

When hierarchies are flattened...

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I would like to challenge the current notion of the 'Goetheanum Leadership', which, as I understand it from the Letters sent to members since the 2018 AGM, is conceived as superior to the arrangement, created by Rudolf Steiner, of a Vorstand (council) for the Society (of which Steiner was the initial president) and a Collegium of section leaders for the School (of which he was also the leader but did not appoint a successor), with Vorstand members also being section leaders.

By contrast, as I understand it, the present construct is a conflict management solution to a problem that arose between the Vorstand of the Society and the leadership of the School, the effect of which is to conflate and confound two things that ought to be kept distinct¹⁶ – the body and the soul, Society and School. It also, or so it seems to me, subverts not only the Vorstand and the Collegium, but also the Country Councils, through the seemingly innocent and unintended, yet potentially disastrous practice of communicating with all members directly from the Goetheanum, rather than via the Groups of the Society. Disastrous because, of set purpose, the worldwide Society is not unitary but derives from and relies on the Groups of which it is comprised.¹⁷

Of greater concern is that, as matters now stand, the new arrangement occludes and even conflicts with what Rudolf Steiner had in mind with his own 'version' of Goetheanum Leadership, as described during the Christmas Conference. Albeit in ways that appear contradictory, in the English version of the *Proceedings*¹⁸ at least, where he refers to the Vorstand and the leadership of the School as "two things" (134):

Firstly, in Paragraph 15 the **Vorstand** of the **Society** is identified as a group of people with initiative for the cause of Anthroposophy (62) and responsibility for the Society (162), whose task as the leadership of the Society (148) is to fulfil the statutes (115).

Secondly, he describes the leadership of the **School** as a **Collegium** comprising the leaders of the sections (88), who, together presumably with Rudolf Steiner, "administer" the School (148). Elsewhere, the leadership of the School is the Vorstand enlarged to include the section leaders (162) in their capacity as "advisors" to the Vorstand (60).

This interweaving and seeming contradictoriness presents us with a conundrum, but not really since the body and soul (of which the Society/School is a reflection) are interwoven, not separate, and we should know by now that contradictions in the realm of spiritual science usually mean we are not seeing things through a wide enough lens. In taking on the presidency of the Society as well as the leadership of the School, 'two things' became linked – Society and School.¹⁹ Even so, Steiner distinguishes between the leadership of the School, i.e. the leaders of the sections (88), and the leadership of the Society, meaning the Vorstand (seemingly in their direct capacities, not as section leaders). Rudolf Steiner then uses yet another leadership concept: while the leadership *at* the Goetheanum is the Vorstand, when joined by the leaders of the sections (as advisors) it becomes the leadership *of* the Goetheanum (129/130).

Thus, Steiner seems to have three leaderships in mind – the Society, the School and the Goetheanum. To what, though, does the word 'Goetheanum' refer? It is especially important not to think that 'the Goetheanum' means the building; several references in the Christmas Conference see it rather as the 'invisible Goetheanum', the Goetheanum as the soul of the Movement (143) – distinct, presumably, from the School as the soul of Society (162). It is as if Society, School and Goetheanum are analogous to body, soul and spirit.

We may baulk at such complexity, but we would surely be advised not to change matters on that ground alone, like those interpreters of the Bible who, claiming superior understanding, displace the sublime with the prosaic. By choosing the name 'Goetheanum Leadership' for the current arrangement, we risk eclipsing from memory and current thinking, not to mention enquiring into, Rudolf Steiner's own idea, which had nothing of conflict within it and was not a management construct, but something he brought

¹⁶ But not separate; just as with the human being.

¹⁷ See Statute 11 from 1923 Christmas Conference.

¹⁸ All page references are to *The Christmas Conference 1923/4*, Anthroposophic Press, New York, 1990. The translation from the German has been relied upon.

¹⁹ In passing, since Steiner describes the School as the soul of the Society, it seems reasonable to assume the Society is the body of the School.

from out of the spiritual world. Nor can such an affair be understood from merely earthly juridical or constitutional points of view. Rather, these have to meet the challenges that Steiner's impulse embodied.

It is also worth remarking that for several decades now the fashion has been not to have a chairperson (or president, if one prefers the Latinate version) for the Society. To my mind, this is both an exoteric and esoteric error. Not only can the Society not then discharge its duties in a way that earthly life requires, but the role of the General Secretary is then without a foil so that something essentially spiritual becomes compromised. Matters become even more complicated when General Secretaries act as or on behalf of the third key officer of any earthly entity – its treasurer.

Indeed, if ever there were a clear example of the threefold nature of social life, it is the often-general practice of an organisation having a chair, a secretary and a treasurer. Take this threesome away, and the risk is great that power, far from being 'stilled' in the sense Rudolf Steiner spoke of, will default either to the General Secretary or to the Treasurer, causing serious shortcuts of both an exoteric and esoteric kind.²⁰ By all means, let the General Secretaries or Country Representatives represent the spiritual life of a country and how anthroposophy might contribute to it – the more so if they are conceived as members of an 'enlarged Vorstand' in the sense meant by Rudolf Steiner (64) – but let the Chairpeople have the brief for how any proposal might 'sit' in the country concerned in general and legal terms. And allow the Treasurers to ensure appropriate funding.

Finally, while one understands that the underlying impulse of much in today's social sciences – especially, ironically, in our own Movement – is to flatten hierarchy, is this not a contradiction in terms? By definition, hierarchies are not and cannot be flat; but they can be predicated on changing social facts, such as when, in a college of teachers or a Society council for example, one of them is vouchsafed²¹ a task that he or she has offered to undertake.²² Then, as it were, hierarchy is animated from 'bottom up', rather than 'top down', by initiative rather than convention or habit, so that it becomes moving and changing rather than static, but never flat.

In short, one has to wonder how flat hierarchies and merely earthly social constructs look from the spiritual world. Are they really instruments that the 'Good Spirits' that attended the Christmas Conference can make use of? Or do they not mislead and disorient, precisely at the moment in history when the opposite is needed? In other words, the more our affairs return to or approximate the triple governance implicit in making distinct the roles of chair, secretary and treasurer, the more they will become aligned with the way of life on the other side of the threshold, and thereby also the true nature of life on earth also.

²⁰ This power problem is made even more awkward when the distinction is maintained between General Secretaries and Country Representatives on a strictly *numerical* basis – i.e. a country-based group of the Society needs 500 or more members to merit a General Secretary. This arrangement is made even more problematic if members are then allowed to pay what they can or want rather than a fee, because the former implies that membership has no financial basis, i.e. being a member requires no will.

²¹ To choose from the at times archaic but rich vocabulary of used by Steiner in the Christmas Conference.

²² A principle elaborated on in Ernst Lehrs's well-known article 'Republican, Not Democrat.'