



Financing the Anthroposophical Society and School of Spiritual Science

ECONOMICS CONFERENCE
Report of the 6th Annual Meeting

Study material published as a contribution to public debates.
Comments to the publisher c/o economics[at]goetheanum.ch always welcome.

Part of any sale proceeds goes to finance research into associative economics.
Please respect copyrights, otherwise how will authors live.

© ***Christopher Houghton Budd and
Arthur Edwards***

Financing the Anthroposophical Society and School of Spiritual Science

Report of the 6th Annual Meeting

This meeting was held at the Goetheanum, Dornach (Basel), Switzerland, 20-21 September 2007.

This was the 6th annual meeting and had as its main topic the financing of the School of Spiritual Science and the role of the Anthroposophical Society in that connection. There was also an extra session to consider the future of the Economics Conference and the question of whether it was time to create a specific section.

Financing the Society and the School

With contributions from Paul Mackay, Cornelius Pietzner and Christopher Houghton Budd and the participation of a diverse international group, including several Society treasurers, the 6th annual meeting looked on three interrelated subjects:

- Funding of the work of the School of Spiritual Science and its Sections
- Funding of the Anthroposophical Society
- Providing and funding premises for the School/Society

That such questions should be formally addressed within the context of a Section meeting is perhaps an example of what is needed: that those concerned with current arrangements come together in the Michael School to share their understandings and discover, out of the diversity that they bring, a unifying image that can inform their work. In this case, building a picture of how the School and the Society are related to economic life, especially as regards the currently predominant Anglo-Saxon approach. The question is not academic, for if the Anthroposophical Movement is to contribute anything to a contemporary understanding of finance, surely it can only do so by exemplifying in its own arrangements a certain anthroposophical logic, one, moreover, that leads rather than follows the world's understanding of such matters.

Central to our deliberations was Rudolf Steiner's own conception of economic and financial matters at the Christmas Foundation Meeting. Because they are based on a spiritual scientific approach to finance, might his insights not provide a benchmark of good practice? The way to achieving this cannot rest on private conversations or personal interpretations alone, but requires the intuitions that can come when insights are consciously shared in the context of the Michael School itself (the meeting was for members of the School active in economic life).

Looking at these subjects over the nine sessions gave rise to a number of key questions:

- Are the Sections national or worldwide?
- Is the School to be funded through or outside the Anthroposophical Society?
- Should the Society take title to money given for Section research?
- What is the effect of making the Society a not-for-profit legal entity in terms of the constraints that it must then operate under?

To what use should compulsory dues be put, as opposed to freely donated ones?
What is the effect when legacy money is put into buildings rather than research?
How are individuals to be funded?
Do we use structures that control or those that trust?
If we understand that the School is the soul of the Society, then what is its spirit, and how is the Society as a body able to become a fit vessel for its Soul-Spirit?

A mixture of pre-distributed texts, spontaneous contributions and blackboard sketches provided a wide-ranging perspective, within which, however, two images in particular came into focus:

At first they appeared distinct, but as the meeting progressed they seemed to merge. One¹ was the body, soul, spirit analogy of the Society to the human being, resulting in Society (body), School (soul) and Michael (spirit).²

The other was of a 'bank for the sections',³ meaning not the kind of bank that takes title to its money flows or seeks to grow its own balance sheet, but a channel for funds intended for so-called 'professional' sectional activity (i.e. not the General Section and not for 1st Class participation). A main point of this arrangement is that the Society thus offers a legal, earthly vehicle for the School so that the School may be in but not of the earth, just as one's body provides an earthly home for one's soul-spirit.

Clarification in all these areas would have a profoundly orientating effect upon the membership at large, halting the ebbing away of enthusiasm typical when there is lack of agreement about the basis of anthroposophical work. More significantly for humanity at large, if the anthroposophical movement could give rise to a worldwide associative economy centred on the Goetheanum and made visible in its finances, this would hardly be without effect in today's financial and economic culture. The sophistication of a spiritual scientific understanding of economic life is surely capable of 'real world' recognition. Thereby, too, the Darwinism that pervades modern economic life might meet its match since a working example soon replicates.

An Economics Section?

Given the adverse power of the materialistic conception underlying economic life today, an extra session was held to consider the question of a dedicated Section for Economics within the School of Spiritual Science.

Is not the power economics takes to itself by distancing itself from the social sciences generally a circumstance that we need to match? Paradoxically perhaps, this promises to bring us to an experience of economic life opposite to the one we so often feel today, namely as something inherently social and Christian? The likely effect would be both an inner strengthening and an outer signalling of the significance of Rudolf Steiner's economic impulse.

¹ From Marc Desaulles, treasurer of the Swiss Society.

² By this analogy the concept of anthroposophical institutions as formal parts of the Society does not arise. Most are charities in their own right with as much need for donations as the Society/School so looking to them as a major source of Section funding is problematical. (A more concrete concept might be freely remitted royalties.)

³ Introduced by Marion Briggs, a representative of the UK Arts Section.

The response of the meeting to the prospect of forming such a Section was mixed. While many spoke in favour, others were concerned that such a development could be divisive and premature. The creation of such a Section could only be undertaken as a karmically inclusive endeavour, of course. But in the view of many of those present, the degree of seriousness and commitment with which our work in the economic field is undertaken needs now to be heightened, if we are to address the humanity-wide abyss that is appearing before us because, arguably, heed has not been paid to the economic path that Steiner initiated.