

The Challenges of Christmas 1923

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In the spring and early summer of 2014, Marc Desaules – Treasurer and General Secretary of the Swiss Anthroposophical Society – spoke of his understanding of the Deed of Rudolf Steiner in regard to the conditions of membership of the School of Spiritual Science. Beginning of May he published an article in the Newsletter of the Swiss Anthroposophical Society, and on 16 May he spoke at Rudolf Steiner House, in London. Both commentaries are published here in one place, as they seem to belong together. The transcript of the London lecture was made by Kim Chotzen, and the editing of this edition is by Christopher Houghton Budd.

Being a Representative: The Only Condition?

Source: 'Anthroposophie' – Newsletter of the Swiss Anthroposophical Society, May 2014.

Over the last few years the Anthroposophical Society and the School of Spiritual Science have been striving anew to become more conscious and clearly contoured in their identity. This striving was echoed in the choice of the Theme for the Year, *The Identity of the Anthroposophical Society*, and taken further in the organisation of the Michael Conference in 2012. There were quite practical consequences: the leadership organs were characterised more precisely, reporting and lines of accountability were reformed, and the statutes were adjusted accordingly. And in February the invitation to a series of three discussions at the Goetheanum was issued, the subject being a set of questions aimed at intensifying and further developing the life of the School of Spiritual Science. At the first meeting on March 25th, the focus was on “being a representative” (*Representant sein*).

The life of the anthroposophical matter¹ (*Anthroposophische Sache*) is shaped by the double nature of the Society and the School, two social-spiritual spaces that belong to each other, and affect each other. Their form and tasks are openly characterised in general, and described in detail, in the founding statutes of the Christmas Conference, 1923.²

As far as life is concerned, much depends on how the threshold between the two ‘spaces’ is formed, and what crossing this threshold demands of one. Here we will endeavour to shine a light on the transition from Society to School, because this has quite a decisive effect on the life of the anthroposophical matter and thus influences the future of the anthroposophical movement. This transition is determined by the conditions for membership of the School. So what are these?

First of all there is a pre-condition, which is already mentioned in the Founding Statutes. The School “will consist of Classes. Upon application, members of the Society can be accepted into these classes when they have been members for a period determined by the Goetheanum Leadership.”³ So in the first place, one can become a member of the School via membership of the Society, but only when one has been a member for at least two years, as was decided at the time.

There are also commitments bound up with membership of the School – such as loyalty to the Goetheanum, or the manner of working with the contents. These are some of the consequences. But what are the actual conditions that determine acceptance into the School, that mark the threshold between the Society and School, or in other words, the threshold between the two ‘spiritual spaces.’ Since 2002, three conditions are referred to in varying formulations. In the blue handbook for example:

¹ *Sache* does not translate well. Closest might be ‘thing’ or, as here, ‘matter’. But ‘cause’, which is now usual, introduces a nuance not found in the German word.

² At the Swiss Anthroposophical Society annual conference in February 2014, the attempt was made to investigate the consequences of the fact that these two ‘spaces’ become completely public, with a particular view to establishing what impact being public has on their *esoteric* aspect. The Swiss Society has planned a series of related conferences in the years to 2023 – see www.anthroposophie.ch.

³ Paragraph 5 Statutes of 28th December 1923.

*“Leading a meditative life, having the will to know and change oneself; having the will to work with others in initiatives and in knowledge; having the will to represent Anthroposophy in life.”*⁴ In the “Wochenschrift: “[...] to lead a meditative life, to live in keeping with and be a representative of the anthroposophical matter”⁵, or on the Homepage of the School: “Conditions of membership of the School are [...] one’s own meditative practice, the readiness to work together and a commitment to Anthroposophy, and to being its representative.”⁶

Since then, these three conditions are taken to describe the threshold explicitly, and are also used worldwide by those responsible in the conversations with those seeking admittance to the School. The life of the School of Spiritual Science is clearly shaped by these conditions, as is, equally, that of the Anthroposophical Society. In the context of the current focus on and development of thinking, the question is whether these conditions correspond to the Founding Impulse of the Christmas Conference of 1923, and whether, as a consequence, the contemporary development of the anthroposophical movement is helped or hindered by them.

Meditative Practice as a Condition?

Before I consider this condition, it is important to note the significance of inner work and of individual striving for anthroposophical spiritual scientific knowledge. These two are intimately bound up with the Christmas Conference. The Foundation Stone Verse itself exhorts us powerfully to practise: “*Spirit Recollection... Contemplation... Beholding.*”⁷ And Rudolf Steiner draws attention to the particular rhythms that will allow a deepened relationship to the World Words of the Foundation Stone Meditation. On the third day of the Founding conference he added:

*“You will find, my dear friends, that when you pay attention to the inner rhythms lying in these verses, when you experience these rhythms in your soul and enter into the corresponding meditation, that is to say the peaceful thoughtful contemplation within yourself, then these verses are to be experienced as the expression of world (cosmic) mysteries, in so far as these cosmic mysteries arise in the human soul as human self- knowledge.”*⁸

In this way, Rudolf Steiner drew attention to the inner work – and once again the character of his words is noteworthy: he spoke quite gently, leaving listeners free, openly describing what he meant by meditation so that nothing remained hidden, and doing so – this is the decisive point – completely without any demand or condition. In this way, it becomes very clear that the inner work is to be considered as an utterly *invulnerable* activity of the free human being.

Despite the most careful research, I have yet to find any clues indicating that this meditative practice might be a condition – not even through conversations with diverse friends. Not in the records pertaining to the Christmas Conference itself, nor in those relating to the formation of the School up until September 1924; neither in lectures and written documents nor in the Class Lessons is the meditative practice referred to as a condition of admittance.

Something I did become aware of in the course of this research which does have significant bearing on the question, is a side comment Rudolf Steiner made as he answered a question on the form of the School in December 1923:

*“The members of the different classes will be scattered all over the place – they will be members, for their pupilship is their entirely private affair, but they will be members – they will be spread out everywhere.”*⁹

⁴ Die Freie Hochschule für Geisteswissenschaft Goetheanum, Verlag am Goetheanum, Dornach 2008, p. 127.

⁵ Wochenschrift «Das Goetheanum», Nr. 41, 13. Oktober 2012, p. 3.

⁶ www.goetheanum.org/Freie-Hochschule-fuer-Geisteswissenschaft.300.0.html.

⁷ Grundsteinlegung, 25.12.1923, GA 260, p. 60.

⁸ Fortsetzung der Gründungsversammlung, 27.12.1923, GA 260, p. 107.

⁹ Sitzung des Vorstandes und der Generalsekretäre, 25.12.1923, GA 260, p. 80.

Here the point is made how little being a *pupil* – in which concept I include meditation – has to do with the School itself.

It has been said to me that Rudolf Steiner had asked various people: “Are you accustomed to meditating?” This may be the case, but the question can scarcely have been meant as a condition for membership of the School; there is not a single comment to this effect in his many words on the subject, so that it can only have been a matter of individual conversations of an entirely personal nature.

Considered from all these perspectives it becomes clear that – although the inner path had great importance for Rudolf Steiner – it was in no way ever set as a *condition* for entry into the School. It is therefore noteworthy that meditative practice has become a condition.

I can see a possible explanation in the dedicated and loving continuation of traditional ways that were customary *prior to* the Christmas Conference. The fact that the minutes and the lectures relating to the Christmas Conference 1923 and the forming of the School in 1924, were first published in 1944/45 – more than twenty years later – makes this understandable. We are all aware, however – and this is part of the picture – that it was precisely these traditional ways that led to the desolate condition of the Society in the early 1920s, and also to the burning of the First Goetheanum.

Could it be that these traditional ways, at least to some degree, are still holding sway: A School membership which understands itself above all to be a pupilship, but thereby holds the School itself hostage for its own purposes, sliding into a state of self-focus, and losing sight of its role in relation to the needs of the world?

‘Maintain Connection’ as a Condition?

Similarly Rudolf Steiner makes no mention, in the context of School membership, of “maintaining connection” as a condition. In other contexts he writes of those members “*who wish to be active in the Anthroposophical Society.*”¹⁰ Here he formulates the duties for such members, where something in the manner of a second condition can be found in:

*“Such individuals must become clear as to the general spiritual situation of people today. They must have a clear picture of the tasks of Anthroposophy. They will, as much as possible, maintain connection with other active members of the Society. For such individuals it must be well-nigh impossible to say: It does not interest me if Anthroposophy and her bearers are painted in a false light or even slandered by opponents.”*¹¹

Could it be, therefore, that the concept of members ‘who wish to be active’ refers to School members? A precise analysis leaves this hypothesis looking unlikely, however. On the one hand, the frame for these activities is clearly defined as being *within the Society*, and on the other hand, no relationship to the School is either directly stated or implied through the context. And if indeed the aforementioned quotation were to be compellingly understood as a condition for School membership, then it remains inexplicable why the other three duties receive no mention.

There is something to be said for understanding this description of those ‘who wish to be active’ *within the Society*, where one’s duties are still formulated and prescribed from outside so to speak, as a kind of preliminary schooling for the School. But with the step of becoming a member of the School, these duties are replaced by the sole condition of “Willing to be a representative”, a condition set inwardly – ‘I’ imbued, freely determined and enacted.

¹⁰ 4. Mitgliederbrief, 3.2.1924, GA 260a, p. 48-49.

¹¹ See footnote 9.

‘Being a Representative’ as the sole Condition!

The word *Representative* first appears in Rudolf Steiner’s work after the Christmas Conference in January 1924, closely tied to the formation of the School of Spiritual Science, and always emphatically stated as a condition – expressed in such terms as – ‘The wish to be a representative of the anthroposophical matter.’ Rudolf Steiner does speak or write of conditions (that is, in the plural), but he only explicitly formulates this one. It occurs over and over with a variety of nuances, be it in lectures, in written missives, as the introduction or closing of a Class Lesson. Here are a few spoken examples:

“But the School of Spiritual Science should consist of people who thoroughly consider themselves to be representatives of the anthroposophical matter”, or: “It must be possible that the Leadership of the School of Spiritual Science can say to the one or the other who do not find their way to be representative of the anthroposophical matter: you are of course welcome in the Anthroposophical Society, but unfortunately you cannot be a member of the Class.” And written in the Newsletter: *“What matters above all is that Class Members really declare themselves willing to be representatives for the care of Anthroposophy in the world.”*

Such comments can be found in the lecture of January 30th 1924, in the Newsletter of the 3rd and 10th of February, in lectures on March 29th in Prague, July 18th in Arnhem, August 12th in Torquay, and August 24th in London, but also in the context of nine Class Lessons (held in three different places). Overall the formulations are similar, and all linked with ‘Being a Representative’.

Earnestness is repeatedly mentioned, especially in the introduction to the Class Lessons, along with the ensuing commitment to “Loyalty to the School, to the Executive or to the Leadership of the Goetheanum.” In this way a member of the School of Spiritual Science becomes a partner in a free contractual relationship, which comes into existence between the individual and the Leadership, through the individual’s ‘Being Representative’:

“Those who wish to be a member of the School must also be a real representative of the anthroposophical matter in the world. Do not look on this as an infringement of human freedom. The freedom must be mutual. The individual, who becomes a member of the School, is a free individual, but the leadership must also be free.”¹²

Here Rudolf Steiner demonstrates again just how respectfully he worked with freedom; whenever he set an absolute demand, he also explained why it was justified.

In summary, with all of this in mind, it can be seen that ‘The wish to be a representative of the anthroposophical matter’, stands as the one single clearly formulated condition in the founding impulse of the School. That being the case, in the future should this not be applied as the only valid condition?

Were it to be so, this would represent a marked shift of emphasis, whereby too the quality of the work within and coming out of the School would be fundamentally re-invigorated. Particularly today, in a time when there is a striving for the intensification and further development of the life of the School of Spiritual Science, this question needs, I believe, to be considered seriously.

Are we ready to take this leap into the unknown? Or, to put it differently, to enable the Christmas Conference to be renewed here and now, and in this way?

¹² Torquay, Lecture 12.8.1924, GA 260a, p. 359.

Open Society, Open School

16 May 2014, Rudolf Steiner House, London, England

I would like to introduce my colleague Marc Desaulles from Switzerland. He's the General Secretary and Treasurer of the Swiss Anthroposophical Society. I'm not going to say much except that this has been a long day for him and we agreed to go to 9 p.m. on the dot, if that's ok. We met at London City Airport at 7:30 this morning and took the light railway through the financial district, to get a sense of London as a financial centre. Then we got off at Greenwich, where real time begins, and had breakfast in front of the Royal Naval College – an impressive sight, reminder of how things were all those centuries ago. Then when we took a boat all the way up the Thames past all the emblems of the British Empire to the Houses of Parliament. I then planned to get on a very modern London bus, but then I thought, no, no we have to go to the Temple church. So then we made a detour to Temple, also an important part of English history. And then we got into a London taxi, actually a Mercedes mini-bus pretending to be a London taxi! Since then we have been working all day on financial themes linked to the Christmas Conference. I've known Marc Desaulles for more than thirty years. We've been close companions related to the Christmas Conference and that will be the main background for what he says this evening. So, welcome Marc. – Christopher Houghton Budd.

Good evening. I hope my English will be not too 'Frenchy', not too 'Swissy', and loud enough so that the people at the back can understand through my wording what I want to say. If it's not the case, just put your hand up and I will speak more loudly.

Looking back to this important event, the Christmas Conference Meeting, I want first to say that for me this is the main event in Steiner's life as regards the commitment he undertook. Not only for him, not only for the anthroposophical movement, the Anthroposophical Society, School, but also for the entire esoteric/exoteric situation of modern mankind. The Christmas Conference Meeting is such a turning point of time that I think we still do not measure it in all its complete consequences. When I say turning point of time, I am taking the wording that Rudolf Steiner used at the end of the Christmas Conference Meeting, when he said,

"This Christmas Conference is to be for us a festival of consecration, not merely for the beginning of the New Year (he's speaking on the 1st of January), but for the beginning of a cosmic turning point of time to which we want to devote ourselves."

I say it again:

"This Christmas Conference which is to be for us a festival of consecration, not merely for the beginning of the New Year, but for the beginning of a cosmic turning point of time to which we want to devote ourselves."

This use of the words 'turning point of time' is not new. If we go through the proceedings of the Christmas Conference, they arise already in the Foundation Stone. So we have a link to that formulation that links us to the Christ Event in Palestine two thousand years ago. But here Steiner adds a word before. He says 'cosmic': It's not just the turning point of time we have in mind when we look back to 2000 years ago. Now it becomes a cosmic turning point of time, meaning what's happening now not only has consequences for the earth but also for the future evolution of the cosmos, if I understand it right. But he also adds another significant word when he says, 'for the *beginning* of a cosmic turning point of time.' This brings it to our time, makes it true for now, the moment when we find ourselves at the end of that Christmas Conference Meeting on the 1st of January, 1924. At that moment of consecration, we now live at the beginning of the cosmic turning point of time.

Right Entry into the Spiritual Worlds

But it is not enough just stop at those few words. What did he mean? What did he mean when he looked back to the Christmas Conference meeting, that was just ending on the 1st of January 1924, to be able to use these strong words, words with this kind of strength, to attest what had just happened?

Maybe we can understand these words in the direction needed when we think to the content of the lecture in which he is speaking. He is speaking at the end of the evening lecture on the 1st of January, the last evening lecture of the Christmas Conference meeting. And the title of this lecture is (it was given afterwards, this title, but it arises out of the content of it) – ‘On the Right Entry into the Spiritual World: the Responsibility Incumbent on Us’. ‘On the Right Entry into the Spiritual World’ – this was the theme of the lecture. And then having spoken of the responsibility that the Western part of the world has, following the situation when the Eastern path gave the West the responsibility for the future link to the spiritual world, there now arises the moment where the West has taken up this responsibility and has to give an answer at the level, not only of our earthly understanding of spirituality but for the next step in evolution, in human evolution on earth, where we in the West had received this responsibility from the East. This is the content of the 1st January lecture, at the end of which he spoke those strong words. And I think those words, ‘the turning point of time that cosmically now has a beginning at the end of the Christmas Conference Meeting’, is about the change in the *right way* to enter the spiritual world in the future.

Now, if we look back in the history of the link to the spiritual world, we have the situation that with the 15th century, something had to happen in the evolution of the Mystery streams that had to take place for the first time in the evolution of the earth because something was happening on earth with humanity and in the spiritual world that was not enabling a further step in the same direction as had been the case until then. And this is the fact that in humanity a sense for freedom is developing. Freedom first arises as a sense in the human being with the Renaissance, with the 15th century. And this had consequences for the way the spiritual world could continue to speak to human beings or the way human beings on earth could continue to have a link with the spiritual world.

This sense of freedom that is growing in humanity brought the Mystery streams to the realisation that something had to be done. And what was needed was to close the Mystery schools because it was not possible to continue. What was happening in these Mystery places was creating fear in the human souls in which the sense for freedom was starting to arise. Because there is a problem: When freedom comes about, freedom needs to be able to look through, freedom doesn’t support, doesn’t accept, when something is kept secret, occult. The human being growing into freedom needs to see through, and when something is kept occult, hidden, secret, either he just turns his attention elsewhere, or he wants to know, or, if it’s too strong, he becomes fearful. And this was not a good ground for the next step of evolution for humanity. And therefore, at the risk that humanity would no longer have a link with the gods, the link that was there was closed off. This step is precisely described by Rudolf Steiner in the beginning of 1924. And this sets the stage. So we have a huge long Mystery stream that stops at a moment in time in the 15th century.

From Belief to Science

And now, at the end of the 19th century going into the 20th century, let’s have a look to Rudolf Steiner. His first step, we can say, is to link with the theme of freedom. He not only gives freedom a positive place in the good sense, in the feeling; he also elevates it to a science, a completely new science of the soul by observing scientifically what’s happening in the soul and elevating that to a real science. He begins to open a field linked to the need to make a place for freedom on the level where everything has to find a place by the end of the 19th century, namely on the level of a science. Everything he would have done on the level of belief regarding freedom would have had no future; this was a past story. Humanity is going onto a level of knowledge. This goes with freedom. Freedom is growing and to stay free, we have to become conscious of things around us, we cannot just believe in them. He writes his *Philosophy of Freedom*, giving a ground, by looking back to all the history about who spoke what and how long and how well and how wrongly about freedom, and building out of that, out of his own research, a science. It’s a science of the soul set up at that point for freedom.

And then step-by-step, he goes further. Now there is a huge challenge because Steiner, with his sensitivity, with his way of mastering intelligence, he now, from that first step of giving a ground for freedom, builds up step by step a science of the occult, a science of the invisible. But not in a way that

the invisible has just to be accepted as something that comes from the gods, boom!, and merely arrives, but as something that can be understood. Starting with a clear observation of thinking in the soul, he enlarges the field of observation and makes a link to the invisible, step-by-step, stone-by-stone, building up a science, a science of the occult, a science of the invisible.

This is a huge challenge because he has to speak about something that was bringing fear, because it was not understandable. It was powerful but not understandable. And now he has to go, not too fast, because it would have again awakened fear; but fast enough so that he comes forward, because he has a lot to bring. And he builds up this science, step by step, with the people who are able to listen and to understand, who are able to train themselves in thinking to reach the region out of which he is starting to speak. He speaks about angels, he speaks about the history of humanity, he speaks about a lot of things that are in fact not visible but which make sense and which, through making sense, build up slowly but surely a science of the invisible. To that he gave the name 'anthroposophy' or 'spiritual science' and that is compatible with freedom.

This is the challenge. To speak of something that we cannot see but that makes enough sense so that we can think it even if we don't see it. So we can think of an angel, we can understand what it is, we can understand the link we have as a human being to that being without having to believe in it. It is a complex science and we should not underestimate what has been done for humanity with that step by Rudolf Steiner. It's a huge work that has been done to create this science. It really has been created, step-by-step, word-by-word, concept by concept, to reopen a link to the spiritual world – by seeing, by understanding, by making it clear, by making it a science. And we all, if we understand that, have to be aware that it is not easy. As in every science, we have to learn the beginning; we have to start with the beginning and enter step by step into the complexity of the science. And the complexity of anthroposophy is huge.

We have all trained ourselves to reach that huge understanding. Even if it's small, it's a huge understanding. And you meet that every time you speak with someone who did not yet make this kind of training to understand it; he just comes with an a priori from here or from there and just wishes everything away. But this is just because he speaks about a science for which he or she did not make sufficient training to come into it and to make sense of it on the scientific level.

This is the reason why all the books by Steiner are so difficult, because the reading of them is already a training of the thinking, and if you think you can just read it and understand it, you will not. You have to will; you have to put your will into action to understand what is meant. And when you do that enough, then you start to see relations that make sense. This is a kind of training of the thinking.

Therefore, we can say we owe to Rudolf Steiner, and him only, that Intelligence has been lifted to a science of the spirit. He did that in the history that is now behind us. He brought the level of thinking to a level of a science in that realm, and he built through that a huge body of thought that we can call today spiritual science; that we can learn, that doesn't make us fearful, that is interesting, and that everyone who wills, who makes a step in it, will find interesting. Or one stays outside because one is not able to will enough freely to come into it. This is also possible.

The Earth as a Sun

Now, with freedom we have another problem. Not on the earth but in the spiritual world. The fact that humanity came to freedom creates a huge problem for the spiritual guidance of humanity. It's really difficult for all the beings that are there to understand what's happening. Because freedom is something new in evolution. And to be able to describe the situation, I have to open a window about the whole evolution. It's something new that comes into evolution thanks to the whole story of incarnation of the divine, the story of the Christ, what in spiritual science we call the Mystery of Golgotha, into which I don't want to go now. But this has huge consequences for the human being, for his own freedom, but also for the beings in the spiritual world. It has a consequence for these spirits in the sense that not all those that accompany humanity, that are present in the guidance of

humanity, are able to understand what's happening with the change when the Christ comes to earth, incarnates in a human being. This makes that the central source of light that was coming out of the sun leaves the sun and comes into the earth and makes that the earth starts to become a sun because of the power that is now here. But you have to imagine what happens for the spirits who are not incarnating on the earth. The reference point is going away. It's changing its place. Some spirits are able to follow what's happening and come with the change. But there are also spirits that are not able to do so, that are not able to follow what's happening. Not because they are free not to understand, but because they don't have the faculty, the capacity to come with that change of reference. And this is the point described by Steiner also, where now on earth there is a dividing happening between the spirits that come with that change of the centre of the universe, we could say – from the sun to the earth – and the spirits who cannot come with that.

We know from evolution that already before, that is in each main former incarnation of our earth – the ancient Saturn, the ancient Sun, the ancient Moon – not all the beings are going at the same speed in evolution and some are remaining at a different stage. And now this is also happening on earth. This is what I just described before: it makes now for humanity, for our time, a completely new and special situation because when we as humanity will start again to have a link to the spiritual world, we will be faced with a new division among the beings in the spiritual world, those following the change of reference I described and those not.

In a time where we think the main striving is to link again with the spiritual side of life, after having had our period of darkness so that we can become free, we start to see here and there signs of a new dawn and are now about to find a way to have again a link to the spiritual world.

But this is not the only challenge. To link again to the spiritual world with a kind of perception, we will not be able to recognize what will be perceived because from outside an angel that comes with evolution and an angel that doesn't come with evolution look the same. They are both angels, the one comes with Christ, the other not. The one comes with the evolution of man on earth, the other not, staying linked to the past wisdom of humanity.

And here we face the major challenge for the next step in the evolution of humanity, present behind all the troubles of the 20th century, forming the background of the human condition on earth today. How do we now find the right relationship, the right entry into the spiritual world? We can train ourselves to reach it and to develop new faculties, but this is not enough. Once we will have them, how will we be able to recognize what's happening there – what's truthful, what's untruthful, what's real, what's illusion? And this is the second challenge by which Rudolf Steiner was confronted. The first was to deal with freedom, to create a solid ground for it followed by a body of science, enabling humanity to enlarge its understanding and to work consciously towards the spiritual world. He teaches us how to do that, how to train ourselves to make our faculties again such that enable us to perceive into realms that are invisible. But once we arrive there, we will have a problem, and he has there to find a 'parada' – is that an English word? – a 'trick'. He has to find a solution to that problem.

The Christmas Conference

I claim this solution is the Christmas Conference. Until the Christmas Conference Steiner was dealing with that problem, knowing it would happen. He speaks about the problem of this division among the guiding spirits of the evolution and the consequences already in 1911. He tries to counter the problem by doing something at the end of 1911 with a small group of people. This is his attempt on the 15th December 1911, called the 'Stiftung' – to form an instance where what appears in the world stays true to what lives within the soul; but this doesn't succeed.

But life continues. Now comes the war, now comes all the rest that follows and we arrive at the burning of the first Goetheanum. And Rudolf Steiner needs what he wanted to achieve at the end of 1911, now he needs it. And he puts everything now in a new way, saying that the only way to go further is to make everything open. No 'cachotterie', nothing secret anymore, everything open,

completely open. And the second thing is, we have to deepen the link with the esoteric part of life. The challenge is to rebuild the Goetheanum but also a new Anthroposophical Society. In his words:

“We must be absolutely clear about the fact that our Society, above all else, will be given the task of combining the greatest conceivable openness with true and genuine esotericism.”

Or, another way of saying that, just a few paragraphs later:

“How can we combine full openness with the profoundest, most serious and inward esotericism? To achieve this it will be necessary to banish from our gatherings in the future anything that smacks in any way of the atmosphere of a clique.”

And then he goes on, setting out these two gestures through the Christmas Conference Meeting 1923/24, the stage for the General Anthroposophical Society and the School of Spiritual Science we still have today. This is very critical. But if we look at the way we are organized and give expression to these in our days, I would say that, in my experience, we still have very much to do to match the intentions of that Christmas Conference Meeting. I don't know your experience, but in my understanding this is the 'parada', the 'trick' of Rudolf Steiner, namely, with these two gestures – full openness and profoundest esotericism – to create a possibility to face the problem of the different sort of spirits we will find in the spiritual world. What I mean will become, I hope, more obvious in the course of this talk.

First let's now look at one or two aspects of it so that you can see what's meant by full openness. We know already by reading the statutes that everything is now open. In the statutes we find details about the School of Spiritual Science. We don't only find things about the Society, but also about the School, about the Three Classes, the way we come into these, the way that everything will be public.

Everything is there, and is open, visible for everyone; the Society was to be registered so this would have been a ground for everyone. This is one aspect of this openness. Often we think to understand Rudolf Steiner with the Christmas Conference when we say the Society is completely open, and the School completely esoteric. I don't think this is true. For him it was completely clear, the *whole* of the Society and the School is open and the whole deepens the esoteric way of working. When he gives an example for the esoteric way of working, he speaks about the Society and the way he signs the cards of the twelve thousand members, he speaks of the esoteric trait, accent – he uses the wording 'esoterische Zug' in German – this permeates the whole Society and the whole School. So we have to leave behind this wrong image, Society open, School closed. This is surely not what Steiner meant. It is much more everything open and everything closed. How do we do that? We have here a problem. And to manage that problem is to deal with the modern spiritual situation of the human being, which is what Steiner did with the Christmas Conference meeting.

From Pupil to Member

Now let's look at another aspect: before the meeting he was a teacher. But what does he become with the Christmas Conference? He becomes the leader of the School. He's not the teacher of the School. You will find nowhere the concept of teacher after the Christmas Conference. He becomes leader. This is a common public word. Before the Christmas Conference he had pupils, personal pupils, pupils in the manner of a school. After, the School of Spiritual Science has members, it has no pupils.

And here he is very precise in the wording. He says: “The members of the different classes will be scattered all over the place; they will be members, for their pupilship is their own private affair, but they will be members.” We can see, in the way he describes it, that he now speaks of a membership of the School of Spiritual Science. So there we are not pupils, despite the contrary image many have. We still hear that, we can hear that in our gatherings. But it's not the case. At least, it is not to be found in the proceedings of the Christmas Conference Meeting. Pupilship may become our intimate link to the guiding spirit of our time, but for the School of Spiritual Science it is our own private affair.

Another aspect concerns the vows that were there before, sometimes also written – all this completely disappears with the Christmas Conference Meeting. In the School of Spiritual Science, there is no teacher, there is a leader, there are no pupils, but there are members, there are also no vows. Instead there is a free contract between the leadership and the members and this is also precisely described: a free contract. And what is the ground for that contract? This is the *one* condition that Rudolf Steiner makes obvious and explicit in many places, something that arises only with the Christmas Conference Meeting – he doesn't use that word before, with one exception to which I will come back – this is to be a representative (*Repräsentant sein* in German). 'Representant' is a French word; it is not a word that we usually use in German. But Steiner uses that precise wording after the Christmas Conference Meeting, a lot of times, in many places, even in the content of lessons, but also in the content of lectures he was giving to prepare and to describe what he was trying to do with the School of Spiritual Science. To be a representative of, to be willing to be a representative of the anthroposophical thing or matter. In German it is *Sache*. I have no English version of that. I just give it out of my English, but it comes in many places, the way to be this, willing to be a representative of the anthroposophical thing or matter.

(From the audience, "cause".)

Yes, we can translate it with 'cause', but if we take the German, there is a subtle difference with that word because if we say 'cause', we have in cause, a kind of active principle, that we don't have in the German word. The German word is 'Sache', it's an object, it's neutral. This may be a little point, but it is an important one. It shows how Steiner was conscious in his use of words. By willing to be a representative of something that is active, you become a kind of servant of that. This he was surely not meaning with 'being a representative of'; he was meaning you have to find in yourself the force to stand for what you are willing to stand for. 'Sache', 'thing' is not active in itself, it leaves you free.

This is very important if we think in terms of sects. Am I just an agent for something that works through me? Or am I free and in front of the world as a representative of something that I have chosen to be representative of, but which has no power over me, where I have to find the power to stand for that thing out of myself? So maybe we can find a better word to translate that very important wording because it is too often translated as 'cause'.

To be representative

And now this 'being a representative of', this new wording that he uses, what does he mean by that? What I just said is that teacher becomes leader, pupils become members. We also have no vows; instead a free contract and the condition for that contract is to be willing to be a representative. These are all categories of public life. We have not invented a new word. And these words were chosen by Steiner. He chose open words belonging to public life. Meaning he also made the School open because this is the condition to become a member of the School, this free contract between the leadership and the membership, this 'being a representative of the anthroposophical matter'.

How is that to be understood? To make a step further, let's now have a look at the other side, this inward deepening, this profoundest esotericism. Rudolf Steiner himself shows how to do it, he makes himself an example of it. Before the Christmas Conference, he was outside the Society. He was teacher; he had pupils. He was speaking and the others were doing. He was not engaging himself in doing things directly. He was even not signing for the Anthroposophical Society. Afterwards he becomes not only a member of the Society, he becomes its president, meaning he builds with the members a new body, he creates the statutes and takes up this new thing, goes into it and becomes the main actor, the one who takes on him everything that before was done by others. He does that all, taking around him only a few colleagues, not very well-known anthroposophists, some with whom he could work together, most of them new for all the others around him. These were not the old well-known people, these were new people with whom he could work, and he built a council with these people, the Vorstand, confirmed by the acknowledgement of the members who were there, 800 members.

And we know from him, he didn't know what this would have as consequences for the future – because this had never been done before. Someone who had a link with the spiritual guidance of humanity, that this person would also engage in terrestrial local affairs, this was not allowed. This was a strict rule of the old Mystery Schools. But he broke this rule because he saw no other way. Out of the necessity of the situation of our time, he saw this as the only way forward.

In doing so, he opens the door for the new Mysteries. In full openness – respecting the fundamental need of freedom that cannot further deal with secrecy – and in profoundest esotericism – enacting himself the *one* condition of willing to be a representative of the anthroposophical matter – he shows the way forward.

And this is the moment, when this happens through the nine days of the Christmas Conference Meeting, we arrive to the point where he says, “And now, we have the beginning” – looking back on what has happened – “of a cosmic turning point in time, the *beginning of a cosmic turning point of time* to which we want to devote ourselves.” In making this statement, with all is has as background, he is very much aware of the incredible step for humanity that has been achieved through those days.

With the Good Spirits

This step is also seen from the spiritual world, especially by those spirits that can be characterised as good, because they accompany evolution by being fully respectful towards the newly gained faculty of human freedom; these spirits – angels, archangels, archai – cannot act within humanity before a human being himself engages. Otherwise they would not respect his freedom and take control of his perceptions, his thinking, feeling and willing. They are too powerful. So they had to wait. But now, this incredible step of the Christmas Conference Meeting enables those good beings to become active and accompany human engagement with their forces.

If we take a look towards the Regent of the Intelligence who was waiting since the 15th century to be able to have a link again with humanity, Michael, who before was with the Christ on the sun and who was also coming towards the earth with his Cosmic Intelligence but then could do nothing. He had to wait until someone like Steiner first built a science of the thinking that *peu-à-peu*, over three decades, developed into spiritual science. This he did, but it was not sufficient, it was not enough because he also had to engage himself in his work – and Michael was still waiting, respectful of human freedom. Then to wait until, through his Deed of the Christmas Conference Meeting, Rudolf Steiner opened for Michael and all the good spirits who are with him, the possibility to work on earth again directly with humanity. This is the other side, seen from the spiritual world, of that incredible step. We owe to that free conjunction of forces the enormous outcome of the year 1924 – the development of the School of Spiritual Science, the karma lectures, the Letters to Members, the specialised courses for agriculture, curative care, medicine, the priesthood, speech, eurythmy.

This is the beginning of a new era, a new time, a new way to enter into the spiritual world. Not any more by contemplation, which does not allow us to distinguish between the spirits that are dividing since the Mystery of Golgotha, but by engaging and in engaging, those who wait until we engage are the ones we can recognize and will come with us on the path. They are not in front of us – to use an earthly image – they are behind us, helping what we are doing.

Checkmate – the Safe Way

And this is the huge change, the turning point of time that begins with the Christmas Conference Meeting: a complete change for the evolution of humanity. Humanity was always told from outside up to that moment when this guidance was closed off because it was creating fear and problems. And now we arrive to the moment when it can be open again but in a completely other way – not with the thinking but with the will. We enter the New Mysteries and these are the Mysteries of the will. Rudolf Steiner opens that door in a way that it is the beginning of a new entry into the spiritual world. That was the title of that lecture, in which he spoke about the beginning of a cosmic turning point of time.

And this way to enter into the spiritual world is right because it is the only safe way. The only safe way is to avoid being confused by imaginations and intimations of the spiritual world. As the next step in evolution, this will happen, but it will be a source of problems. The safe way, according to what Rudolf Steiner did with the Deed of the Christmas Conference, now goes with the will. We have to engage, this is the safe way. It is as if Rudolf Steiner, aware of the situation, of the power of destruction in the world and around him, even among the anthroposophists, saw that the only way was to set a ‘checkmate’ to those new retarding spirits who could not come with the evolution. And he succeeded by changing the rules of the game, so to speak, by trusting the genuine free human will that comes about when one engages. He received the forces of the spiritual world and five months later he says it was right – first in Paris, then in Arnhem. It was the right step to do; it was the right way to go.

But this is a completely other esoteric. We have to be aware of that. It’s not easy to understand because there is an enormous inertia in social habits: we all continue to do like we always did, with the way as before. And this is true also for the anthroposophical movement. Here I think we have a problem. We have to wake up. We are still pre-Christmas Conference Meeting in many ways of understanding and living in the Anthroposophical Society and the School of Spiritual Science. Where is the full openness and where the profoundest esotericism?

All this stands on the reality of one condition, and it is the only one that counts. A condition embodied by Rudolf Steiner himself when he took the presidency of the Anthroposophical Society. A condition he then formulated in a very singular way to become a member of the School of Spiritual Science: willing to be a representative of the anthroposophical matter. When I say the only one, I say that although it would take another half an hour or so to substantiate, but you can study the whole Christmas Conference proceedings, you will not find the three conditions we have today, for example on the homepage of the Goetheanum under School of Spiritual Science, where – at least in the German version, I didn’t check the English one – the first condition is being a meditant, having a meditative practice; the second one, to stay in relation together among members of the school; and the third one, but not expressed in the same way that Steiner expressed it, to represent anthroposophy in some way.¹³ If you look at these three, you first become a member because you are or want to be a meditant, this is the first condition. Or you become a member because you want to be in a fraternity – this is an old story, this is freemasonry, this is all the things we have had in the old story. It’s not something new or of our times. And the third one, willing to be a representative, you never really get to seriously, or you forget about it, because you have difficulties enough with the first two!

Time to stop dreaming

This is the situation in which we are, yet it is crazy: we are completely in a dream regarding our understanding – I say that strongly – of the intention of the Christmas Conference Meeting. We can look honestly around us: Where is the will of being a representative of the anthroposophical matter within the School, and where within the Society? It is almost unbelievable...

The importance of ‘being a representative’ is not only given by Rudolf Steiner’s deed in taking on the presidency of the Society and by the one condition to become a member of the School of Spiritual Science. There is another place where this word ‘representative’ (Repräsentant) comes in Steiner’s work and it is linked with the wooden statue. And this is not as representative of the anthroposophical matter, but as the Representative of Man. And it’s interesting: the words are the same and the spiritual gestures are the same. We can already perceive that gesture in his attempt in 1911 to enable something that seems impossible. He gives the example, when I say, “I say nothing”, I say something and therefore it becomes wrong. The difficulty is: How can we give expression to something that we carry inwardly and yet stay truthful? And this is the problem with anthroposophy, it has to come into the world but when it comes into the world, we do not find the way to bring it because it becomes wrong when we do it. This was the challenge of 1911. It failed.

¹³ ‘To be a representative of the anthroposophical matter’ is not the same as ‘to represent anthroposophy’. – CHB.

He goes further and creates the wooden statue of the Representative of Man, and with this statue you have exactly the same gesture – the central being that is on one side holding something, on the other side holding something else, while making a step forwards. In this, he achieved the image of what was to be done, but he still did not bring that about ‘efficiently’ among the members. And then in the Christmas Conference Meeting, it becomes, not the Representative of Man, but the gesture of the human being: If I want to find the right entry into the spiritual world, I have to find this gesture, this position in me when willing to be a representative of the anthroposophical matter. But this I can only do if I make a step forward, if I become active, yet not knowing the consequences of what I will do. The condition to be a member of the School is also the attitude for a right entry into the spiritual world and to a deepest esotericism.

We can perceive out of that the huge challenge we have in front of us for the anthroposophical movement, the Anthroposophical Society and the School of Spiritual Science, if we would just take seriously what Rudolf Steiner did with the Christmas Conference Meeting. It’s a huge field of things to do, of a way to stand for, and we have in front of us, now, nine years left until the moment when we will be able to celebrate the hundred years since the Christmas Conference Meeting. I think we can prepare ourselves year by year to become more and more aware of what *was* in fact intended there by Rudolf Steiner for our time; what he *did*? Because he did do it: The Christmas Conference succeeded completely but the men and women around him did not completely understand what he was doing. It was just too much because it was completely another way than before: You use the forms of the past but you change them in a way that adapts them for the future. This he did and I think we can learn that in the years that are coming.

The last sentence of the Foundation Stone may resonate with a sense of more engagement in the background of what being a representative of the anthroposophical matter means or could mean for us.

*Light-giving,
Christ Sun
Warm thou our hearts
Enlighten thou our heads
That good may become
What we from our hearts would found
And from our heads direct
With aim-filled willing.*

Thank you.

CHB Note:

The last line quoted by Marc says ‘With aim-filled will’. When I suggested changing this to ‘With single purpose’, Marc asked where, then, is the all-important reference to ‘will’ or ‘willing’? My answer was that ‘with single purpose’ implies a resolve of the will but that translation is an ever-vexed question. Does one follow the syllables, the meaning, or the poetry? The version Marc used derives from George Adam’s 1927 ‘classic’:

*O Light Divine!
O Sun of Christ!
Warm thou our hearts
Enlighten thou our heads
That good may become
What we from hearts would found
And from our heads direct
With single purpose*

Here is the original German by Steiner’s own hand¹⁴ with, on the left, the syllable count and, on the right, some thoughts of mine that try, but don’t quite succeed, to meet all three considerations:

4	<i>Goettliches Licht</i>	<i>God-given Light</i>
4	<i>Christus Sonne</i>	<i>Christ’s own Sun</i>
8	<i>Erwaerme unsere Herzen</i>	<i>Bring warmth into our hearts (short 1 syllable)</i>
8	<i>Erleuchte unsere Haupter</i>	<i>Bring light into our heads (short 2 syllables)</i>
4	<i>Dass gut werde</i>	<i>That good may be</i>
5	<i>Was wir aus Herzen</i>	<i>What we from our hearts</i>
2	<i>gruenden</i>	<i>would found</i>
3	<i>Aus Hauptern</i>	<i>from our heads</i>
6	<i>Zielvoll fuehren wollen</i>	<i>would with full will enact</i>

There is also a second (final?) version¹⁵, again with a syllable-matching exercise by me:

4	<i>Goettliches Licht</i>	<i>God-given Light</i>
4	<i>Christus-Sonne</i>	<i>Christ’s own Sun</i>
3	<i>Erwaerme</i>	<i>Enwarm Thou</i>
5	<i>Unsere Herzen</i>	<i>Our hearts (short 3 syllables)</i>
3	<i>Erleuchte</i>	<i>Enlighten</i>
5	<i>Unsere Haupter</i>	<i>Our heads (short 3 syllables)</i>
4	<i>Dass gut werde</i>	<i>That good may be</i>
2	<i>Was wir</i>	<i>What we</i>
5	<i>Aus Herzen gruenden</i>	<i>from our hearts would found</i>
2	<i>Was wir</i>	<i>What we</i>
5	<i>Aus Hauptern fuehren</i>	<i>from our heads direct</i>
2	<i>Wollen</i>	<i>And will</i>

¹⁴ *The Christmas Conference*, Anthroposophic Press, New York 1990, p. XII.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. XXIV.