

The Anthroposophic Movement

LECTURE SEVEN

The Consolidation of the Anthroposophical Movement

Dornach, 16 June 1923

Having talked about various outer circumstance as well as the more intimate aspects of modern spiritual movements, I will attempt today and tomorrow to provide an interpretation of the conditions which govern the existence of the Anthroposophical Society in particular. And I will do so by means of various events which have occurred during the third phase of the movement.

We have to understand clearly our position at the time when the second phase of the Anthroposophical Movement was coming to an end, around 1913 and 1914, and our position today. Let us look back at the progress which was achieved in the first and the second phases by adhering essentially to the principle that progress should be made in line with actual circumstances, that the movement should move forward at the same speed as the inner life of the anthroposophy expands.

I said in the first phase – approximately up to 1907, 1908, 1909 – we gradually worked out the inner spiritual content of the movement. The foundations were laid for a truly modern science of the spirit with the consequences which that entailed in various directions. The journal *Luzifer-Gnosis* was produced by me and others which built up the content of anthroposophy in stages. When the second phase began, the science of the spirit came to grips, in lectures and lecture cycles, with those texts which are particularly significant for the spiritual development of the West, the Gospels and Genesis, a development which included the broader public in certain ways. Once again real progress was made.

We started with the Gospel of John, and moved from there to the other Gospels. They were used to demonstrate certain wisdom and truths. The spiritual content was built up with each step. The expansion of the Society was essentially linked with this inner development of its spiritual content.

Of course programs and similar things had to be organized to take care of everyday business. But that was not the priority. The main thing was that positive spiritual work was undertaken at each stage and that these spiritual achievements could then be deepened esoterically in the appropriate way.

In this context it was particularly at the end of the second phase that anthroposophy spread more widely into general culture and civilization, as with the Munich performances of the mystery dramas. We reached the stage at the end of the second phase when we could begin to think about the construction of the building which has suffered such a misfortune here. This was an exceedingly important stage in the development of the Anthroposophical Society. The construction of such a building assumed that a considerable number of people had an interest in creating a home for the real substance of anthroposophy. But it also meant that the first significant step was being taken beyond the measured progress which had kept pace with the overall development of the Anthroposophical Society. Because it is obvious that a building like the Goetheanum, in contrast to everything that had gone before, would focus the attention of the world at large in quite a different way on what the Society had become.

We had our opponents in various camps before this point. They even went so far as to publish what they said about us. But they failed to draw people's attention. It was the construction of the building which first created the opportunity for our opponents to find an audience.

The opportunity to construct the building assumed that something existed which made it worthwhile to do that. It did something with a certain inner vitality. Indeed, we had gathered valuable experience over a considerable period of time. Since a society existed, this experience could have been put to good use, could be put to good use today. Everything I have spoken about in the last few days was meant to point to certain events which can be taken as valuable experiences.

Now this period came to an end. The burning of the Goetheanum represents the shattering event which demonstrated that this period has run out. Remember that these lectures are intended to allow for self-reflection among anthroposophists. That self-reflection should lead us to remember today how at that time we also had to anticipate, anticipate actively, that when anthroposophy stepped into the limelight the opposition would inevitably grow.

Now we are talking in the first instance about the start and the finish. The start is represented in the courage to begin the construction of the Goetheanum. Let us examine in what form the effect achieved by the Goetheanum, in that it exposed anthroposophy to the judgment of an unlimited number of people, is evident today.

The latest evidence is contained in a pamphlet which has just appeared and which is entitled *The Secret Machinery of Revolution*.¹ On page 13 of this pamphlet you will find the following exposition:

¹ "The Secret Machinery of Revolution", by G. G. London, 1923. (Reprinted from *The Patriot*. The relevant passage, with the sub-heading A Mystery League, appeared in No. 37, Vol. III, 19 October 1922, p. 169. It is contained in Part VI of a series of articles entitled "The Anatomy of Revolution".)

At this stage of my inquiry I may refer briefly to the existence of an offshoot of the Theosophical Society, known as the Anthroposophical Society. This was formed as the result of a schism in the ranks of the Theosophists, by a man of Jewish birth, who was connected with one of the modern branches of the Carbonari. Not only so, but in association with another Theosophist he is engaged in organizing certain singular commercial undertakings not unconnected with Communist propaganda; almost precisely in the manner in which Count Saint Germain² organized dyeworks and other commercial ventures with a like purpose. And this queer business group has its connections with the Irish Republic movement, with the German groups already mentioned, and also with another mysterious group which was founded years ago, and which includes in its membership many well-known politicians, scientists, university professors, and literary men in France, Germany, America, and England. It is a secret society, but some idea of its real aims may be gathered from the fact that it sponsored the Ligue des Anciens Combatants, whose aim appears to be to understand the discipline of the armies in the Allied countries. Although nominally a Right Wing society; it is in direct touch with members of the Soviet Government of Russia; in Britain it is also connected with certain Fabians and with the Union of Democratic Control, which opposes secret diplomacy.

The only thing I need to add is that my trip to London is planned for August, and you can see from this that our opponents are very well organized and know very well what they are doing. As you know, I have said for some time that one should never believe there is not always a worse surprise in store.

As you can see, we have our opponents today and that is the other point which marks the end of the third phase who are not afraid to make use of any lie and who know very well how to utilize it to the best advantage. It is wrong to believe that it is somehow appropriate to pass over these things lightly with the argument that not only are they devoid of truth, but the lies are so crude no one will believe them. People who say that simply show that they are deeply unaware of the nature of contemporary western civilization, and do not recognize the powerful impulses to untruth which are accepted as true, I have to say, even by the best people, because it is convenient and they are only half awake.

For us it is particularly important to look at what lies between these two points. In 1914 the anthroposophical movement had undoubtedly reached the point at which it could have survived in the world on the strength of its own spiritual resources, its spiritual content. But conditions dictated that we should continue to work with vitality after 1914. The work since then consisted essentially of a spiritual deepening, and in that spiritual deepening stage by stage, without concern for the external events of the world, because it was and still is the case that the spiritual content which needs to be revealed for mankind

² Died 27 February 1784. cf also the lecture by Rudolf Steiner of November 1904 in Berlin

to progress has to be incorporated into our civilization speaking about or working on this material other than base our actions on these very spiritual resources.

In this respect anthroposophy was broadened in its third phase through the introduction of eurythmy. No one can ever claim that eurythmy is based on anything other than the sources of anthroposophy. Everything is taken from the sources of forms which attempt in one way or another to achieve something which might superficially resemble eurythmy to a certain extent. But look at events from the point when Marie Steiner took charge of eurythmy.³ During the war it was cultivated in what I might describe as internal circles, but then it became public and met with ever increasing interest. Look at everything which has contributed to eurythmy. Believe me, there were many people who insinuated that here or there something very similar existed which had to be taken into account or incorporated into eurythmy. The only way in which truthful progress could be made was to look neither left nor right but simply work directly from the sources themselves. If there had been any compromise about eurythmy it would not have turned into what it has become. That is one of the conditions which govern the existence of such a movement; there must be an absolute certainty that the material required can be gathered directly from the sources in a continuous process of expansion.

Working from the centre like this, which was, of course, relatively easy until 1914 because it was self-evident, is the only way to make proper progress with anthroposophy.

This third period from 1914 onwards, witnessed an all encompassing phenomenon which naturally affected the anthroposophical movement as it affected everything else. Now it must be strongly emphasized that during the war, when countries were tearing each other apart, members of sixteen of seventeen nations were present here and working together; it must be emphasized that the Anthroposophical Society passed through this period without in any way forfeiting its essential nature. But neither must it be forgotten that all the feelings which passed through people's minds during this period, and thus also through the minds of anthroposophist, had a splintering effect on the Anthroposophical Society in many respects. This cannot be denied.

In talking about these things in an objective manner, I do not want to criticize or invalidate in any way the good characteristics which anthroposophists possess. We should take them for granted. It is true that within the Anthroposophical Society we managed to overcome to a certain extent the things which so divided people between 1914 and 1918. But anyone watching these things will have noticed that the Society could not avoid the ripple effect, even if it appeared in a somewhat different form from usual, and that in this context something came strongly to the surface which I have described before by saying that in this third phases we saw the beginnings of what I might call a certain inner opposition to the tasks I had to fulfill in the Anthroposophical Society.

³ Marie Steiner has been involved with Eurythmy from its beginnings in 1912 and took over the practice and development of Rudolf Steiner's indications from 1914 onwards. See *Aus dem Leben von Marie Steiner-von Sivers*, pp. 74ff

Of course most people are surprised when I talk of this inner opposition, because many of them are unaware of it. But I have to say that this does not make it any better, because these feelings of inner opposition grew particularly strongly in the third phase. That was also evident in outer symptoms. When a movement like ours has passed through two phases in the way I have described, there is certainly no need for blind trust when certain actions are taken in the third phase given that the precedents already exist whose full ramifications are not immediately clear to everyone. But remember that these actions were undertaken in a context in which, while most certainly not everyone understood their full implications, maybe things had to be held together and it was of particular importance the anthroposophical movement itself should be defined in the right way. That is when we observed what might be describe as such inner opposition.

I am aware, of courses, that when I speak about these things, many people will say: But shouldn't we have our own opinions? One should certainly have one's own opinions about what one does, but when someone else does something with which one is connected it is also true that trust must play some role, particularly when such precedents exist as I have described

Now at a certain point of the third phase during the war, I wrote the booklet *Thoughts in Time of War*.⁴ This particular work elicited inner opposition which was especially noticeable. People told me that they thought anthroposophy never intervened in politics, as if that booklet involved itself with politics ! And there was more of the same. Something had affected them which should not grow on the ground of anthroposophy although it sprouts in quite different soil. There were quite a few such objections to *Thoughts in Time of War*, but I am about to say something terribly arrogant, but true nevertheless; no one ever acknowledged that the whole thing was not really comprehensible to them at the time but if they waited until 1935 they might perhaps understand why that booklet was written.

And this is only one example among many which demonstrates clearly the strong intervention of something whose almost exclusive purpose was to undermine the freedom and self-determination within the Anthroposophical Society which we take for granted. It should have been self evident that the writing of this publication was my business alone. Instead, an opinion began to form: If he wants to be the one with whom we build the Anthroposophical Society, then he is allowed to write on the things we approve of.

These things have to be stated in a direct manner, otherwise they will not be understood. They are symptomatic of a mood which arose in the Society and which ran counter to the conditions governing the existence of the anthroposophical movement!

But what has to play a particularly significant role in this third phase is the awareness of having created a Society which has taken the first steps along a road which a large part of mankind will later follow. Consider carefully that a relatively small society is set up

⁴ Reprinted in GA 24

which has taken upon itself the task of doing something which a large part of mankind is eventually supposed to follow.

Anthroposophists today must not think they have only the same commitments which future anthroposophist will have when they exist by the million rather than the thousand. When limited numbers are active in the vanguard of a movement they have to show commitment of a much higher order. It means that they are obliged to show greater courage, greater energy, greater patience, greater tolerance and, above all, greater truthfulness in every respect. And in our present third stage a situation arose which specifically tested our truthfulness and seriousness. It related in a certain sense to the subject matter discussed at one point in the lectures to theologians.⁵

Irrespective of the fact that individual anthroposophist exist, a feeling should have developed and must develop, among them that Anthroposophia exists as a separate being, who moves about amongst us, as it were, towards whom we carry a responsibility in every moment of our lives. Anthroposophia is actually an invisible person who walks among visible people and towards whom we must show the greatest responsibility for as long as we are a small group. Anthroposophia is someone who must be understood as an invisible person, as someone with a real existence, who should be consulted in the individual actions of our lives.

Thus, if connections form between people – friendships, cliques and so on – at a time when the group of anthroposophists is still small, it is all the more necessary to consult and to be able to justify all one's actions before this invisible person.

This will, of course, apply less and less as anthroposophy spreads. But as long as it remains the property of a small group of people, it is necessary for every action to follow from consultation with the person Anthroposophia. That Anthroposophia should be seen as a living being is an essential condition of its existence. It will only be allowed to die when its group of supporters has expanded immeasurably. What we require, then, is a deeply serious commitment to the invisible person I have just spoken about. That commitment has to grow with every passing day. If it does so, there can be no doubt that everything we do will begin and precede in the right way.

Let me emphasize the fact. While the second phase from 1907, 1908, 1909 to 1914 was essentially a period in which the feeling side, the religious knowledge of anthroposophy, was developed, something recurred in the third phase which was already present in the first, as I described yesterday. The relationship between anthroposophy and the sciences was again brought to the forefront.

It was already evident during the war that a number of scientists were beginning to lean towards anthroposophy. That meant that the Anthroposophical Society gained collaborators in the scientific field. At first they remained rather in the background. Until

⁵ The courses for theologians. (Stuttgart, 12 – 16 June 1921; Dornach, 26 September – 10 October 1921; Dornach 6 – 22 September 1922) have not been published.

1919 or 1920 the scientific work of the Society remained a hope rather than a reality, with the exception of the fruitful results which Dr. Unger⁶ achieved on the basis of *The Philosophy of Freedom* and other writings from the pre-anthroposophical period. Otherwise, if we disregard the constructive epistemological work done in this respect, which provided an important and substantive basis for the further content of the movement, we have to say that at the start of the third phase the scientific aspect remained a hope. For scientific work became effective at this stage in a way exactly opposite to what had happened in the first phase. In the latter period people were concerned, as I explained yesterday, to justify anthroposophy to science; anthroposophy was to have its credentials checked by science. Since it did not achieve that, its scientific work slowly dried up. In the second phase it did not exist at all, and towards the end everything concentrated on the artistic side. General human interests took the upper hand.

Scientific aspirations emerged again in the third phase, but this time in the opposite way. Now they were not concerned, at least not primarily, with justifying anthroposophy to science but rather sought to use anthroposophy to fertilize it. All kinds of people began to arrive who had reached for something to fertilize their endeavors. Researchers were no longer looking for atomic structures, as they had done when physics and astronomy had led them to look for atomic theories to apply to the etheric and astral bodies. Now, when enough progress had been made to make a contribution to science, the exact opposite occurred.

This tendency, and I wish to discuss only its positive aspects today, will only be effective for the benefit of the anthroposophical movement if it can find a way of working purely from anthroposophical sources, rather in the way that eurhythmics has done in the artistic field, and if it is accompanied by the commitment which I have mentioned. As long as so much of the present scientific mode of thinking is carried unconsciously into the anthroposophical movement it will not be able to make progress productively.

In particular, there will be a lack of progress as long as people believe that the current scientific establishment can be persuaded about anything without their first adopting a more positive attitude towards anthroposophy. Once they have done that, a dialogue can begin. Our task with regard to those who are fighting against anthroposophy today can only be to demonstrate clearly where they are not telling the truth. That is something which can be discussed. But of course there can be no dialogue about matters of substance, matters of content, with people who not only do not want to be convinced, but who cannot be convinced because they lack the necessary basic knowledge.

That, above all, is where the work needs to be done: to undertake basic research for ourselves in the various fields, but to do that from the core of anthroposophy.

⁶ Carl Unger, 1878 – 1929. Engineer. One of the most effective advocates of anthroposophy in Germany. Member of the Executive Council of the Anthroposophical Society from 1912 to 1923. A few moments before he was due to deliver his public lecture “What is anthroposophy?” in Nuremberg, he was fatally shot by a mentally deranged person. See his book *Die Grundlehren der Geisteswissenschaft*. Dornach, 1929.

When an attempt was made after the war to tackle practical issues in people's lives and the problems facing the world, that again had to be done on the basis of anthroposophy, and with the recognition that with these practical tasks in a particular it was hardly possible to count on any sort of understanding. The only proper course we can pursue is to tell the world what we have found through anthroposophy itself, and then wait and see how many people are able to understand it. We certainly cannot approach the world with the core material of anthroposophy in the hope that there might be a party or a person who can be won over. That is impossible. That is contrary to the fundamental circumstances governing the existence of the anthroposophical movement. Take a women's movement or social movement, for instance where it is possible to take the view that we should join and compromise our position because its members' views may incline towards anthroposophy in one way or another; that is absolutely impossible. What matters is to have enough inner security regarding anthroposophy to be able to advocate it under any circumstance.

Let me give you an amusing example of this. Whenever people are angry with me for having used the Theosophical Society for my work, I always reply that I will advocate anthroposophy wherever there is a demand. I have done it in places where it was only possible once, for the simple reason that people did not want to hear anything further from me a second time. But I never spoke in a way that, given their inner constitution, they could have been persuaded by superficial charm to listen to me a second time. That is something which has to be avoided. When people demand to hear something we have to present them with anthroposophy, pure anthroposophy which is drawn with courage from its innermost core.

Let me say that these things have all happened before in the anthroposophical movement, as if to illustrate the point. For instance, we were invited to a spiritualist society in Berlin,⁷ where I was to talk about anthroposophy. It did not occur to me to say no. Why should those people not have the right to hear something like that? I delivered my lecture and saw immediately afterwards that they were quite unsuited, that in reality this was not what they were seeking. For something happened which turned out to be quite funny. I was elected immediately and unanimously as the president of this society. Marie Steiner and her sister, who had accompanied me, were shocked. What should we do now, they asked? I had become the president of the society: What should we do? I simply said: Stay away! That was perfectly obvious. By electing as their president someone they had heard speak on only one occasion, those people showed that they wanted something quite different from anthroposophy. They wanted to infuse anthroposophy with spiritualism and thought that they could achieve it by this means. We come across that kind of thing all the time.

We need not hold back from advocating anthroposophy before anyone. I was invited once to speak about anthroposophy to the Gottsched Society⁸ in Berlin. Why should I not

⁷ It has not been possible to establish when this incident took place.

⁸ On 17 October 1904. There is no transcript.

have done that? The important thing was not to compromise over the anthroposophical content.

That was particularly difficult after I had written the “Appeal to the German People and the Civilized World”, and after *Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question* had been published.⁹ The essential thing at that time was to advocate only what could be done on the basis of the sources of underpinning these books, and then wait and see who wanted to participate.

I am convinced that if we had done that, if we had simply adopted the positive position which was continued in the ‘Appeal’ and in the book, without seeking links with any particular party – something which I was always against – we would not be stumbling today over obstacles which have been able to achieve one or two successes. Whereas now we have achieved no success at all in this field.

It is part of the conditions governing the existence of a society like ours that opportunities must always be found to work out of the spirit itself. That should not, of course, lead to the stupid conclusion that we have to barge in everywhere like bulls in china shops or that we do not have to adjust to the conditions directed by life, that we should become impractical people. Quite the contrary. It is necessary to inject some real practical life experience into the so-called practical life of today. Anyone who has some understanding of the conditions governing life itself will find it hard not to draw parallels between contemporary life and the life of really practical people,¹⁰ who have such a practical attitude to life that they immediately fall over as soon as they try to stand on both feet at once. That is what many people today describe as practical life. If these people and their real life experiences manage to penetrate a spiritual movement, things really begin to look bad for the latter.

As I said today, I would rather dwell on the positive side of the matter. We should not pursue a course so rigid that we run headlong into any obstacle in the way; of course we need to take avoiding action, make use of the things which will achieve practical progress. The important factor is that everything should contain the impulse which comes from the core.

If we could progress in this way the Anthroposophical Society would quickly shed the image – not in any superficial or conventional way, but justifiably – which still makes it appear sectarian to other people.

What is the use of telling people repeatedly that the Society is not a sect and then behave as if it were one? The one thing which needs to be understood by the members of

⁹ The appeal was printed in Stuttgart in 1919 and distributed as a leaflet with the signatures of many well-known personalities from German-speaking culture. Rudolf Steiner further included it in his book *Towards Social Renewal: Basic Issues of the Social Question* (1919). Rudolf Steiner Press, London 1977. See also GA 189

¹⁰ Title of a poem from the *Gallows Songs* by Christian Morgenstern, which is often presented in eurythmy.

the Anthroposophical Society is that of the general conditions which govern the existence of a society in our modern age. A society cannot be sectarian. That is why, if the Anthroposophical Society were standing on its proper ground, the we should never play a role. One repeatedly hears anthroposophists saying we, the Society, have this or that view in relation to the outside world. Something or other is happening to us. We want one thing or another. In ancient times it was possible for societies to face the world with such conformity. Now it is no longer possible. In our time each person who is a member of a society like this one has to be a really free human being. Views, thoughts, opinions are held only by individuals. The Society does not have an opinion. And that should be expressed in the way that individuals speak about the Society. The *we* should actually disappear.

There is something else connected with this. If this *we* disappears, people in the Society will not feel as if they are in a pool which supports them and which they can call on for support when it matters. But if a person has expressed his own views in the Society and has to represent himself, he will also feel fully responsible for what he says as an individual.

This feeling of responsibility is something which has to grow as long as the Society remains a small group of people. The way in which that has been put into practice so far has not succeeded in making the world at large understand the Anthroposophical Society as an eminently modern society, because this practice has repeatedly led to situations in which the image which has been set before the public is *we* believe, *we* are of the opinion, it is *our* conception of the world. So today the world outside holds the view that the Society is a compacted mass which holds certain collective opinions to which one has to subscribe as a member. Of course this will deter any independently minded person.

Since this is the case, we have to consider a measure today which need not have been thought about, perhaps a year ago, because things had not progressed to a stage in which we are tarred with the same brush – with certain ulterior motives, of course – as the Carbonari,¹¹ the Soviet government and Irish republicanism. So now it seems necessary to think seriously about how the three objects¹² which are always being quoted as an issue might be put in context: fraternity without racial distinctions and so on, the comparative study of religions, and the study of spiritual worlds and spiritual methodology. By concentrating on these three objects, the impression is given that one has to swear by them. A completely different form has to be found for them, above all a form which allows anyone who does not want to subscribe to a particular opinion, but who has an interest in the cultivation of the spiritual life, to feel that he need not commit himself body and soul to certain points of view. That is what we have to think about

¹¹ Literally; charcoal burners. Name of a secret political society in Italy which was connected with Freemasonry and which also established a strong presence in France in the nineteenth century.

¹² The reference is to the three objects of the Theosophical Society: 1. To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or color. 2. To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science. 3. To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man.

today., because it belongs to the conditions governing the entire of the Society in the particular circumstances of the third phase.

I have often been asked by people whether they would be able to join the Anthroposophical Society as they could not profess to the prescriptions of anthroposophy. I respond that it would be a sad state of affairs if a society in today's context recruited its members only from among those who profess what is prescribed there. That would be terrible. I always say that honest membership should involve only one thing: an interest in a society which in general terms seeks the path to the spiritual world. How that is done in specific terms is then the business of those who are members of the society, with individual contributions from all of them.

I can understand very well why someone would not want to be member of a society in which he had to subscribe to certain articles of faith. But if one says that anyone can be member of this Society who has an interest in the cultivation of the spiritual life, then those who have such an interest will come. And then others, well, they will remain outside, but they will be led increasingly into the absurdities of life.

No account is taken of the circumstances of the Anthroposophical Society until one starts to think about conditions such as these which govern its life, until one stops shuffling along in the same old rut. Only when the Society achieves this ability to deal with these issues in a completely free way, without pettiness and with generosity, will it be possible for it to become what it should become through the fact that it contains the anthroposophical movement. For the anthroposophical movement connects in a positive way without compromise, but in a positive way to what exists in the present and what can act productively into the future.

It is necessary to develop a certain sensitivity to these points. And it is necessary for anthroposophists to develop this sensitivity in a matter of weeks. If that happens, the way forward will be found as a practical consequence.

But people will only be able to think in this direction if they radically discard the petty aspects of their character and truly begin to understand the need to recognize Anthroposophia as an independent, invisible being.

I have had to consider the third phase in a different way, of course, to the two preceding ones. The latter are already history. The third, although we are nearing its end, is the present and everyone should be aware of its circumstances. We have to work our way towards guidelines concerning the smallest details. Such guidelines are not dogma, they are simply a natural consequence.