section for General Anthroposophy. (In principle, therefore, one joins the School in the First Class in the Section for General Anthroposophy, having spent at least 2 years in the Society, once described by Jørgen Smit as a kind of preparatory class).¹¹²

In terms of the Christmas Statutes, one joins the Society in *recognition* of the work done at the Goetheanum.¹¹³ At this stage one does not have responsibility for anthroposophy; and one is free. As, too, is Rudolf Steiner. If, however, one wishes to go on to take *responsibility* for anthroposophy then this one does *with* Rudolf Steiner. However, in order for both ourselves and Rudolf Steiner to remain free yet co-responsible, certain conditions are requisite, which one fulfils on joining the School.

Here one has to go carefully, distinguishing between conditions such as the one just described and those that are, as it were, pragmatic and go with the territory, such as the role of meditation. Or the efficacy of rather than moral precept about going it alone in spiritual scientific research. Can 'private' research really be spiritually scientific? Does it not need to be collegiate *de facto*?

These are secondary matters, akin to if you want to drive in Italy you need to drive on the right. By Steiner, there is in fact only one primary condition – namely, one accepts the responsibility of representing anthroposophy and all that entails.¹¹⁴

The way is therefore open (by means of the Society with the School within it) for any human being who chooses to do so, to work with Rudolf Steiner in the specific way Steiner described as necessary after taking on the presidency of the Society. Any human being can *recognise* the work done by the Goetheanum, expressing this by joining the Society and making this deed the substantial condition of membership. One can also, if one chooses to do so, take responsibility for this work, i.e. for

¹¹⁰ See *Anthroposophy Worldwide* 11/12.

¹¹¹ In November 2023, a twelfth is being mooted, linked to curative education.

¹¹² See *The Deed of Rudolf Steiner*. <https://aebookstore.com/publications/chb-collected-works/full-chb-list/the-deed-of-rudolf-steiner/>

¹¹³ In more detail, Statute 1 refers to 'nurture of the soul on a basis of anthroposophy'; Statute 2 of conviction that spiritual science exists and is the task of the Anthroposophical Society; Statute 3 speaks about 'recognising the results for humanity'; and Statute 4 'considers the existence of the Goetheanum justified'.

¹¹⁴ See *The Challenges of Christmas 1923*, Marc Desaulles.

(https://economics.goetheanum.org/fileadmin/economics/Towards_2023/EC_MD_The_Challenges_of_Christmas_1923.pdf)

anthroposophy, by joining the School. But in taking responsibility for anthroposophy one joins Rudolf Steiner in 'his' task. Likewise, therefore, this deed is the substance of membership of the School. In that sense, also, one can imagine that one thereby becomes part of the leadership of the Goetheanum, understanding the Goetheanum now to refer to Rudolf Steiner's cosmic task. One takes one's place in the circle in which Rudolf Steiner also has a seat. One could also venture that, the more effective one's representation of anthroposophy in this way, the closer one comes to being a colleague of Rudolf Steiner. [This paragraph modified 2023.]

This is not a relativist view – it requires conscious recognition of the uniqueness of Rudolf Steiner's karma, and it requires making anthroposophy one's own, grounding one's work on spiritual science in fact; something one cannot do alone. One knows this condition when one is at home in the first place in the Anthroposophical Society – in Anthroposophia's 'body' – where one's family is no longer born of blood but of I-hood. And where one's karma is mediated not 'by nature' but by consciousness of what one is responsible for.

In principle and in potential, therefore, all members of the School can join in and be part of the leadership of the Goetheanum, thereby locating the Goetheanum in all our 'anthroposophical' deeds, not in a particular geographical place. The potentially dangerous, because too earthly, image of 'periphery-centre' is then denied geographical or physical significance – giving way to the, perhaps better – and even hologrammatic – 'whole and its components'.¹¹⁵ [Last phrase added 2023.] Then the leadership of the Goetheanum ceases to be 'over there' in Dornach. It is in one's own heart.¹¹⁶ 'Over there' changes into one's ability to achieve and maintain this experience (of being part of the Goetheanum) in the here and now of one's own anthroposophical life.

Once the leadership of the Goetheanum is located in one's heart, in one's deeds, then the leadership at the Goetheanum – however worded or instituted – will be perceived in its true light. Not as a geographical or physical thing in the first instance and not as something organisational or managerial, let alone as a special group of people, but as a necessary expression on earth of a living spiritual reality – a reality that cannot be forced into being from the earth out of legal forms or managerial constructs, but as an 'event' that irradiates these things, giving them their true meaning. 'The spirit coming of itself', in fact.

This would be so even if the Society were to wither away and die due to conflict and if every member were to take refuge in his fidelity to Rudolf Steiner. We would then have to rebuild the refounded Society anew – to press the 'refresh' button, as one might say these days. The question would then become whether such a future belongs to tomorrow, or is already existing. The answer to this will in turn probably depend on at least three related 'post-Culmination'¹¹⁷ phenomena obtaining:

- (1) anthroposophy arising out of the deeds people do when they take responsibility *collegiately*; no longer from 'on high', or ex cathedra, or merely alone;
- (2) money flows showing that our will is turned towards the Goetheanum; and
- (3) deliberate and scientific financing of inter-sectional work, provided this work stands (or is capable of standing) in the public domain.

Addendum 2023

Except as indicated in minor regards, the above combined texts have not been changed or needed to be changed since they were first written (2008 and 2012). That is to say, the matters they discuss are perennial and not dated by the passage of time. Understood from inside out, so to speak, Rudolf Steiner's conception does not date. Rather, it patiently awaits our understanding of it, enduring our mangling of it so that it fits our lesser comprehension. This is a counsel that, in my view, those who would better guess Rudolf Steiner would do well to weigh carefully.

¹¹⁵ Similarly, one should beware of the idea of 'global-local', unless by local one means the individual.

¹¹⁶ It is in this sense and spirit that the website www.hopespringseternal.world has been created 'for those who have the Anthroposophical Society at heart.'

¹¹⁷ See Stephen Usher, 2006, revised 2011. https://anthroposophy.eu/w/images/1/15/Usher_Stephen_E._-_Remarks_on_the_culmination_at_the_end_of_the_20th_century.pdf