Making the Goetheanum Interesting for People

Interview with Cornelius Pietzner, New Treasurer of the General Anthroposophical Society

When Cornelius Pietzner introduced himself at the general meeting in April 2002, he spoke of travels that led him to experience "a different kind of globalizing force," a kind that brings spiritual life into relation with earthly life. Born on September 27, 1957, of Irish/Austrian parents, Cornelius Pietzner grew up in the U.S. from 1961 onwards. His father founded the first Camphill in that country. Pietzner returned to Camphill after his studies of sociology and law. He was available for an interview just two weeks after his confirmation as treasurer. Contact with others is the theme that kept recurring in this conversation.

What skills does a treasurer need?
For a comprehensive and large multidimensional organism like the Goetheanum and the General Anthroposophical Society, the treasurer has to be able to deal with budget control and all the requirements that have to do with the authorities and the regulatory needs of a charitable organization. At the same time and perhaps even more importantly, the treasurer has to be able to work at a more human, social level with all the many people and the many interests and perspectives of the membership worldwide. He must also have a future-bearing imagination of what the financial requirements are going to be.


Photo by S. J.

Sections Make Anthroposophy Visible in the World

If we compare the position of treasurer of the Anthroposophical Society with a similar position in a company, we notice that the Anthroposophical Society doesn't generate a product or service. Isn't it dissatisfying to constantly have to raise money without having anything to give in exchange?
I don't see that as dissatisfying. I see it as a provocative and worthwhile challenge. In some essential ways one could say we do have a product. Our product is just much more refined and more interesting and has to do with processes of self-transformation and inner development. The financial life involves many things other than just material goods.

What about performances, workshops and conferences? Are these products in the usual sense?
We also have other things like the restaurant, bookstore and publishing company, all of which have a "product" element. The finances themselves are reflections of many spiritual currents and relationships.

Another view is that the Anthroposophical Society is a kind of supporting association for the School of Spiritual Science, so that it doesn't have to offer a product at all. How do you see the finances of the Anthroposophical Society in relation to the School of Spiritual Science?
It's one of the key responsibilities that we have and also one of the key opportunities, because the sections represent very practical and manifold ways in which anthroposophy is embedded and made visible in the world.

How do you see the needs of the sections in relation to the needs of the world? The sections have projects and aspirations – what if they bypass the needs of the world? Can the treasurer stop them?
That's a delicate question because it's important that the financial life does not determine and direct. Obviously we can have hopes, goals and plans, and if the finances aren't available we will be unable to initiate those projects and goals. On the other hand, if the sections engage in work that somehow does not have a resonance with the world, the lack of finances can also be a reflection of that relationship. These things have to come into a dialogue, into a relationship. The sections may also want to request some kind of input, advice or consultation from the financial department in a collaborative sense.

New Avenues of Income

Money is said to go wherever there are ideas and initiatives. This seems to be true if you look at the Goetheanum budget. Earmarked gifts have grown. However, the total budget doesn't look as good. Is the Goetheanum fulfilling its tasks from this perspective?
General support tends to be less interesting for some people. And that issue is made worse through the fact that the Goetheanum is "international headquarters." I would like to look at the tightness of the budget as an opportunity to build new avenues of income. It's amazing to me that many members who have never been here, who may not have a clear picture of the Goetheanum, are extremely faithful in their support. We also have important institutional support that I hope we can strengthen further.

We receive quite a lot of operational support through bequests and legacies. That is a very unusual concept for me. I don't know other charitable organizations that finance daily work through legacies, counting on its member's testamentary generosity to fund basic operations. So I'm interested to learn how we have structured our financial support base.

The current Faust *project is something that will probably only interest the German-speaking world, because the performances and accompanying program will be in German. Why should a worldwide society, in which many languages are spoken, support such a project?*
Because it's a major commitment of the Goetheanum! In so far as the world membership wants to support and be connected to important Goetheanum commitments, it can, and I believe, will support *Faust*. But practically speaking we will most likely not receive an overwhelming amount of support from the non-German speaking world. There may be a few notable exceptions. For example we have had substantial gifts from the Los Angeles Branch. This generosity will hopefully inspire other Groups and members around the world!

Increase the Reality of the Goetheanum in the World

We can also look at it from the other side. To what extent does the Goetheanum support non-German projects?
Working within a worldwide Society it is neither effective nor possible to initiate general financial support. I don't necessarily see the Goetheanum as being connected to single projects that will awaken the interest of everybody.

When I traveled recently around in England, Norway and Sweden, one of the questions that I asked was

whether we could initiate or develop Goetheanum activities in other countries, whether they could think of us as partners and collaborators, particularly in the economic realm. For example, could we have a working conference on "capital" in Järna, Sweden, as a collaborative Goetheanum event? If we could develop those kinds of activities, I think it would also increase the living reality of the Goetheanum for people in other countries.

Are there ideas for seeking money for Goetheanum events from non-anthroposophical sources, such as lottery money?

I'm not sure that we will be able to continue to finance the Goetheanum or the sections without looking beyond anthroposophical foundations, banks and our membership. If we go to other foundations or other businesses and are able to engage and interest them in the work that we are doing, we will develop new forms of interaction and relationships. I think this will be essential for the future.

To what extent we can develop fundamentally different sources of income is a question to me. For example, what if we were donated patents or trademarks? Those are ways that universities and other charitable organizations often receive income. Or we could be given a percentage of a business. I think that we have a window of maybe five to ten years to try to build a new financial infrastructure.

There are many people who are on a spiritual path, spiritually awake, striving people, who are working with money, finance and business, who could be quite interested to learn about our work. I have many connections with those kinds of people in the United States and I'm looking forward to meeting more people like that here in Europe.

You may be familiar with the research of Paul Ray on what he calls "cultural creatives." There are many among them with whom it would be important for us to deepen our connections.

I also see that there are people who are interested in anthroposophy and business who don't always quite know how to make a connection to the Anthroposophical Society. They tend to be doers, more in the will. They tend not to be so interested in conferences and lectures. Some of them have told me they feel valued for their money, but not for their know-how, their interest or for the way that they connect to the world. How can we extend our welcome to that important group of people? It's also a cultural question, to include the doers and entrepreneurs. This represents a kind of section work. We have to experiment a little bit. I do not think we can just invite these people to finance our conferences. We have to maybe work with them in business. So I see this as an opportunity for the future.

Do you see it as the task of the treasurer to fulfill an ideal, seeking entirely selfless donations? Or should the Goetheanum turn elsewhere to finance things that are normally paid for or subsidized? I sometimes feel that if we withdraw too much into an ideal, we shut ourselves off from society in general. On the other hand, the Goetheanum can be a place to practice community ideals. This may not be as successful as elsewhere but qualities are developed that may perhaps be relevant in the future. How do you see your task within this tension?

I think my orientation is somewhere in the middle. We have a responsibility to understand what our ideals are, and we need to do the theoretical, conceptual work. We need to do the spiritual work. Practical necessity and idealistic integrity need to come into a creative and fruitful struggle with each other, but I don't feel dogmatic one way or the other. I also see this as something that is answered by life and with other people at hand of specific events and questions.

Transparency for a Deeper Relationship

Is there a goal that you would like to be measured by? Three and a half years ago in an interview, Rolf Kerler spoke of perhaps doubling the membership as a way of improving income. The membership has not doubled; it has decreased. Do you have such a vision?

It's clear to me that our financial situation is a difficult one. I would like to make it less difficult. There are specific measures that I could point to, but more important for me is that I recognize that we feel stretched. We can't always do what we need to do. We have many problems and I see those problems as positive challenges. I see them in the membership, I see them in the businesses that we are connected with. I see them in our source of gift income. I see them in the way we deal with our budgets. I see them in a number of different areas. So, yes, the membership could grow, but more important to me is *how* the membership will grow and *why* the membership should grow. And who would be interested to be members? Will they be younger people? What do we need to do to make the Anthroposophical Society of sufficient interest and relevance that people want to become members? I think that we will be helped to understand our challenges in active relationship to other people. So I am interested in as much transparency and communication as possible. I'm also interested to invite many people into the dialogue, so that people can feel that it is not just the treasurer's problem, but it's *our* problem. It's something that we all want to solve!

> *What do we need to do to make the Anthroposophical Society of sufficient interest and relevance that people want to become members?*

Can you sketch one or two concrete projects?

Transparency allows people to understand what the priorities and goals are. For example, some years ago I didn't really know where my membership contribution went. So when we enter into that kind of dialogue or make things transparent, it invites people to develop a deeper relationship with the actual issues. Ongoing and clear communication is an essential quality and goal! I do feel that it will be important to ask the sections – what are your intentions? How do you prioritize and structure your intentions? And how do you bring your intentions into relationship with your colleagues in other sections? Or with sectional work in another country?

I also want to try to work with the Youth Section to create a new form of training in finance and business. I'm beginning to have some talks to see how we could create something that would be appropriate to what I think many young people are looking for. Do we have, for example, 15 different anthroposophical organizations that have very identifiable economic and financial identities and methods, where young people can train over a period of two years through a structured series of internships in several of these organizations? They could come to the Goetheanum for more cognitively oriented work in finance, business and economy and maybe do an internship in a hotel or bank or Camphill community, or whatever it might be. It would be structured for hands-on learning and would be done on a global basis. There are several different ideas such as this that I'm beginning to consider.

Interviewed by Sebastian Jüngel, April 8, 2002

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