

Reconstitution of the Christmas Society – Other Views¹

By the time you read this, you will probably also have read your Winter 2003 “News for Members,” including the account and minutes of the extraordinary members’ meeting held in Dornach on December 28 and 29, 2002, to re-found and re-register the General Anthroposophical Society by reactivating what is being called the “General Anthroposophical Society (Christmas Conference) and to amend Rudolf Steiner’s original statutes, the Principles. You may have noted that there was considerable protest, that there are several lawsuits pending against the society, and that a Dornach court has already placed a temporary injunction on any further activity by the proposed new body until a number of legal issues have been resolved.

What is behind this? What was upsetting the “small but very vocal minority” that threatened to “obstruct the flow of the meeting”? Since it is central to the practice of Anthroposophy to look at issues from all sides, to engage in open dialogue, and to respect those who hold different views, it seems to me these voices should be heard. I mingled quite freely with some of these members during a recent stay in Germany, so I would like to try to express their concerns, in the fervent hope that I might be objective and fair and, above all, contribute not to further disunity, but to understanding and healing.

The first jolt for many (including my sister) was having to commit themselves in writing to the “Christmas Conference Society” as defined by the *Vorstand* before they were allowed to enter the auditorium and exercise their normal membership rights to participation. About 100 members who could not in good conscience make that commitment (some simply for lack of information about what it meant) had to sign a different card, which made them mere guests without participation/voting rights in their own society. The meeting was not called as required by Article 10: The invitations to extraordinary meetings to be sent out to all members three weeks in advance were not sent. Invitations were only given in the “Goetheanum,” which not nearly all members get, so that many did not know of the meeting.

Objections to the recent proceedings tend to fall under three headings.

- 1) Members question a reconstitution, a reactivation, of the society which they do not understand or see the need for.
- 2) *They question the hasty way this important change is being undertaken*, which does not give them nearly enough time or opportunity to understand and participate.
- 3) They object to many of the proposed changes to the statutes, which seem to them to curtail members’ rights.

The view of most of the questioners *regarding the constitution issue* is precisely the view that was generally held by members and *Vorstand* as recently as the year 2000 – namely, that the General Anthroposophical Society of which we are all members, whose statutes were approved on February 8, 1925 and which was incorporated on March 3, 1925, is the full successor of the society founded on December 28, 1923. This 1923 society was a civil law society only, and thus incapable of business transactions. Yet Rudolf Steiner wanted a society that could transact business and hold monies, and could thus include the publishing house,

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the clinic, and the Building Society. It was one of his main aims in the Christmas Conference to unify the esoteric and exoteric aspects of anthroposophical life, the society and the movement. The way to give it that fuller legal authority, without having to change the original statutes was to make the original GAS the *legal successor* of the already-existing Building Society, which no longer needed a legal body of its own, having chosen to become a subdivision of the GAS, so the GAS took over its, the Building Society's, legal body. This was the complex foundation process Rudolf Steiner was still able to participate in shortly before his death, and the resulting GAS has been considered legal, complete, and functional for 80 years now by legal scholars and informed laypeople alike – the full successor of the 1923 society.

At a 2002 members' meeting (cf. "News for Members", Autumn 2002), in a reversal of its former position, the *Vorstand* began to speak of a separate body that it called "the Christmas Conference Society," which it claims exists in an unrecognized, dormant state *alongside* the General Anthroposophical Society because it, the CCS, was never legally completely merged with the GAS, our familiar society. The *Vorstand* would like to reactivate this CCS, saying this step would also serve to unite the esoteric and exoteric strands of anthroposophical life, which it claims has not yet been done. Many dissenters believe the GAS to be a legal, full, and perfectly functional successor to the CCS, and consider a belief in a second, dormant society legally untenable. There are some who think differently, claiming the *way* the GAS was founded did not correspond with Rudolf Steiner's wishes, and that therefore the spirit of the Christmas Conference has not survived in it, or even at all, so that today's society and School for Spiritual Science are no longer esoteric. Others join the *Vorstand* in embracing what has come to be known as the "two-society theory." But all disagree with the *Vorstand's* plan to fuse the two and particularly the way it is being carried out, with so little member participation allowed.

Here is an overview of *complaints about the process*: This includes, of course, the apparent "weeding out" of the opposition in advance of the meeting, and the fact that the required written invitations were not sent out. (These and similar matters generated three of the four lawsuits). It is also regretted that proposed changes to the statutes were not publicized until so late and that the written counterproposals were not made available until members were about to enter the auditorium. Members object to having had to submit their statements in written form in advance before being allowed to speak, and to having their words terminated after three minutes by the sound of a bell. They object to the overall haste. Some unanswered questions: What will happen to the old GAS and to members who continue to want to belong to it? What if the *old* society is dissolved or absorbed into the *new* society before the very questionable legal existence and even more questionable spiritual justification of the *new* society have been fully clarified? What can be done to prevent the loss of the society Rudolf Steiner founded?

About a hundred *counterproposals to the statute changes* were sent in to Dornach, though not circulated until right before the meeting. Most aimed at creating a balance between the members' and the *Vorstand's* rights. It was deplored by many that discussions of anything involving the Christmas Conference – that wellspring of anthroposophical spirituality – turned almost entirely on legal and procedural matters while the original Christmas Conference statutes – the Principles – were being changed instead of being studied and understood more deeply in their spiritual substance. Some of the counterproposals: The meeting should not call itself a meeting of the CCS because there is no proof that this body legally exists. Changes to the 1923 statutes should be postponed until a broad-based body of members has had a chance to work out counterproposals that are truly in keeping with their

spiritual intent and current world conditions. Similarly, an alternative slate of *Vorstand* candidates was called for so that voters would have a choice (society members voting on *Vorstand* members was puzzling, since normally they are chosen by cooptation). When members are expelled, a reason should be given. Swiss corporate law specifies that “a weighty reason” must exist. At members’ meetings, members should have the right to bring up anything they deem important to the life of the society and not be limited to the subjects on the *Vorstand*’s agenda. Looking at these counterproposals alongside the *Vorstand* amendments to the statutes listed in the minutes (“News for Members” Winter 2003) will make these member concerns even clearer.

A considerable number of members left this meeting feeling disenfranchised and alarmed at the idea of possibly having to trade the GAS, their spiritual home for years, for a society with no legal basis, a society apparently more concerned with administration rights than with member rights. They also worry about the possibility that the same fault lines that have now formed in the society might soon be traceable in every Waldorf school and other anthroposophical institution. They worry about how Class membership, work opportunities, standing among other Anthroposophists and more, might be affected by an inability to commit to the proposed CCS, and whether members who “signed away” their membership rights at the meeting did so for good.

On the weekend of March 9th in Karlsruhe, these members held a meeting to decide on further action. About 40 members from several European countries are suing. Three of the lawsuits challenge the legality of meeting results due to irregularities in procedure; one challenges the legal existence of the “dormant” society. But besides fighting for their anthroposophical ideals in court (a very hard decision for them), they are determined to practice these ideals as never before. I close with a few lines expressing this determination²:

“We should now stringently measure ourselves and our future conduct against this meeting in Dornach.

- Are we able to achieve the openness we missed there, among ourselves?
- Are we able to progress from merely existing in outer proximity to each other to true community?
- As we seek for insight, for truth, are we able to overcome and transform our own personal weaknesses?
- Have we already achieved some ideas that are capable of uniting us?”

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² These are the words of Anette Grosskopf in “Begegnung” (“Encounter”), a newsletter of the Austrian Anthroposophical Society. Issue 2, Feb. 27, 2003.