

Concerning a 'Free' Association

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When I go about the world in link with my work with the Circle of Treasurers, seeking to understand the 'economic fundamentals' of the Anthroposophical Society – whether worldwide (at the Goetheanum) or at the country, local or working field level – the same question presents itself, hologrammatically, as it were:

Can a free association of people who have anthroposophy in common as their main life reference²³ be free, and they within it, if it includes real and/or financial assets? Do not such assets require it to incarnate more deeply, becoming a legal person in its own right and thereby separating its members from its liabilities, beyond the nominal amount they may have to pay in the event of dissolution requiring it?

In a free association (of which the Societies in Ireland and South(ern) Africa are cases in point), all members are jointly and severally liable for its liabilities, a simple constraint that serves to prevent them incurring net liabilities in the first place. But also, one that does not require complex competences in order to look after its activities, ensuring in turn that its focus is on anthroposophy per se and not stolen from other affairs, as Shakespeare might have put it.

Especially in the case of the Anthroposophical Society, when incorporated in its own right, responsibility in such an association passes from the members in general to those of them who find themselves on the council (or its equivalents). But often those councils act, not as initiative-takers in the sense of the Christmas Conference, but as if doing the bidding of the members, rather than seeking their affirmation – spiritually a very different thing.

I'd like to draw attention to this again in this centenary year of the Country Societies, because many branches and groups of the Society have beneficial use of the assets of a sister entity. This replicates the Bau Verein story and it is this story that now comes up everywhere I go in the world, from the Goetheanum to Quito: Do we not need to go back to 1924/5 and start over, and ask again, what was so 'wrong' with the twin arrangement? Or, more positively, what does it demand of us? Are we *à la hauteur* when it comes to handling real estate and 'serious' sums of money? The question is especially valid – urgent even – when one sees how the expenses of many groups of the Society and at all levels are often not covered by the membership income.

If it can be said (by Steiner) that economic life is related to spiritual life as a shell is to its nut, then it follows that financial hygiene is a reflection of spiritual hygiene. Only there is a profound difference: while the shell does not beget the nut, finance and will life are related reflexively – the one expresses and can beget the other. The very fact that one determines to fund something can create the will to do so.

Such a subtlety of 'new mystery' finance can only become visible when the autonomy born of cash operations, paying one's way, is achieved. This autonomy is lost when, while trying to deepen one's understanding and support of anthroposophy, one finds oneself responsible for real and financial assets; par hazard, rather than because one has the skill-set for owning more than one's own home.

On the other side of the coin, those whose karma it is to own and manage real and financial assets beyond a personal situation, remain hidden from view, affronted even, when this task is undertaken on an amateur basis. In my experience going around the world, the burden on council members who have such responsibilities, because of their office, not their training or any entrepreneurial experience, is everywhere evident, especially in their decision-making. But also, because substantial inner, time and material resources are thereby diverted away from their 'core activity' – in our case, furthering the work of the School of Spiritual Science – and at a time when that work needs it most. Any number of Waldorf schools can stand witness to this problem. But also, parish councils, arts organisations and all manner of charities in general.

In the short but fraught history of the Anthroposophical Society to date, one can get a measure of this problem if one imagines that the decision to locate the Goetheanum had not been taken over dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Grossheinz, so to speak, but put to the vote in Munich. Democracy is not the field or medium for such decisions for the simple reason that the I of those whose karma such decisions belong to, as it were, cannot then 'inhabit' the assets concerned.

This is why, out of my experience of the many cases I know, I advocate the Anthroposophical Society working alongside sister entities when it comes to meeting its needs for premises and funding. A dynamic

²³ In the UK, an informally constituted association.

can then emerge that has history underwriting it, not just personality however well-intended. In modern finance this is called the principal-agent problem. Only there the agent is the servant of the principal. In the New Mysteries they are partners.