I am a student of Anthroposophy who has been a member of the Anthroposophical Society for many years. The older I get the more grateful I am that I met Rudolf Steiner’s work in my late teens because it has added so many dimensions to my life, from inner and outer work to a deep appreciation of the world and nature, indeed it has helped to give my life meaning, direction and joy.

Given my gratitude it is natural that I would wish to express my appreciation for Anthroposophy by being a member of the Society and of the School of Spiritual Science. So it is a question for me why membership is declining and why so few younger people are joining when the many practical initiatives springing from Steiner’s rich insights are flourishing, in particular Waldorf education and Biodynamic agriculture.

I began to seriously reflect on these questions of membership and the future of the Anthroposophical Society some months ago, and to have conversations and attend meetings on these topics. As often happens when you engage earnestly with a question, articles, books, and conversations followed; and so I tried to pay attention to what was coming my way and to write down and sort the resulting thoughts. This initial reflection is what I am sharing with you, a still incomplete but I hope intelligible exploration. My thoughts have also been stimulated and shaped by my recent attendance at the Social Science Section Conference in Kimberton and the Oct. annual meeting of the Anthroposophical Society in Spring Valley. I am very grateful for these meetings and conversations.

The most recent numbers of membership that are available to me suggest that there are presently about 42,000 members worldwide, down from 60,000 at the turn of the century, and of these about 300 are under 30, 3000 under 40, 6000 under 50 and the remaining 82% over fifty years old. These numbers also reflect my own experience in going to Branch or Society meetings, with the majority of those attending being elderly. It is becoming clear that the Anthroposophical Society is losing its ability to speak directly to the hearts of younger people in a vibrant enough fashion to encourage membership or some other form of clear affiliation, despite our efforts to reach out to “youth.”

While I can think of different reasons for this decline in membership and engagement with the Anthroposophical Society, there are to my mind a number of quite fundamental and related perspectives to consider. The first of these is that Rudolf Steiner himself suggests that Anthroposophy would reach its widest expansion at the end of the 20th century, at a time when he hoped that Anthroposophy would reach a kind of culmination point, giving a new spiritual impulse for the future of civilization. “At the end of the century... at the culmination point the greatest possible expansion of the Anthroposophical Movement will be attained.”

Confirming this statement is also a law of historical evolution which Steiner points to, of three times thirty-three years for an historical impulse to ripen and to affect the broader culture. “One such truth I have recently pointed out. Whatever a person undertakes, not as concerns his or her own individual karma but in the whole context of the ethical, historic working of humanity, is subject to a certain law of historical evolution... A seed of thought or of deed takes a whole generation -33 years to ripen... When it is ripened, it goes on working, it goes on working in historical evolution for another 66 years. Thus the intensity of an impulse planted by a human being in the stream of history can truly be recognized in its work with the Goetheanum.  

1 Jon McAlice gave me these current membership numbers after consulting experience in going to Branch or Society meetings, with the majority of those attending being elderly. It is becoming clear that the Anthroposophical Society is losing its ability to speak directly to the hearts of younger people in a vibrant enough fashion to encourage membership or some other form of clear affiliation, despite our efforts to reach out to “youth.”

While I can think of different reasons for this decline in membership and engagement with the Anthroposophical Society, there are to my mind a number of quite fundamental and related perspectives to consider. The first of these is that Rudolf Steiner himself suggests that Anthroposophy would reach its widest expansion at the end of the 20th century, at a time when he hoped that Anthroposophy would reach a kind of culmination point, giving a new spiritual impulse for the future of civilization. “At the end of the century... at the culmination point the greatest possible expansion of the Anthroposophical Movement will be attained.”

Confirming this statement is also a law of historical evolution which Steiner points to, of three times thirty-three years for an historical impulse to ripen and to affect the broader culture. “One such truth I have recently pointed out. Whatever a person undertakes, not as concerns his or her own individual karma but in the whole context of the ethical, historic working of humanity, is subject to a certain law of historical evolution... A seed of thought or of deed takes a whole generation -33 years to ripen... When it is ripened, it goes on working, it goes on working in historical evolution for another 66 years. Thus the intensity of an impulse planted by a human being in the stream of history can truly be recognized in its work with the Goetheanum.  

1 Jon McAlice gave me these current membership numbers after consulting experience in going to Branch or Society meetings, with the majority of those attending being elderly. It is becoming clear that the Anthroposophical Society is losing its ability to speak directly to the hearts of younger people in a vibrant enough fashion to encourage membership or some other form of clear affiliation, despite our efforts to reach out to “youth.”

While I can think of different reasons for this decline in membership and engagement with the Anthroposophical Society, there are to my mind a number of quite fundamental and related perspectives to consider. The first of these is that Rudolf Steiner himself suggests that Anthroposophy would reach its widest expansion at the end of the 20th century, at a time when he hoped that Anthroposophy would reach a kind of culmination point, giving a new spiritual impulse for the future of civilization. “At the end of the century... at the culmination point the greatest possible expansion of the Anthroposophical Movement will be attained.”

Confirming this statement is also a law of historical evolution which Steiner points to, of three times thirty-three years for an historical impulse to ripen and to affect the broader culture. “One such truth I have recently pointed out. Whatever a person undertakes, not as concerns his or her own individual karma but in the whole context of the ethical, historic working of humanity, is subject to a certain law of historical evolution... A seed of thought or of deed takes a whole generation -33 years to ripen... When it is ripened, it goes on working, it goes on working in historical evolution for another 66 years. Thus the intensity of an impulse planted by a human being in the stream of history can truly be recognized in its work with the Goetheanum.  

1 Jon McAlice gave me these current membership numbers after consulting
ing through three generations, that is, through a whole century.\(^3\) One can ask whether this law also applies to the Anthroposophical Society as a legal and earthly form. I would suggest that it does but not to the broader Michaelic impulse of Anthroposophy as a spiritual stream relevant to the time of Michael’s regency as Time Spirit, roughly from 1879 to 2350.\(^4\)

If we look at the first 33 years of the 99 year time period, (1923-56), starting with the Foundation Stone Conference, than the time of seeding was not propitious for the founding and development of a world impulse for spiritual renewal. Not only did Rudolf Steiner die soon after the Christmas Foundation meeting but the Anthroposophical Society split into warring camps, weakening the Anthroposophical impulse for decades to come. At the same time that this was occurring, and possibly aided by the weakened state of Anthroposophy, the rise of Nazism and Fascism began to cast its shadow over Europe and the world, leading to the Holocaust and the horrors of World War II. Looking at these conditions for seeding a new spiritual impulse for humanity, one can only be amazed that so much was achieved later, in the latter half of the 20\(^{th}\) century.

If the first 33 years is a time of seeding, then the second 33 years can be seen as a time of growing or manifesting the new spiritual and cultural impulse in the world. This indeed occurred to an ever greater extent in the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s as a new generation of enthusiastic young people joined their destiny to that of Anthroposophy and the many forms of practical work arising from it. This was the time of the institution builders; founding and developing schools, medical clinics, adult education centers, farms, CSA’s, curative homes, art centers, banks, churches and alternative communities. By 1990, a year after the end of the second 33 year cycle, there were well over 10,000 groups and institutions active in over 50 countries in all parts of the world, inspired by Rudolf Steiner’s work; a truly remarkable burst of de-centralized creative social energy.\(^5\) I sometimes wonder what could have been accomplished if Rudolf Steiner had lived another five years and if the Anthroposophical Society had not broken apart.

On a more personal note, my wife Signe and I attended the 1970 Youth Conference in Spring Valley, New York and we felt like we entered a vortex of spiritual energy as younger people from many parts of the world met each other and Anthroposophy, transforming destinies and leading to exciting new possibilities of uniting our work and life with Anthroposophy. The same experiences were shared by others attending youth conferences in Dornach, Holland, England and Germany throughout the 1970’s and early 1980’s. A part of the Boomer generation had found their way to Anthroposophy and dedicated their lives to building up the institutional networks of the broader Anthroposophical Movement.

The third cycle began in 1989 and was marked by the fall of communism and the re-uniting of Germany and of Berlin, its historical capital. As Anthroposophy is strongly centered in German culture, the reunification of Germany provided a new opportunity for Anthroposophy to impact central Europe in a significant way. Perhaps it has done so in the decades since 1989. Certainly, already in the late 1970’s people in Germany and central Europe recognized the profound practical impact of Steiner’s work on the broader culture. Here is Joseph Huber, writing in the leftist publication Kursbuch in 1979:

“...We leftist hares race around madly in pursuit of our socialist dreams and when we finally arrive we find an anthroposophical hedgehog in place, saying “Boo, I’ve been here for ages.” Here you find a general hospital, there a cooperative bank; there are autonomous kindergartens, schools, publishing houses, alternative therapeutic and curative institutions, conference centers, free art academies, pharmaceutical companies, biodynamic farms and other activities. Whereas the left achieves relatively little with much noise, anthroposophists do a lot quietly.”\(^6\)

When you travel around Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Holland and the Scandinavian countries you sense that reform initiatives inspired by Rudolf Steiner’s work are very visible, valued and are well-integrated into the

---

\(^3\) I am indebted to John Beck for this reference. It is from a lecture by Rudolf Steiner, “On the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Times,” Dornach, Dec. 26, 1917, In RS Archives, Schmidt Number S-3456


\(^5\) An essay from the Goetheanum website. I believe the number of 10,000

\(^6\) Joseph Huber, “Astral Marx: The Work of Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy”, in Kursbuch, Frankfurt, March 1979, p 77. The article was translated by Rudi Lissau.
broaden our understanding of society and its historical evolution.

The authors discuss the characteristics of different generations, the importance of understanding the unique ways in which individuals express themselves, and the challenges that arise from these differences. The idea of a generational time frame is presented as a useful framework for analyzing historical events and understanding the dynamics of society.

The authors argue that there is often a significant difference between the rhythms of different generations, and that these differences can have a profound impact on society. They also discuss the role of institution in shaping the characteristics of different generations, and the ways in which these institutions can either support or challenge the values and beliefs of a particular generation.

Overall, the essay provides a thoughtful exploration of the concept of generations and their role in shaping society. It encourages readers to think critically about the ways in which historical events are shaped by the unique experiences and perspectives of different generations.
and connected our life and work to it, as previously mentioned. I think this was a characteristic of the Boomer generation, if we connect to something and care about it, we want to do it, to change the world according to our beliefs and values. So, with others, we set out to start a Waldorf school in Boston, having a lot of energy and good will but very limited knowledge or experience. We were, however, helped by the times and more experienced and wiser people, and so The Waldorf School in Lexington exists today. Helping to found the school led us to Emerson College and other interests and activities connected to Anthroposophy.

While my three siblings appreciated their Waldorf School experience, they did not find a deeper connection to Anthroposophy, often thinking that I had been irresponsible by giving up a promising academic career to join an alternative spiritual movement offering limited prospects for income or influence.

Turning to the next generation, that of our children, born between 1961-81, Strauss and Howe refer to them as the 13th generation and others have referred to them as Generation X. Less politically ideological, more pragmatic and less institutionally focused, they were tired of their parent’s culture wars and life style experimentation.9 Our own children, while very supportive of Waldorf education, and spiritually and environmentally aware as well as socially engaged, are not likely to seek affiliation with the Anthroposophical Society because it does not seem so relevant to their lives and interests at this time. Also the books, activities, and insights are readily available online or through the many practical initiatives connected to Steiner’s work. What is there to join and why, might be a way of summarizing the prevalent attitudes of Generation X even when appreciating the practical results of Steiner’s pioneering work.

Lastly there are the millennials, born between 1982 and 2003. They now range in age from 13 to 34 and have a reputation as being more educated, more liberal, more environmentally aware and more tech-savvy than all previous generations. They clearly see the threats to civilization and have a keen sense of the inauthentic in society and in its leaders. Given that only 300 people under 30 have become members of the Anthroposophical Society globally, it seems that we have not yet learned to speak to their concerns effectively.

I have pointed to Steiner’s prophetic statement about membership and the cycle of three times thirty-three years as well as the pattern of generations to explain the decline in membership and its quite drastic aging. There are two additional perspectives which I would like to mention before turning to the question of the future and what we could consider doing. They are both relevant to the membership question, in particular to the relatively slow growth of the Anthroposophical Society between Steiner’s death and the point of maximum expansion, around the year 2000.

Earlier I mentioned the split in the Anthroposophical Society and its leadership in 1935. What occurred is that three members of the Vorstand, the Leadership Council of the Anthroposophical Society centered in Dornach, Switzerland; Albert Steffen, Marie Steiner and Gunther Wachsmuth expelled two other members, Ita Wegman and Elizabeth Vreede, as well as many other members from the Society including long-term students of Rudolf Steiner such as Willem Zeylmans, Eugen Kolisko, and D.N. Dunlop. Thousands of members of the Dutch and English Societies were also expelled. This terrible tear in the fabric of the Society and its leadership was the culmination of a decade-long and growing conflict within the leadership of the international Anthroposophical Society and Movement about how best to carry on the work of Anthroposophy following the death of Rudolf Steiner.10 The earthly vessel for carrying the work of Anthroposophy was thus badly damaged and weakened just as a new Klingsor, Adolf Hitler, was expanding his manic powers in Germany.

Connected to the expulsion of the many members was also the fact that the remaining Vorstand members claimed that they not only carried earthly administrative responsibility for the Society but also spiritual authority through continuing to have Rudolf Steiner’s direct spiritual guidance. Thus they attempted to monopolize and centralize both earthly and spiritual authority, compounding the grievous error of the expulsion and limiting the effectiveness and legitimacy of Anthroposophical work in the eyes of thousands of devoted students of Rudolf Steiner.11 How much better it would have been to say we carry administrative and legal responsibility and trust in the freedom and responsibility of class members and dedicated students of Anthroposophy to work in the spirit of the Foundation Stone Meeting and the Michael Mysteries in a creative and collaborative fashion. As Ludwig

---

9 See “Overview of Patterns” in Strauss and Howe, between pp. 123-138.
10 Meyer, pp.1-14
11 Meyer, pp.1-14
Polzer-Hoditz said when counselling against the expulsion measure at the fateful April 5, 1935 Annual Meeting of the Anthroposophical Society in Dornach:

“The Foundation Stones that rest in strong hearts are no longer tied to a particular location and a single building. They must become the Foundation Stones for the Mystery centers of the future at diverse locations. Those who will sow the seeds for these Mystery centers can be called to do so by their destiny, directly by the spiritual world. However, above all, this requires esoteric courage rather than paternalism and restrictiveness.”

Harwood’s phrase has stuck with me over the years as I have had the good fortune to meet quite a few “Michaelic Souls” in my life, with no active connection to Anthroposophy. This experience, coupled with the history of Anthroposophy and our culture at large, led me to wonder whether Michael and his hosts did not go to a Plan B upon perceiving the rise of Nazism, Fascism and Communism in Europe in the 1920’s and 30’s. Rather than Plan A, concentrating the incarnation of Michaelic souls in Central Europe from the 1920’s to the 1950’s, they instead incarnated in many parts of the world, and strongly in the English speaking world, playing a major role in bringing about the consciousness raising revolution of the 1960’s, laying the foundation for that extraordinary flowering of an alternative society which is quite discernible, if not always recognized, in many parts of the Western World today. In the Age of Michael, are not the efforts to foster human equality, a sense of individual dignity, a new humanity awareness, a love of the earth and the environment, the recognition of the power of the human spirit, the call for world peace and of love between races and genders part of the universal call of Michael in our time? Are people like Bill McKibben, Maya Angelou, Paul Hawken, Rebecca Solnit, Marshall Rosenberg, and thousands of others not our Michaelic sisters and brothers? Certainly my life experience has been that when I enter into an open conversation with others about the challenges of our time, a true meeting happens out of our mutual concern, often leading to friendship and an alive, and frequently spiritual exploration.

An interesting question to reflect on is what could have happened to the membership of the society if the Anthroposophical Society and its leadership had been more open and less dogmatic in meeting with the often long-haired but seriously seeking portion of the Boomer generation which was bent on storming the threshold of the spiritual world using whatever means available? What portion of the present estimated 50 million “cultural creatives” in the United States, who share the values of Waldorf school parents to a remarkable degree, are Michaelic souls who cannot or will not find their way to Anthroposophy because of its forms, infighting, and Germanic

An additional point to mention regarding membership can be summed up by a phrase attributed to A.C. Harwood, “The Archangel Michael does not only blow through the Anthroposophical Trumpet.” He must have been acutely aware of this truth, being an occasional member of the “Inklings,” that remarkable group of English philosophers and intellectuals which included C.S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, JRR Tolkien, Charles Williams, Warren Lewis, Hugo Dyson and others.

His advice was not followed, thereby laming the growth and vitality of the Anthroposophical Movement for much of the century.

A shadow side of most spiritual movements are the conflicts around who is the truest interpreter of the founder’s insights and intentions. This was not only true of the Anthroposophical Society in 1935 but continues into the present. I have had many people tell me they have not and will not join the Anthroposophical Society because of the infighting which exists. I experienced this growing up as well as later. Which dedicated student of Anthroposophy has not had their intentions and motives questioned and their actions criticized, usually indirectly through the grapevine, and has not also on occasion participated in such gossiping themselves. As one businessman and Waldorf parent told me when I talked to him about joining the Anthroposophical Society, “No thanks, I don’t want to get involved in the plumbing.” So we, as members of the Anthroposophical Society, need to acknowledge our part in the limited growth of the society and its recent decline and make a new resolve to not run down, undermine or gossip about our brothers and sisters who are also on the difficult road of self-transformation.

An interesting question to reflect on is what could have happened to the membership of the society if the Anthroposophical Society and its leadership had been more open and less dogmatic in meeting with the often long-haired but seriously seeking portion of the Boomer generation which was bent on storming the threshold of the spiritual world using whatever means available? What portion of the present estimated 50 million “cultural creatives” in the United States, who share the values of Waldorf school parents to a remarkable degree, are Michaelic souls who cannot or will not find their way to Anthroposophy because of its forms, infighting, and Germanic

12 Meyer, p.4
14 Paul Hawken, in Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw it Coming, Viking, 2007, makes the case that millions of groups on the fringes of society are creating an alternative future devoted to creating conditions to sustain life in all of its different forms.
cultural overtones?15

What seems quite clear to me now, in 2016, is that membership and therefore the financial resources available to the Society will continue to decline and I think quite dramatically, as over 80 percent of members are over 50 years old. The activities in Dornach will need to shrink as well as that of the national societies. Perhaps this is as it should be given the pattern of generations and Steiner’s life cycle description of three times 33 years for new cultural and spiritual initiatives. Maybe we need to accept that the Anthroposophical Society in its present form is no longer serving the living spirit of Anthroposophia, that it has done its task and needs to be re-created and re-invented for the future. Certainly if I am honest with myself and with my brothers and sisters I would say that I often sense limited life and limited spiritual presence in formal Branch or Society activities, whereas I sense a lot of life and much spiritual energy in small groups of people exploring spiritual questions, whether class work, section activities, inner development, or the central questions of our time. So could we imagine a letting go of what has been and foster an exuberant time of experimentation guided by the spirit of Anthroposophia? Some initial, and tentative thoughts follow although I am far from certain at this point about what is really needed since setting a new direction is the task of the membership and the present leadership and most importantly that of younger generations inspired by Michael.

Some questions which could lead us forward include:

1. Could we imagine a kind of death and resurrection of the Anthroposophical Society happening in the coming seven years? What can we learn from what Rudolf Steiner went through in 1922-23 when he considered the future of Anthroposophy and of the Anthroposophical Society? When he was asked by members of the Esoteric School toward the end of WWI whether the spiritual work could continue after the war was over he said “the old can no longer be taken up. Though it could come to a new esoteric form within the Society.”16 It seems to me that Steiner was always experimenting with new forms and processes, fully aware that the form always needs to serve the spiritual and social impulse it embodies. But the forms we now have go back five generations. Do they still serve the living spirit?

2. Also relevant to this question is an experience I had as a twelve year old. My painting teacher, a very sweet, talented 86 year old women fell and broke her hip. She realized that she would be quite lame after an operation and was also going blind so she decided to stop eating and died six weeks later. I was and am truly moved by the strength of the human spirit which can and will I am sure choose the time of death and transition in the future. Should organizations not do the same and free the spirit to develop further in new forms? Should we not free the spirit of Anthroposophia by allowing a death and resurrection process to occur for the earthly and legal forms we have?

3. Could we turn inward and outward at the same time asking what Michael and the being of Anthroposophia need from us at this time, practicing the principles of sacramental conversation or the reverse ritual and also join our Michaelic brothers and sisters in the world working on the issues of the time practically and offering, or giving the rich treasure of anthroposophy up to serve a healing and renewal of society. Joining environmental groups, prison outreach programs, currency and associative financial groups, working on gender rights, on basic income programs on local or international poverty programs, and offering the questions and insights we have acquired would be a kind of offering of Anthroposophical spiritual substance, of what the Germans call “Geistesgut.” A central part of this inward and outward work is working more consciously with destiny, bringing more awareness to our own life themes and tasks while being intensely interested in meeting and “friending” those who we meet on our life journey. I started a small direct loan program recently, connecting retired people with local business groups who need loans for expansion. I do not talk about the different types of money but do discuss this dimension of having a conscious connection to your money and to the people who are using it, creating a karmic friendship circle. A friend, a former Waldorf craft teacher in Germany, works with 20 Syrian and Afghan refugee children on a regular basis and her maturity wisdom and love feeds the children and

draws a group of parents and helpers to create a peace inspiring environment in which art projects create healing bridges.

4. Can we begin a conscious dialogue with interested generation X members and with millennials asking them to explore the activities and forms which could best serve their interests and needs They, after all, instinctively know what the future holds whereas older members, like myself, have to a significant degree met our life challenges and destiny questions.

5. Could we begin a conscious review and future learning process and identify what we, as the Anthroposophical Society have accomplished since 1923 and where we have faltered or not met our potential. For example, I think the thousands of individuals working in groups with the spiritual content of Michaelic wisdom over the decades is a very significant achievement in bringing Michaelic thought forms to earth. The incredible creativity and initiative of students of Rudolf Steiner in creating generative healing movements such as curative education, Waldorf education and Biodynamic agriculture is another enormous accomplishment. A shadow element is the infighting and the spiritual and intellectual arrogance which has affected our movement, leading us to sometimes think and act as if Rudolf Steiner’s spiritual insights were our own as opposed to being a gift given to us and capable of evoking our gratitude and humility. As we then look to the present and the future can we work with the dead much more consciously asking for their advice and insight for they now see clearly whereas we do not.

6. Lastly can we strengthen the sense among students of Rudolf Steiner’s work that they are Anthroposophy and that any initiative and any acts they undertake with the motive of serving Michael and the times is living Anthroposophy for which they need no approval? If we see the Society primarily as its members then let us in the next seven years encourage a time of great experimentation in form and activity, celebrating a sense of life and of living spiritual presence. Then Michael will guide our efforts for renewal.

In embarking on a journey of renewal for the Anthroposophical Society, which would inevitably arouse much opposition and fear, we also need to keep in mind that Rudolf Steiner as an initiate is in all likelihood on earth today, incarnated in the West, and given his many previous male incarnations, quite likely, a woman. He/she would continue working with other initiates in the service of Michael/Christ and I think would find a relationship to the legacy of Anthroposophy if not its present organizational form.17

It is now more than a century since Rudolf Steiner first shared the results of his spiritual research and gave Anthroposophy its present form and content. The times are remarkably different as are the ways in which the time spirit is working. Can we be alert to such changes and possibilities and re-imagine our ways of associating and being in community. Can we see the Society as an elderly person capable of giving wisdom and inspiration to others without self-interest and help the Being of Anthroposophia find new homes?

Christopher Schaefer, Ph.D., (christopherschaefer7@gmail.com) is co-director of the Center for Social Research at Hawthorne Valley, is a member of the Social Science Section and was a member of the national and international collegium of the Section, as well as a member of the General Council of the Anthroposophical Society in America. He was a faculty member and program director at Sunbridge College in Spring Valley, NY for many years. He lives in the Berkshires with his wife, Signe.

17 Walter Johannes Stein asked Steiner about his next incarnation and Steiner is reputed to have said, in America, in 80 years. In Rudolf Steiner’s Millennial Prophecies by Heinz Herbert Scheffler, Henry Goulden, East Grinstead, quoted by Usher, previous citation.