

# Frankfurt Memorandum: Rudolf Steiner and the subject of racism<sup>1</sup>

By Ramon Brüll and Dr. Jens Heisterkamp

## Overview:

- I. Introduction
- II. Critical examination of Steiner's remarks
  - 1. Apparently racist theosophical terminology
  - 2. Anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism
  - 3. Discrimination through attribution of decadence
  - 4. Discrimination through unclear formulation and creation of stereotypes
  - 5. Racist remarks
- III. Steiner against the background of historical-critical research
- IV. Developmental thinking between the ideal and an hierarchical approach
- V. Summary and conclusions

Annex 1: Background to this memorandum

Annex 2: Documentation: official statements on the subject from the anthroposophical movement

## I. Introduction: why a memorandum?

The claim that the founder of anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925), was a racist or held views tinged with racism has for a number of years repeatedly been advanced in critical publications as well as reports in the media. In making such claims, anthroposophy as a teaching and a socio-spiritual movement is also often fundamentally called into questions. These charges are countered by staff working in anthroposophically-based institutions and facilities all over the world who class irritating remarks by Steiner on the issue of race as irrelevant and – as far as the central anthropological contributions by Steiner are concerned – totally marginal. Any reasonable dialogue between these two groups has so far tended to be prevented by a fundamentalist and emotional approach on both sides: the one party demands the complete “renunciation” of an allegedly obsolete founder figure while on the other side every utterance of Steiner’s is apologetically defended however bizarre it might appear. A dialogue is urgently required here if the recurring debate is to be put back on a factual foundation.

Some years ago, important preliminary work in this respect was undertaken in the Netherlands, a country particularly sensitive to issues of discrimination, when in 1996 a specialist commission chaired by the human rights expert Dr. Th. A. van Baarda examined the whole of Steiner’s work for racist content. The

---

<sup>1</sup> Annex 1 explains how this memorandum came about.

The authors are the publishers of the general-distribution anthroposophical magazine *info3 – Anthroposophie im Dialog*. Ramon Brüll translated the Dutch report referred to in the text into German. Dr. Jens Heisterkamp holds a doctorate in history.

resultant study<sup>2</sup> is the only one so far which seeks to explain Steiner's statements not just in the context of his work<sup>3</sup> but also measures its *effect* by means of objective legal and ethical criteria. In its final report, the Dutch commission notes that a "racist teaching" in the sense of a theory which postulates the alleged superiority of one group of people over another does not exist in Steiner. But according to the Commission, there are some few places in the approximately 89,000-page complete works of Steiner – the Commission counted 16 quotations – which, if they were uttered by an author today, might even provide grounds for criminal charges. The Commission judged another 66 quotations to be *less serious cases* of discrimination or *statements open to misinterpretation*. In making its judgements, the Commission applied the principle that, with regard to the question as to whether a quotation was insulting or not, the key issue in line with generally valid principles was not the *intention* of the speaker or author but rather the *effect* on the target.<sup>4</sup>

## II. Critical examination of Rudolf Steiner's remarks

In the present Memorandum a similar but nevertheless independent approach to the Dutch Commission is adopted. In doing so, the authors of the Memorandum draw on their committed connection to the work of Rudolf Steiner but do not make its acceptance a prerequisite for any evaluation; they take account above all of the generally accepted criteria of non-discrimination as well as the results of historical research into racism.

With regard to the Steiner's problematic remarks on the subject of the races, it transpires that there are essentially five different groups:

1. Apparently racist theosophical terminology
2. Anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism
3. Discrimination through attribution of decadence
4. Discrimination through unclear formulation and creation of stereotypes

---

<sup>2</sup> *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen. Eindrapport van de onderzoekcommissie*. Published by Antroposofische Vereniging in Nederland, Zeist 2000. Published in German as: *Anthroposophie und die Rassismus-Vorwürfe. Der Bericht der niederländischen Untersuchungskommission „Anthroposophie und die Frage der Rassen*. Edited by Th. A. van Baarda. With a foreword by Justus Wittich and an analysis in the context of German law by Ingo Krampen. Authorised translation by Ramon Brüll, Frankfurt am Main 1998 (2nd edition 2006)

<sup>3</sup> A hermeneutic approach is adopted e.g. by Lorenzo Ravagli, Hans-Jürgen Bader et al.: *Rassenideale sind der Niedergang der Menschheit. Anthroposophie und der Rassismusrwurf*, Stuttgart 2002

<sup>4</sup> For some years now, Rudolf Steiner Verlag, responsible for publishing the works of Steiner, has followed a corresponding recommendation by the Commission and provides a critical commentary for relevant remarks by Steiner in any reprints of books with problematic passages.

## 5. Racist remarks

Almost all the *examples* quoted here are text passages which were and are also quoted in the context of public criticism. For a complete overview of the incrimination text passages we refer to the report of the Dutch commission (see Note 2) and with regard to the context to the relevant volumes of the Rudolf Steiner complete works (*Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe = GA*).

### 1. Apparently racist theosophical terminology

This first category includes the today extremely irritating concept of the "root race" which Steiner took from theosophy and used until about 1905 for his own cultural philosophical analysis. With regard to the development of humanity (the "human race"), the fundamental works of theosophy referred to the various *periods or epochs* in the history of humanity as "root races" or "sub-races" (in the sense of a part of humanity as a whole). This misleading designation for cultural epochs did not actually have anything to do with the ethnic origin of different peoples. Contrary to first impressions, these remarks do not, therefore, have a racist background.

Nevertheless, Steiner's remarks in this respect have an exceptionally offensive effect and are open to misunderstanding by readers not familiar with theosophical literature. An example from a letter: "All the sub-races of our five root races had a Semitic element so far. The last came to Europe via Spain, as you know. But such elements become exhausted at the end of a cycle and a new element must evolve."<sup>5</sup> A drawing is attached to this quotation, taken from a letter of 28 April 1905 to Marie von Sivers, in which five so-called "sub-races" branch off one after the other: ancient Indian culture, the branch of "Zarathustra culture", the branch of Semitic-Babylonian-Assyrian culture, the Greco-Roman world and the "fertilisation of Germanic culture through Semitism and Christianity".

The terms "root race" or "sub-race" are confusing in this context and factually inappropriate and Steiner himself stopped using them after about 1905. From this time onwards he explicitly distanced himself from such theosophical terminology: "I intentionally avoid the term "sub-race" because the concept of "race" does not actually fully cover the reference. The reference is to periods of cultural development [...]."<sup>6</sup>

The criticism which attaches to this passage was thus recognised and countered by Steiner himself. However, Steiner was subsequently not always consistent in

---

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Steiner, Marie Steiner-von Sivers: *Correspondence and Documents 1901-1925*. GA 262. Rudolf Steiner Press & Anthroposophic Press, London & New York 1988, p. 58. The study by the Dutch commission, *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen*, classified passages in the letter from which this quotation is taken in category II (formulation open to misunderstanding or less serious case of race discrimination). [Quotation 241]

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *The Gospel of St. John*. GA 103. Anthroposophic Press, New York 1962. Lecture of 30 May 1908 in Hamburg. [Quotation 18 (13)]

this regard which means that the term "race" still occurs in individual instances in later transcripts of lectures as a synonym for peoples or, indeed, for cultural epochs.

## 2. Anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism

At the heart of the repeatedly raised accusations of anti-Semitism against Steiner lies a statement which he made in an 1888 review of a work by the Austrian writer Robert Hamerling, in which Steiner writes: "It certainly cannot be denied that Judaism today still acts as a unified whole and as such has often intervened in our present circumstances, and has done so in a way which was hardly beneficial to western cultural ideas. But Judaism as such has long had its day, has no justification within the modern life of nations, and the fact that it has nevertheless been preserved is an error of world history the consequences of which cannot be avoided. We are not referring here to the forms of Jewish religion alone, we are primarily referring here to the spirit of Judaism, the Jewish way of thinking."<sup>7</sup>

Although Steiner saw himself as having distanced himself from the crass anti-Semitism of the Austria of his day, this statement could not be a more classic expression of anti-Semitism, if only because it refers in a stereotypical and excluding way to a "Jewish way of thinking", but above all because it denies Judaism a "justification within the modern life of nations" and speaks out both against the Jewish religion and against the "spirit of Judaism". Neither can it be justified by the fact that a section of liberal Jews in the late nineteenth century themselves were strongly pushing for assimilation and were questioning their identity.

Steiner did, however, later disavow this singularly anti-Semitic remark. He admitted that he had initially underestimated the danger of anti-Semitism and expressly criticised it himself. Indeed, he started to publish on behalf of the "Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus" (Association for Combating Anti-Semitism), some of whose leaders were his friends. Barely 13 years after the remark quoted above, he wrote in one of his essays: "Anyone who looks at the present with open eyes knows that it is untrue to believe that the union among the Jews is greater than their union with modern cultural endeavours. Even if such an impression has been given in recent years, this is due in significant part to anti-Semitism. Anyone, like me, who has shuddered to see the damage caused by anti-Semitism in the minds of decent Jews could not avoid such a conclusion."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Steiner: "Robert Hamerling: 'Homunkulus. Modernes Epos in 10 Gesängen'." *Deutsche Wochenschrift* 16 / 17 (1888), in: Rudolf Steiner: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Literatur 1884-1902*. GA 32. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 3rd edition, Dornach 2004, p. 145 ff. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotation in category I (quotations with a discriminating effect). [Quotation 192]

<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Steiner: "Verschämter Antisemitismus", *Mitteilungen aus dem Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus 1901*, Volume II, No. 48, in Rudolf Steiner: "Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kultur- und Zeitgeschichte 1887-1901". GA 31. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 3rd edition, Dornach 1989, p. 409. [Quotation 202]

Nevertheless, Steiner's remarks on Judaism continued to remain ambivalent to a certain extent, although he also paid great tribute, for example, to the spiritual contribution of ancient Hebrew culture to the history of humanity. This was because as Christianity became increasingly important in this thinking from the turn of the century onwards, Steiner took over into his subsequent lectures some of the anti-Judaistic stereotypes of Christian religion. Since the time of Paul and Augustine such stereotypes have tended to accuse Judaism of having historically "outlived" its time once the "Saviour" had come. Overcoming such latent anti-Judaism remains a challenge also for anthroposophists today.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Discrimination through the attribution of "decadence"

In order to set out clearly his own approach to a spiritual and humanistic evolutionary theory, Steiner not only referred to theosophy, based on ancient Indian Vedic sources, but also to the scientific theory of evolution as represented at the time particularly by the German naturalist Ernst Haeckel. Here Steiner essentially supported Haeckel's espousal of a non-religious explanation for the origin of the world and human beings. But anyone who today reads Haeckel's description of the origin of humankind must be taken aback by the way in which one of the leading scientists of his day observed the traditional peoples, who at the time were just appearing above the horizon of European research, with such a scientifically cold and quasi zoological view. Haeckel's developmental biology bears clear racist hallmarks to the extent that it looks at the genesis of the human being. Thus Haeckel even denied some races the status of belonging to the human species, moved them into the proximity of primates and criticised that "most anthropologists hold dogmatically to the so-called unity of species of all human races."<sup>10</sup>

Such positions can not be found in Steiner who, despite all his enthusiasm for Haeckel, did have considerable reservations with regard to his purely materialistic approach and, for example, vehemently rejected the evolutionary proximity of monkeys and human beings. Steiner did, however, share a number of the racist preconceptions of the science of the time according to which some ethnic groups, for instance, were fundamentally deemed to be culturally inferior. As a consequence, there are derogatory judgements of indigenous peoples in Steiner too such as: "In the American race we have primitive natives who have been left far, far behind."<sup>11</sup> On the other hand there is also in Steiner a profound

---

<sup>9</sup> On the subject of Rudolf Steiner and Judaism see the fundamental study by Ralf Sonnenberg, "'Keine Berechtigung innerhalb des modernen Völkerlebens'. Judentum, Zionismus und Antisemitismus aus der Sicht Rudolf Steiners" in: *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, edited by Wolfgang Benz for the Centre for Anti-Semitism Research at the Technical University of Berlin, Berlin 2003, pp. 185 - 210

<sup>10</sup> Ernst Haeckel: *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*. Gemeinverständliche Werke II. Leipzig, Berlin 1924, p. 397

<sup>11</sup>

Rudolf Steiner: "Das Johannes Evangelium" from the volume *Menschheitsentwicklung und Christus-Erkenntnis*. GA 100. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 3rd edition, Dornach 2006 (1967), lecture of 22 November 1907 in Basel, p. 259. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotation in category I (quotations with a discriminating effect). [Quotation 152 (133)]

appreciation of the spirituality of, for example, the American indigenous inhabitants which is completely absent in Haeckel and other researchers of the time.

In about 1910, Steiner moved away from the depiction of a vertical sequence of races, such as he had still argued as late as 1907 on the basis of Haeckel, and now pursued a more "horizontal" and universalistic concept according to which the various ethnic groups did not crystallise one *after* the other (as did later the cultural epochs) but largely simultaneously and in parallel from a preceding archetypal humanity.<sup>12</sup> Here he focuses to a greater extent on their individual contributions to development – in which context Steiner nevertheless in a clichéd way assigns people with a black skin, for example, to the role of the "childhood age" of humankind. Furthermore, with regard to future human development Steiner here refers, as already mentioned, to the phenomenon of "decadent races" with regard to the indigenous American inhabitants, for example, who no longer participate in further cultural development. The term "decadence" when applied to groups of people is without doubt discriminatory.

Because civilisations develop in a specific and limited period as well as a limited geographical region, they are, as a rule, also associated with specific peoples and are thus located, at least in earlier phases of human civilisation, in mostly homogeneous ethnic populations. Hence we refer in general to Greek culture and also mean by that the population group which primarily developed this culture. No one objects to that – at least not for as long as the civilisation in question is not referred to as "declining", "remaining stationary" or becoming "decadent". Because if it is, the identification of an ethnic population group with the culture it has developed or supported would almost inevitably imply the "decadence" of the relevant population. The lack of differentiation between a culture which is in decline and the population supporting it leads to discrimination when applied in the context of peoples. This is illustrated in the following remark by Steiner: "But the Europeans have ascended to a higher cultural level whereas the Indians have remained stationary and have therefore become decadent."<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. Discrimination through unclear formulation and creation of stereotypes**

A special case with regard to the allegations of discrimination is presented by the lecture cycle *The Mission of the Folk-Souls* from 1910. Steiner here wanted to present a complex picture of the creation of races, peoples and civilisations. In this context he sets out alongside external climatic and geographical influences,

---

<sup>12</sup> K-P. Endres and Wolfgang Schad: "Die Vielfalt des Menschen. Die verschiedenen Annäherungen Rudolf Steiners an das Problem der menschlichen Rassen." *Mitteilungen aus der anthroposophischen Arbeit in Deutschland*, special edition, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Menschheitsentwicklung und Christus-Erkenntnis*. GA 100. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2nd edition, Dornach 2006 (1997). Lecture of 22 November 1907 in Basel from the cycle *The Gospel of St. John*, p. 259. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotation in category I (quotations with a discriminating effect). [Quotation 152 (133)]

which taken on their own could easily lead to determinism, the interaction with influences coming from spiritual beings which he describes in detail.<sup>14</sup> According to Steiner's description, the (in his view provisional and temporary) differentiation of humankind as a whole into various races occurred because different purely spiritual beings influenced human beings from outside – and in doing so they focused on different organ systems: in the Mongols on the cardiovascular system; in Asians on the nervous system; in black Africans on the glandular system, etc. Steiner here speaks metaphorically of "boiling and simmering" because in the latter physical process visible changes are also caused externally through non-visible forces. It "boils and simmers" metaphorically also in the various organ systems of human beings. And then, in this context, he makes the extremely bizarre remark: "Everything that gives the Ethiopian race its particular characteristics arises because the Mercury forces boil and simmer in the glandular system of the people concerned."<sup>15</sup> This sentence acts like an insult particularly when it is taken out of context or is abbreviated ("it boils and simmers in the glandular system of Negroes"). "Boiling and simmering" sounds like libidinous, uncontrolled heat, like chaos, arousal and lack of control, signs of a weak ego, animal passion and "lower sensuality".

Apart from such formulations themselves, the term "Negro", as used by Steiner and other contemporary authors without concern itself today produces understandable irritation.

One example of that is the following sentence, which is rightly often the subject of complaint: "Because even Negroes must be seen as human beings."<sup>16</sup> In the context of Steiner's comments in this passage it becomes clear that something different was meant, namely "Because Blacks are humans too!", a remark which could by no means be taken for granted in 1922. Leaving aside the question as to whether the shorthand note was imprecise or whether the lecturer did not quite say what he meant, the sentence as published is highly discriminating whereas the lecturer was concerned to say precisely the opposite: the inclusion of the black population as equal citizens in the then colonies.

---

<sup>14</sup> Steiner's concept, building on ideas of Herder and Hegel, to explain the cultural expression of social systems through the involvement of spiritual entities ("folk spirits") cannot be examined in greater detail here.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Die Mission einzelner Volksseelen in Zusammenhang mit der germanisch-nordischen Mythologie* (The Mission of the Folk-Souls in Relation to Teutonic Mythology). Eleven lectures from 7 to 17 July 1910 in Kristiania (Oslo). GA 121. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 5th edition, Dornach 1982 (1974), page 111/112. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this and eight further quotations from this lecture cycle in category II (formulation open to misunderstanding or less serious case of race discrimination). [Quotation 111 (93)]

<sup>16</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Die geistig-seelischen Grundkräfte der Erziehungskunst. Spirituelle Werte in Erziehung und sozialem Leben* (Spiritual Ground of Education). GA 305, Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 3rd edition, Dornach 1991. Lecture of 21 August 1922 in Oxford, page 100. See also Th. A. van Baarda (ed.) *Anthroposophie und die Rassismuskorruptionen*, Info3-Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2006 (1998), page 262. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotation in category I (quotations with a discriminating effect). [Quotation 130 (112)]

The creation of painful stereotypes occurred particularly in a lecture about differences in humankind which Steiner gave to workers building the then Goetheanum. This is a lengthier example: "And whereas the Mongols mainly use their mid-brain, we Europeans have to use the fore-brain. But this has the following result: the person with the hind-brain primarily lives in the drives, the instincts. This one here with the mid-brain lives in the feelings which are located in the chest. And we Europeans, we poor Europeans, live in the thinking which is located in the head. This means that we don't in a manner of speaking really feel our inner human being. Because we only feel our head when we have a headache, when it is unwell. Otherwise we don't feel it. But this means that we take in the whole of the external world, easily become materialists. Negroes don't become materialists. They remain human beings inside. But they develop the life of the instincts inside. Asians don't become materialists either. They remain with the feeling life. They are not as concerned about external life as the Europeans. Of them they say: people who only concern themselves with external matters only become engineers."<sup>17</sup> The assignment by stereotypical racist clichés is striking.

In another passage, too, (also from a lecture to workmen) such typification exceeds the limits of what is acceptable: "As a result, everything in Negroes connected with the body and the metabolism is actively developed. They have, as people say, a strong drives, instincts. Negroes, then, have a strong instinctual life. And since essentially they have the sun element, light and heat, on the surface of their bodies in the skin, there is a completely different metabolism as if the sun itself were cooking inside them. That is where their instinctual life originates. It is constantly cooking inside Negroes [...]"<sup>18</sup>

## 5. Racist remarks

The bulk of the text passages which are cited by critics as evidence of Steiner's racism comprises remarks by Steiner in which – contrary to the main thrust of his ethic of the free individual – he clearly reveals himself as a member of a late colonial and Eurocentric age with its characteristic "'superior' and 'inferior' hierarchies" (Christian Geulen).<sup>19</sup> Thus Steiner spoke, for example, as a matter of course about the apparent "injustice of nature that it condemns one person to existence in a human race at the bottom level while lifting another into an

---

<sup>17</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde. Über das Wesen des Christentums*. Lectures to workmen at the Goetheanum, Volume III, GA 349. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 3rd edition, Dornach 2006 (1961). Lecture of 3 March 1923, p. 58. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotation in category II (formulation open to misunderstanding or less serious case of race discrimination). [Quotation 127 (106)]

<sup>18</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde. Über das Wesen des Christentums*. Lectures to workmen at the Goetheanum, Volume III. GA 349. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 3rd edition, Dornach 2006 (1961). Lecture of 3 March 1923, p. 55. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotations in category II (formulation open to misunderstanding or less serious case of race discrimination). [Quotation 127 (106)]

<sup>19</sup> Christian Geulen: *Geschichte des Rassismus*. Munich 2007, p. 10



apparently perfect race" and took it as a given that "the Caucasian race" represented "the actual civilised race".<sup>20</sup>

Here are the most important examples of such an attitude, to which the critics too repeatedly refer:<sup>21</sup>

"[...] we give pregnant women these Negro novels to read and no one needs to ensure that Negroes come to Europe to produce mulattoes..."<sup>22</sup> Steiner here uses the term "mulatto" in a derogatory way as if children with a dark skin from ethnically mixed relationships were undesirable in Europe.

Or: "Should the perfect spirit be subject to the same conditions as the imperfect one? Should Goethe suffer the same conditions as any Hottentot?"<sup>23</sup> Steiner here uses the term "Hottentot" sweepingly as a negative example.

"The Negro race does not belong in Europe and it is of course nonsense that it now plays such a large role in Europe."<sup>24</sup> This quote, taken as such, expresses disregard for people with a black skin.

"There is a biography of Schubert which describes Schubert's external looks as if he had the appearance of a Negro. There is no question of that! Indeed, he had a very likeable face! But he was poor."<sup>25</sup> Here Steiner probably allows himself to be

---

<sup>20</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Weltenrätsel und Anthroposophie*. 22 lectures, Berlin, 5 October 1905 to 3 May 1906. GA 54. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2nd edition, Dornach 1983. pp. 133 and 144

<sup>21</sup> The Dutch commission identified 16 seriously discriminatory or racist remarks; the authors of this Memorandum tend to include a number of additional quotations in the more serious category I.

<sup>22</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Über Gesundheit und Krankheit. Grundlagen einer geisteswissenschaftlichen Sinneslehre*. Lectures to workmen at the Goetheanum, Volume II, GA 348. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 4th edition, Dornach 1997 (1983). Lecture of 30 December 1922 to workmen at the Goetheanum, pp. 188/189. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotations in category I (quotations with a discriminating effect). [Quotation 119 (137)]

<sup>23</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Das Christentum als mystische Tatsache und die Mysterien des Altertums*. GA 8, Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 9th edition, Dornach 1989 (1902), p. 47. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotations in category I (quotations with a discriminating effect). [Quotation 123 (105)]

<sup>24</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde. Über das Wesen des Christentums*. Lectures to workmen at the Goetheanum, Volume III. GA 349. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 3rd edition, Dornach 2006 (1961). Lecture of 3 March 1923, p. 53. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotations in category II (formulation open to misunderstanding or less serious case of race discrimination). [Quotation 127 (106)]

<sup>25</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Esoterische Betrachtungen karmischer Zusammenhänge*, Volume I, Rudolf Steiner Verlag, GA 235, 8th edition, Dornach 1994 (1933). Lecture of 8 March 1924, p. 123. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotations in category I (quotations with a discriminating effect).

induced by personal emotion to see people with a black skin indirectly as a synonym for “unlikeable”.

*“The white race is the race of the future, working on the spirit.”*<sup>26</sup>

*“If the blue-eyed and blond-haired people were to die out, people would become increasingly stupid unless they developed a kind of cleverness which is independent of blondness. It is the blond hair which actually leads to cleverness”*.<sup>27</sup> The bizarre nature of the connection implied here between skin and hair colour and intelligence does not need further comment.

One of the key definitions of racism applies to these remarks. According to this definition, racism arises through the “generalising and absolutising value placed on actual or fictitious differences for the benefit of the accuser and to the detriment of his victim to justify his privileges or aggression” (Albert Memmi)<sup>28</sup>. There is no evidence in Steiner that he justified racist aggression.<sup>29</sup> It is, nevertheless, very regrettable that Steiner made such racist remarks in the wider sense.<sup>30</sup> Neither does the attempt, made every so often, to put these quotations in a context make them any more palatable. The third quotation does not become any more acceptable if one assumes that Steiner had meant to refer to black African culture with the derogatory sounding expression “Negro race”. The quotations in this category are also more than a mere problem of the historical use of language, which could be tackled by “translating” what he meant into a “contemporary” form of expression. As far ahead of his time as Rudolf Steiner was with regard to many educational, medical and, indeed, social issues – the

---

[Quotation 150]. The biography cited derives from Ritter von Kreissle-Hellborn, *Joseph von Spaun, einige Bemerkungen über die Biographie Schuberts*.

<sup>26</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Vom Leben des Menschen und der Erde. Über das Wesen des Christentums*. Lectures to workmen at the Goetheanum, Volume III, Dornach 1923. GA 349, Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 3rd edition, Dornach 2006 (1961), p. 67. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotations in category I (quotations with a discriminating effect). [Quotation 132 (114)]

<sup>27</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Über Gesundheit und Krankheit. Grundlagen einer geisteswissenschaftliche Sinnenlehre*. Lectures to workmen at the Goetheanum. Volume II. Dornach 1922/1923. GA 348, Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach 1997 (1983), page 103. The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* classified this quotations in category II (formulation open to misunderstanding or less serious case of race discrimination). [Quotation 37 (31)]

<sup>28</sup> This definition by the French academic was included in, among other places, the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*. See also Albert Memmi, *Rassismus*, Frankfurt am Main 1987.

<sup>29</sup> The only – albeit questionable – exception is formed by a remark on the allegedly “preordained”, constitutionally-based extinction of the “Indian population” in the lectures on the mission of the folk souls, *Die Mission einzelner Volksseelen*, GA 121, p. 79; however Steiner here seems to refer rather to death through the diseases which were introduced. **In contrast, Steiner condemned the extermination of the Indians by the Europeans. See van Baarda (ed.), *Anthroposophie und die Rassismus-Vorwürfe*, p. 295ff.**

<sup>30</sup> According to A. Memmi, racism can be differentiated into racism in a wider and narrower sense.

remarks cited above are documents of an obsolete way of thinking and time which are no longer acceptable or "translatable" in any way today.

The argument, sometimes put forward, that those quotations were spoken in a different time does not make such views more valid because they were widespread in our cultural sphere some 100 years ago. They remain just as discriminating. Gross intentional or negligent discrimination was already hurtful before the ban on discrimination was codified, for example, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

### **III. Steiner against the background of historical-critical research**

Despite the racist remarks cited in this group, Rudolf Steiner was no racist and no representative of a "racial theory" in the sense of an ideology to safeguard a supremacy based on race. In particular, the typical "central theme" of militant racism, "the clash of communities imagined in terms of 'race' for self-assertion, prestige, superiority" as well as the "collective hostility up to and including the will to destruction"<sup>31</sup> is absent in Steiner – in contrast, for example, to popular racist authors of his time such as Gobineau, Spencer or Chamberlain. Neither does Steiner contain the typically racist threat scenarios of an allegedly chosen hereditary collective. "Steiner does not develop ... a self-contained racial theory with regard to current humanity," the Steiner critic Husmann-Kastein<sup>32</sup> finds and Helmut Zander, author of the hitherto most comprehensive historical-critical study on Rudolf Steiner, concludes: "His racism is manifest in some remarks; in others Steiner explicitly distanced himself from the racism of his environment."<sup>33</sup> "Historians such as George L. Mosse, Jörn Rüsen or Uwe Puschner have therefore rightly signalled reservations with regard to the attempt to include Steiner among the racial 'system builders' and activists," Ralf Sonnenberg too observes in the *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, Steiner often expressly criticises the emphasis on blood and tradition-bound differences: "A person who today speaks about the ideal of race and nation and tribal membership is speaking about impulses of decline in humanity. And anyone who believes that with these so-called ideals he is presenting humanity with progressive ideals is speaking an untruth because nothing will bring humanity more into decline than if ideals of race, nationalism and blood

---

<sup>31</sup> Geulen, loc. cit. – Geulen further observes: "Wherever we encounter racial theories towards the end of the nineteenth century, we will find this view of the clash of races as a universally valid principle for any kind of social development", op. cit. p. 73f. – In Steiner, however, such a view plays no part. On the contrary, for him the driving force behind all modern social development is the individuality of the human being.

<sup>32</sup> Jana Husmann-Kastein: *Schwarz-Weiß-Konstruktionen im Rassenbild Rudolf Steiners*. Lecture manuscript for the conference "Anthroposophy – critical reflections" at Humboldt University Berlin, 21.7.2006.

<sup>33</sup> Helmut Zander: *Anthroposophische Rassentheorie*. In: S. v. Schnurbein and J.H. Ulbricht (eds.): *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne*. Würzburg 2001, p. 325.

<sup>34</sup> Sonnenberg, op. cit., p. 205

are propagated.<sup>35</sup> And in the lecture series on the subject of “folk souls”, of all things, which contains some very stereotypical clichés about race, it says on the other hand very categorically: “The races have arisen and they will pass away,” and over the coming centuries humanity would live in ways in which there could “no longer be any talk of a state which can be described as racial.”<sup>36</sup> All of this contradicts a systematic racism which always aims for the unchanging existence and optimisation of a specific hereditary state. Nationalist ideology has always treated Steiner and anthroposophy as opponents.<sup>37</sup>

At the centre of Steiner's anthroposophy we have – despite individual time-bound racist remarks – the holistic development of the individual human being as well as of society which benefits from the development of the individual to freedom. The simultaneity of historically outdated flaws with a work which as a whole is humanistic is shared by Rudolf Steiner with other historical authors such as Luther (anti-Semitism), Kant (discrimination against blacks) or Albert Schweitzer and Hermann Hesse (partial stereotyping of Africans).<sup>38</sup> The Dutch commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen*, which we have referred to a number of times, therefore describes a large part of the criticism of Steiner as “selective outrage”. And it is indeed the case that most German-language critics as a rule pick out individual text passages which are then overstated both qualitatively and quantitatively with regard to the complete works. But that changes neither the fact that the corresponding quotations in the existing printed form *are* discriminating nor the necessity to understand the historical author Steiner *also* as belonging to his time. That is why the point is not to “distance” oneself from Steiner, which would be inappropriate with regard to an almost 100-year-old work in the history of ideas, but to observe that there are individual text passages as well as questionable discourses in this work with which one expressly cannot nor would want to identify. The ambivalence of a spiritual giant who is a historical author *and* provider of impulses working to the present day must be matter-of-factly registered and the one must be critically separated from the other.

#### **IV. Developmental thinking between the ideal and an hierarchical approach**

A fundamental problem with regard to the discrimination issue, which can only be raised here but not finally resolved, arises in that in history and, particularly, in the our time different cultures and forms of consciousness exist simultaneously. If now individual forms are identified as representatives of an

---

<sup>35</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Die spirituellen Hintergründe der äußeren Welt. Der Sturz der Geister der Finsternis*. 14 lectures, Dornach 1917. GA 177. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 5th edition, Dornach 1999, p. 220.

<sup>36</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Die Mission einzelner Volksseelen in Zusammenhang mit der germanisch-nordischen Mythologie*. 11 lectures, 7 to 17 July 1910 in Kristiania (Oslo). GA 121. Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 5th edition, Dornach 1982 (1974), p. 76.

<sup>37</sup> Lorenzo Ravagli: *Unter Hammer und Hakenkreuz. Der völkisch-nationalsozialistische Kampf gegen die Anthroposophie*, Stuttgart 2004.

<sup>38</sup> See the very illuminating study on this subject by Marcelo da Veiga: “Sprachliche und historische Kriterien zum Rassismusvorwurf”, in: *Anthroposophie*, Christmas 2007 edition.

advanced civilisation or “higher development”, it is likely that representatives of – from this perspective – earlier stages of development experience themselves as subordinate and undervalued, and that, conversely, political and ideological claims are derived from the alleged “higher development”. Thus cultural research based on the evolutionary thinking following on from Steiner will also have to tackle self-critically the danger of chauvinistic aberrations when making cultural comparisons.

Steiner's view of human development as an evolutionary process which in the course of history leads from lower to higher stages of culture and consciousness does not, however, by itself contain racist or chauvinistic implications, as some critics like to imply, provided the dimension of “race” is expressly excluded. It only become questionable if cultural evolution were to be linked to the membership of particular ethnic groups or, in general, to specified collectives. Formulated in a positive way: in the present there is no fundamental restriction of a collective kind preventing an individual from reaching on an equal and self-determined basis any stage of consciousness. Conversely, the justified concern about the creation of chauvinistic hierarchical cultural structures should not imply that the central idea of anthroposophy – and other humanistic approaches – of the personal spiritual development of the individual should be discredited, on which the development of society, consciousness and cultures is also dependent.

The importance of the idea of development with regard to individuals and cultures can be seen alone in current terms such as “development aid”, which self-evidently assumes different stages of development of societies. Furthermore, in issues regarding the developmental perspectives of threshold countries the term “premodern” societies comes into play when considering deficits in the fields of human rights, the rule of law as well as free access to knowledge and to markets, without the differentiation between “modern” and “premodern” necessarily entailing discrimination. This danger is avoided by referring without any ambiguity to *cultural* stages of development. As intellectual progress, these are in principle accessible to all people and are not tied to specific ethnic membership.

Anything else would, in any case, also contradict Steiner's own individualistic ethic. Structuring the cultural development of humanity into evolutionary steps and stages should never mean that collective consciousness and cultural qualities give rise to a kind of determinism according to which members of a specific culture are tied to specific characteristics or behaviours. However, in the specific description of ethnic or national characteristics in his lectures, Steiner, other than for example in his main philosophical work *The Philosophy of Freedom*,<sup>39</sup> does not always clearly emphasise the precedence of the individual over the collective<sup>40</sup> and the use of organic analogies and collective typologies is often superimposed over the actual emancipatory individualism of his world view. In

---

<sup>39</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *The Philosophy of Freedom*, GA 4, Rudolf Steiner Press 1999. Also published as *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, SteinerBooks 2007.

<sup>40</sup> In this context the frequently advanced argument is not convincing either, that, given the progressive reincarnation of the individual through a great variety of ethnic groups, cultures and nations, the assumed “lower” rank of certain development stages is in any case relativised since in this way those who belong to that stage, too, have the opportunity of advancing to “higher” stages. This point discriminates against those affected who reside at an assumed “lower” level or do not, indeed, share the idea of reincarnation at all.

this respect the Steiner critic Helmut Zander rightly notes: "Steiner hardly reflects on the interpretative circumstances of the models he uses so that the constraints of an organological system of metaphors, above all the assumed character of a law of nature regarding their progression, is not reflected upon".<sup>41</sup> Steiner's remarks on this point are not always unequivocal.

## V. Summary and conclusions

- There is no racism in Steiner as defined by historical research, no systematically espoused "theory of race", and no ideology of a "clash of races". In particular, it does not exist as a theory or instructions on how to act for modern and contemporary humanity.
- There are, however, in Steiner's works individual discriminating and some few racist remarks which must unequivocally be classed as historically obsolete. They can be explained historically in that Steiner took part in a discourse on questions of evolution, some of it tinged with racism, at a time of colonialism and Eurocentrism.
- One singular anti-Semitic remark from 1888 is countered by Steiner's public opposition against anti-Semitism in the period around the turn of the century. However, there are also anti-Judaistic traits in some of his lectures.
- From a present perspective, Steiner did not always display a clear methodological awareness of the problems associated with seeing cultural developmental possibilities as being linked with biological characteristics. This creates models of collective discrimination through the assignment of decadence. On the other hand Steiner criticises the restrictions of developmental thinking in purely biological terms and locates the development of the individual as being independent of collective dependencies.
- Fundamentally, the subject of race is of no relevance to the anthroposophical structure of ideas either quantitatively or qualitatively. In other words, on thousands of book pages and in hundreds of lectures on spiritual, religious, educational, medical or political questions the subject of "race" does not crop up at all. Neither the anthroposophical literature of the present nor, for example, the curricula of the Waldorf schools contain any remarks like those investigated here. The social initiatives throughout the world based on anthroposophy, including in South Africa and Namibia, in the Philippines, Egypt and Israel, would not be plausible on the basis of a racist ideology.
- Steiner's works in their overall stance reiterate over and again the universalistic development of a single humanity belonging together irrespective of differences in ethnic, national or religious origin. With his approach to social threefolding, Steiner wanted to create a social framework in which every individual is freely able to develop in equality and with the protection of his or her indigenous cultural characteristics. The spirit of these ideas coincides today

---

<sup>41</sup> Helmut Zander: "Anthroposophische Rassentheorie", in: S. v. Schnurbein and J.H. Ulbricht (eds.): *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne*. Würzburg 2001, p. 322.

still with key achievements of the modern age such as the Declaration of Human Rights and modern laws against discrimination and on equality.

© 2008 Ramon Brüll, Dr. Jens Heisterkamp  
*info3*-Verlag, Kirchgartenstr. 1, 60439 Frankfurt, Germany.

## **Annex 1: Background to this Memorandum**

In the autumn of 2007, Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy once again came under considerable public attack in the German-speaking countries. In particular, there was a threat that a number of books by Steiner would be put on the index of the German Federal Department for Media Harmful to Young Persons because they contained quotations which were seen as racist. At the time, two aspects were instrumental with regard to the initiative to draw up this Memorandum: on the one hand, public opinion has a justified interest in learning what anthroposophists today, who with high ethical pretensions contribute to the development of social fields such as schooling, helping people with disabilities, health and banking, think about elementary questions of human rights and the coexistence of people of different origins. On the other hand, anthroposophists today want to clarify their relationship with historical and potentially problematic aspects of their founder.

As a result, a draft was prepared which was published by the authors in March 2008 in the magazine *info3 - Anthroposophie im Dialog*. The text itself was preceded by a short statement which announced the intention of "wishing to respond to the accusations of racism in a thorough and publicly accessible way." Numerous personalities in the anthroposophical movement supported this call for dialogue by becoming initial signatories. In particular, the statement continued: "For the signatories ... Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy plays a major role in their personal and working life precisely because of its decisive advocacy of the dignity of the human being and an open, pluralistic society. Hence they regret that Rudolf Steiner's works, which inspire them through their substance, radical liberalism and cosmopolitan humaneness, contain individual passages which are capable today of offending people in their dignity."

Signatories were Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish, Cornelius Bohlen, Dr. Richard Everett, Nikolai Fuchs, Dr. med. Michaela Glöckler, Wolfgang Held, Matthieu van den Hoogenband, Walter Hiller, Frank Hörtreiter, Bernd Keicher, Dr. Walter Kugler, Henning Kullak-Ublick, Paul Mackay, Michael Olbrich-Majer, Dr. Jost Schieren, Christoph Simpfendörfer, Jonathan Stauffer, Theo Stepp, Rahel Uhlenhoff, Jelle van der Meulen, Bodo von Plato, Justus Wittich as well as all *info3* authors such as Dr. Frank Meyer, Rüdiger Iwan, Marianne Carolus, János Darvas and others.

The original intention of the authors to draw up a final version on the basis of the draft together with the signatories and others interested could not, however, be realised because soon after publication very different and also unexpected responses emerged. Thus the fact alone of a declaration of support by signing the draft, for example, encountered fierce criticism in parts of the anthroposophical movement. While many people actively working above all in the practical fields of anthroposophy welcomed the initiative, there were also voices who completely failed to see the necessity of such an approach. In a lively discussion process lasting several months (including on the *info3* website and in

almost all anthroposophical magazines and journals) three different attitudes to this issue broadly emerged:

- Representatives of the first tendency consider that raising accusations of racism against Rudolf Steiner is fundamentally the consequence of negative intentions or the failure to understand anthroposophy properly; accordingly all problems can be cleared up as "misunderstandings" if they can be interpreted in the respective context of Steiner's works. Within the framework of a world view in which the universal humanity of Christianity and the idea of reincarnation, something which affects all peoples, apply, racism simply cannot exist, this view says, which was espoused, for example, by anthroposophical house journals such as the *Goetheanum* or *Erziehungskunst*. The council of the Anthroposophical Society in Germany distanced itself from the draft Memorandum in the members' newsletter *Anthroposophie weltweit*.
- Representatives of the second position see the problem associated with Steiner's discriminatory remarks but do not consider it appropriate to comment on these in detail in public rather than emphasising to a greater extent Steiner's constructive contributions. This view was also taken by some of the initial signatories of the draft who shortly after publication wanted to have it known that by their signature they wanted to support the process of dealing with the issues but not the draft as such. This group of initial signatories, which included representatives from the Waldorf education association, the Steiner Nachlassverwaltung (administrators of Rudolf Steiner's estate) as well as the *Goetheanum* in Dornach, declared their intention in a joint statement with the authors of the draft Memorandum "to pursue the debate about the racism charges in the first instance by different routes".
- Representatives of the third tendency participated through specific suggestions concerning particular individual issues, but also the style of the draft, which some still considered too apologetic, or its too great dependence on the Dutch expert opinion.

The authors are grateful for the many different reactions to their initiative. Numerous suggestions arising from written comments or conversations were as far as possible taken into account in the final edit. In addition, contributions from historical racism research were utilised to a greater extent than in the first draft. All in all, this has produced a final version which is considerably different from the draft. A signature campaign which was originally considered was postponed by the authors in favour of the hope that the Memorandum would unfold its effect through a broad reception inside and outside the anthroposophical movement.



## Annex 2: Documentation: Public statements by the anthroposophical movement on the accusations of racism

### **The edition of Rudolf Steiner's complete works and the accusations of racism**

In view of current legal questions and the numerous reports on the issue of remarks in Rudolf Steiner's works which are racially discriminatory, the Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung as publisher responsible considers it necessary to explain its editorial practice in this respect.

Since the 1990s individual remarks in the large volume of Rudolf Steiner's (1861–1925) complete works are under discussion as possibly being racially discriminatory. Since then, such remarks have been thoroughly investigated by various parties. An extraordinarily thorough and comprehensive analysis from a factual and legal point of view was undertaken by the Dutch commission of enquiry *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen* (1998/2000). The conclusions reached by the commission included the following:

←Rudolf Steiner's work does not contain any racist teachings. Remarks about races form a minor part of the complete works both in terms of content and quantity. They must be seen against the background that Rudolf Steiner, as he systematically sets out in numerous places in his works, fundamentally starts from a far-reaching view of the human individual in which group membership by race, nation, gender religion, status, etc. is a mere outward form of appearance. As defined by Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, differentiation by race relates to past stages of humanity which becomes meaningless in the present and future.

←In terms of social policy, Rudolf Steiner radically advocated liberty and equality of human individuals, primarily in his initiative for social threefolding. He frequently and unmistakable spoke out against racism, anti-Semitism, nationalism and similar endeavours.

←There are, however, a number of remarks about races in the published works which, by the criteria of the present regulations against racial discrimination as they were developed in the wake of the Second World War, could cause a problem if they were used today in a hateful, hostile and discriminatory manner or were taken out of context.

←For the sake of completeness, it was noted that Steiner's remarks about races were in all events unobjectionable in his time. There were no rules against discrimination in the legislation of the time.

The Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung publishes the works of Rudolf Steiner as an academic complete edition of an historical author who founded the anthroposophical science of the spirit. All works are published in accordance with the guidelines of the edition. Following the recommendations of the commission cited above, text passages in volumes of the complete edition containing remarks which could be interpreted as racially discriminatory from a present perspective have been provided since 2005 with a special commentary in reprints and new editions of the volumes concerned. This editorial practice will apply to all future reprints and new editions of the volumes concerned. The individual commentaries must be researched and serve the purpose of providing factual information about the context of the relevant remark, explaining possible misunderstandings and enabling their critical classification.

The members of the board hereby declare on behalf of the Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung that they emphatically reject the use of Rudolf Steiner's remarks in any way which calls for hate against groups of people or is directed in a hostile and discriminatory way against groups of people on the basis of race, nation, gender, religion, etc. They would see that not just as a violation of basic principles of human dignity but also as an abuse of the intentions of Rudolf Steiner.

The Board of the Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung, October 2007

- Stuttgart Declaration of the Association of Waldorf Schools

#### **Waldorf schools against discrimination**

- In observing their educational tasks, the independent Waldorf schools make a contribution in the spirit of human rights to a society which is based on the coexistence in solidarity of all people.
- As schools without selection, separation and discrimination of its pupils, they view all human beings as free and equal in dignity and rights, irrespective of

their ethnic association, national or social origins, gender, language, religion, political or other convictions.

- Anthroposophy as the basis of Waldorf education rejects any form of racism and nationalism. The independent Waldorf schools are aware that individual formulations in the complete works of Rudolf Steiner do not, by current understanding, accord with this basic attitude and have a discriminatory effect.
- Racist or discriminatory trends are not tolerated either in school practice or teacher training. The independent Waldorf schools emphatically reject any racist or nationalistic appropriation of their education and of Rudolf Steiner's works.

The independent Waldorf schools have been working on the basis of such an understanding of their role since their establishment in 1919. Waldorf educational facilities are actively involved today in all parts of the world, including in social flashpoints in Europe, Africa, America, Asia, Israel and the Arab world.

**Adopted by the members' meeting of the Association of Waldorf Schools, Stuttgart, 28 October 2007.**

### **Declaration regarding the charges of racism in Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy**

*The council of the Anthroposophical Society in Germany declares as follows:*

A human science of the free human being

Anthroposophy investigates the historical and present conditions governing the development of the free human being. It sees itself as a human science of the human individuality; hence any form of racism and exclusion of groups of people is alien to it. In his works, Rudolf Steiner created the basis for such an understanding of human beings of themselves. His objective was to overcome the lack of freedom and the limitations which arise from definitions of group association and racial membership. In doing so, the formulations used by Rudolf Steiner in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are of course dependent on their time. In today's linguistic experience the impression may arise in some passages of racially motivated forms of expression; but a serious examination of the content and context will show at any time that the opposite intention holds good. The practice of anthroposophy in a great variety of facilities in, for example, education, therapy and research illustrates such an obligation towards free human beings in their objectives and collaborations.

For the council of the Anthroposophical Society in Germany

Dr. Wolf-Ulrich Klünker, Mechtild Oltmann, Hartwig Schiller, Justus Wittich

19 November 2007

**Summary of the final report of the Dutch commission "Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen".**

The Dutch commission "Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen" presented its final report to the council of the Anthroposophical Society in the Netherlands on Saturday, 1 April 2000. In this final report, the commission confirms its earlier result from the interim report of February 1998. This states that the complete works of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) contain neither a racial theory nor are there statements which were made with the intention of demeaning people or groups of people because of their their

racial membership and which could, as a result, be considered to be racist. But in the judgement of the commission the complete works of Rudolf Steiner contain a number of statements which, by today's standards, have a discriminatory character or could be experienced as discriminatory.

The commission concludes that there are 16 statements by Rudolf Steiner which – if they were made today as independent statements in public – would be subject to criminal action under Dutch law due to their discriminatory character; that is four more than was determined in the interim report. One of them, as can be read in his autobiography, was experienced as offensive by a Jewish acquaintance already during Steiner's lifetime.

The commission recommends that these passages in the complete works of Rudolf Steiner should no longer be published in future except with a commentary. That also applies to the quotations in group 2 which, although they were not classed as discriminatory within the meaning of today's criminal law, are at risk of easily being misunderstood without a corresponding interpretation or are experienced as discriminatory to a minor degree (for example through the time-bound choice of words or through the use of anthroposophical technical terminology). The interim report cited 50 such quotations; in the final report it is 67. Group 3 includes all quotations which are neither discriminatory in character nor require a commentary. That comprises all the remaining quotations of the 162 which were examined.

### **Changes in meaning**

The responsibility for reflecting the views of Steiner in their own words lies with today's authors and speakers – anthroposophists as a rule. They should be aware that certain terms and statements – even if they were used by Steiner exclusively in a descriptive, characterising way – are today laden with baggage and can have an unwanted discriminatory effect. In this context, speakers and authors have a responsibility towards their present-day listeners and readers, maybe including members of ethnic minorities. Because the meaning of terms changes with time, the literal repetition of quotes from Steiner can change their content. Obsolete meanings of concepts can, indeed, create a negative impression. The quotation, for example, that Negroes, too, are human can have a seriously discriminatory effect in the today's context. In the late nineteenth, early twentieth century the non-European peoples and races were in general not automatically considered to be the same in nature as Europeans. Against the background of the thinking of the time, Steiner's statement would have had a downright emancipatory ring.

### **Judaism and Zionism**

In its final report, the commission also evaluated and judged Steiner's views and statements about the Jews, Judaism and Zionism. This part of the study shows that Rudolf Steiner strongly resisted the amalgamation of the concepts of “race” and “people” with the uniform term “nation”. In this context he generally opposed the formation of ethnically homogeneous states. For this reason he also in his time spoke out in principle against Zionism as a state-establishing idea and advocated the integration of the Jews into a joint but differentiated European culture. Belonging to Judaism was a religious question for him connected with individual and cultural freedom but not to be understood as the basis for the establishment of an own state.

On the other hand, the study also explains why and which of Steiner's remarks about Judaism and Zionism gave cause for misunderstanding and criticism. In 1897 he polemicalised as an essayist in the *Magazin für Litteratur* sharply and personally against the founders of Zionism, Herzl and Nordau. He accused them of exaggerating and misusing anti-Semitism, which was on the rise at the time, for their own political ends in a period when the pogroms in Russia had already triggered a stream of refugees heading towards Germany and Austria. Because Steiner was thereby essentially promoting the vision of assimilation which he also advocated elsewhere, Steiner cannot in the view of the commission be accused of anti-Semitism even if he underestimated its dangers at that time. Nevertheless, the trivialising character of his judgement and the formulations he uses in the essay can be experienced as seriously discriminatory in our time after the trauma of the Holocaust. Hence the commission classified the relevant quotations as belonging to group 1 (statements with discriminatory character today).

The same applies to a statement in an essay about the role of Judaism in world history which the 27-year-old Steiner published in a book review for the *Deutsche Wochenschrift* in 1888. Steiner questioned the independence of the Jews as a separate grouping within Europe while at the same time paying tribute in a wider context to the positive influence of Judaism on European culture. One passage which has been subject to criticism in this connection says: “But Judaism as such has long had its day, has no justification within the life of modern nations, and that it has nevertheless been preserved is an error of world history the consequences of which could not be avoided.” (In the complete works of Rudolf Steiner, volume 32).

Steiner himself was shocked when this article was experienced as offensive to Jews by his own Jewish employer – whose children he was tutoring. For this reason the commission agrees with Steiner's biographer Christoph Lindenberg who qualifies this passage as a “blunder”. The commission itself notes that in the passage concerned a “too severe form of words” was used for the intended point of view, namely assimilation. Today, after the Holocaust, this form of words can, of course, no longer be used in any decent way. This form of words, if it were used today, would be “seriously discriminatory towards Jews”, the commission judged.

### **Initial underestimate of anti-Semitism**

Rudolf Steiner at the end of the nineteenth century vehemently resisted the plans of Theodor Herzl which he formulated in Zionism, the aim of which was to give the Jews the framework for a state, a “homeland”. Steiner subsequently consistently developed his view and severely criticised the establishment of any ethnically homogeneous states legitimised by the right of self-determination of peoples. The commission also surprisingly notes that Rudolf Steiner and his contemporary, Theodor Herzl, had almost identical views as young intellectuals on key subjects. Both advocated the emancipation of the Jews, both initially judged the rising anti-Semitism at the end of the nineteenth century not to be a threat and both were shocked by the Dreyfuss affair and were (correctly as it subsequently turned out) convinced of his innocence.

It becomes clear from the supplementary material that Steiner seriously underestimated anti-Semitism but changed his views in this respect around 1900. From 1901 onwards he fought against it as directly as he urgently warned for the rest of his life until 1925 against the danger of rising nationalism. Steiner was consistently aware of the danger of anti-Semitism from 1900 onwards when he was a member of a group of artists and intellectuals around the just deceased Jewish writer Jacobowski.

In that period he wrote that he had not anticipated that the anti-Semitic feelings among the students and the population would be as persistent as they turned out to be. He had assumed that these feelings would be increasingly recognised as unjustified and therefore overcome. Under the influence of the radical politician Georg von Schönerer, they turned out to be anything but the remnants of former times. Steiner made his views repeatedly and directly clear in the *Mitteilungen des Vereins zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus*, including in a series of articles entitled *Verschämter Antisemitismus (The Coyness of Anti-Semitism)*.

He had meanwhile recognised anti-Semitism as a “danger to Jews and non-Jews” and as a “cultural sickness” which arose from an attitude against which one could not speak out clearly enough. In this connection it is indicative of Steiner's consistent position that he described the notorious “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” as an anti-Semitic forgery as early as 1919, two years before *The Times* in Britain was able to prove it in detail. But he remained unchanged in his view that the time of the independence of the Jews as a urban diaspora had passed, just as it had for other peoples, and, quoting his contemporary Kunowski, that they had to amalgamate “in the blaze of a new culture which burns up racial hatred”.

### **Equal treatment of the “races”**

The commission regrets that in the public debate about anthroposophy and racism Rudolf Steiner's social theory has so far been left out of account. A new age had begun in Steiner's view at the end of the nineteenth century. One of the most important characteristics of this new era was the cosmopolitan element, the endeavour to overcome nationalistic tendencies and the separation of the races. For this reason, among others, Steiner in reaction to the First World War actively advocated his social vision, the so-called “social threefolding”. A key element in this is the importance which Steiner accords to the freedom of the individual increasingly to liberate himself or herself from the old form of group bonds.

Steiner attempted to describe the differences among the races, and in particular among peoples, with the aim to enable better reciprocal understanding. In relation to the races he held the opinion that an emphasis on their differences was no longer appropriate for the time. In the debate about the “social question” after the First World War Steiner not only advocated cultural diversity but just as much equal rights for the people of different nations and origins as a generally valid law. This was in a time in which equality before the law was by no means yet self-evident – not even among the white population. The present final report mentions the fact in this context that the Versailles peace conference had even rejected the proposal that equality of treatment for all races should be included in the charter of the League of Nations.

### **Criticism of Wilson**

Steiner expressly rejected the attempt to amalgamate the concepts of “race” and “people” with a new term of “nation”. On occasion of his criticism of the American president Woodrow Wilson and his doctrine of the right to self-determination of nations, Steiner had urgently warned of the danger of rising nationalism. Curiously, Steiner's warning against combining the concepts of race and nation has not so far been mentioned in the public debate, the commission writes.

Wilson was repeatedly attacked by Steiner with the argument that such a right to self-determination would inevitably lead to xenophobia and the attempt to build ethnically homogeneous nations. Furthermore, Wilson had deliberately overlooked that the attempt was being made to decide by political debate what constituted a “nation” and that it could thereby be made subject to the arbitrary decisions of nationalistically inclined politicians – with all the consequences that arise therefrom. Every attempt to give a clear answer to what constituted membership of a nation would lead inevitably to the attempt to select “clean blood”. In his criticism of Wilson Steiner raised the ethnic struggles in the then developing Yugoslavia as an example of the consequences of nationalistic attempts at self-determination.

### **Examination of criticism**

The commission also examined criticism according to which anthroposophy is accused, among other things, of proximity to the ideology of national socialism and criticism of the absence of comments against the Nazis in the 1930s. With regard to the former charge, the commission clarifies that there is no inherent relationship between anthroposophy and ideologies which are based on racism, fascism or anti-Semitism. Steiner's world view, in which racial characteristics are accorded no importance whatsoever for the future and racial prejudices as well as nationalisms must be overcome, contradicts the blood-and-soil theory of the Nazis. That also becomes clear from the grounds for the ban of the Anthroposophical Society in Germany by the Nazis in 1935.

Separately from such fundamental considerations, the commission recognises the possibility of justified criticism of certain historical links between individual anthroposophists and the Nazis. These relationships existed in concrete form, something which, among other things, the work of the historian Uwe Werner (*Anthroposophen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*, 1999) shows. In the opinion of the commission, history shows that membership of the Anthroposophical Society was no guarantee that the person concerned would actively resist racist or fascist influences under all circumstances. On the other hand it can also be shown that there were anthroposophists in the resistance movement, something which the commission expressly mentions as a fact, not as an excuse.

The commission points out in this context that anthroposophists, too, took compromising measures, for example when the council of the General Anthroposophical Society applied for “proof of Arian ancestry” for Rudolf Steiner in 1935 to try and stop the ban of the Anthroposophical Society in Germany. The criticism that no significant resistance against the Nazi dictatorship was evident from the side of the anthroposophists is described by the commission as justified to the extent that the council of the General Anthroposophical Society indeed took no action against the regime, a fact which was “of course extremely regrettable”.

### **Selective outrage**

In conclusion, the commission again points out that it has rarely happened in the Netherlands that historical publications such as those of Rudolf Steiner have been subject to such strict scrutiny. It writes: “The number of pages on which there are remarks which can be seen as discriminatory comprises less than one tenth of a percent of the complete works of Rudolf Steiner, comprising a good 89,000 pages. Anthroposophy and social Darwinism contradict one another. Allegations that racism was inherent in anthroposophy or Steiner had prepared the way for the Holocaust in conceptional terms have turned out to be categorically false. The commission reaches the firm conclusion that Rudolf Steiner, in comparison to other pre-War authors and authors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (such as Hegel or Albert Schweitzer), has become the victim of selective outrage”.

### **Gerard Kerkvliet for the Anthroposophical Society in the Netherlands, 2000**

The author is press spokesman for the Anthroposophical Society in the Netherlands.

The present annex is a brief summary of the 720-page final report of the commission *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen and is intended exclusively for media use*. For academic purposes we refer to the original report published by the Anthroposophical Society in the Netherlands: *Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen*. Eindrapport van de commissie Antroposofie en het vraagstuk van de rassen. Antroposofische Vereniging in Nederland, Zeist 2000, ISBN 90-805593-1-8.

---

Frankfurt Memorandum • ISBN 978-3-924391-39-3 • Price €3.00

Info3-Verlagsgesellschaft Brüll & Heisterkamp KG

Orders from: [vertrieb@info3.de](mailto:vertrieb@info3.de)

Kirchgartenstr. 1 • 60439 Frankfurt • Tel +49 69 58 46 47 • Fax +49-69-58 46 16 • Head Office Frankfurt am Main • Commercial register: Frankfurt am Main HRA 28503 • Personally liable partners: Ramon Brüll, Dr. Jens Heisterkamp • Turnover tax ID No. DE 111 999 318  
[www.info3.de](http://www.info3.de)