BOOK REVIEW

The Mysteries of Social Encounter by Dieter Brüll.

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In few situations is the old saying, "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing" more easily proven than in the social organization and functioning of many of our Waldorf Schools. The enormous good will and promise of a new way of social working inspired by Rudolf Steiner's work too often translates into many plaintively wondering "why is this so hard?" while many others simply throw up their hands and walk away from the movement. Yet those who have felt in their hearts the wisdom of anthroposophical social ideals can also carry on confidently, sure that greater social learning will be found on this path, and that each new insight is a step towards a better world.

In the spirit of gaining new insight, we are given a powerful tool in the recent AWSNA Publication's translation of Dieter Brüll's book, *Der anthroposophische Socialimpuls–ein Versuch seiner Erfassung*, under the title, *The Mysteries of Social Encounters.* This book could have a profoundly positive effect on our English-speaking schools and other anthroposophical institutions, and it could lead us further on this path to a socially harmonious world. Brüll's scholarly work not only takes us on a survey of Rudolf Steiner's social theories, but also gives practical examples of how these theories are often misunderstood and misapplied. He shows quite clearly how in such cases they are indeed, "a dangerous thing." The danger here is that we take Steiner's theories and implement them without regard to other practical social realities.

A central theme of the book is precisely this: that we must work to make our thinking about ideas, such as, for example, "the threefold social order," flexible enough that we stop using it as jargon and start applying it practically in the organization of our institutions. To apply it practically in our own community requires further insight into the stage of our community's development, its social dynamics, and the social abilities of the community members. In other words, we have to get to know each other! Brüll is clear that most of Steiner's social theories carry an implicit warning, often ignored: "This is a theory. Effective practical results require practical organizations." He further states that the most forward thinking theories, applied before there are social conditions that can accept them, often result in a counter-productive discrediting of the very ideas one is promoting. So it is that organizing institutions strictly on theory can result in experiences not very satisfying–somewhat akin to biting into an unripe pear. The appearance of both is so promising, but careful handling and patience lead to far better results.

The Mysteries of Social Encounters also explores the basis for positive social interaction and offers key insights into what "careful handling" might look like in any institution, but especially in those built on anthroposophical foundations. Brüll begins by looking at the basic phenomena of social interaction with a depth of insight that illuminates three-fold social ideas as they pertain to the different aspects of society, not only as these ideas relate to the wider societal or "macro" level of government–about which Steiner spoke frequently after 1917–but also as they apply in our personal lives and in the life of institutions–about which Steiner spoke surprisingly little. Each of these three spheres of social activity–the personal, the institutional, and the societal–requires a different application of these ideals. Have most people working with threefolding made this distinction? I suspect not. Luckily, Brüll offers us precision and clarity on these concepts. Yet as long as we work with them as mere concepts they will fail us. Or, as Steiner put it: "Today it is not a matter of looking for theoretical solutions but rather to seek conditions in which humans can live in a social manner." And, going further, "To the degree that human beings regulate their social life together from their ordinary consciousness, forces intervene which work against the sense of development salutary for mankind." Instead we are called on to "make new our ways of thinking" and to become flexible and practical in our application of social theory.

Those interested in transforming the social relationships in their community should seriously consider a study of this book. Starting with an in-depth survey of Steiner's social thought in the introduction by Christopher Schaefer, *The Mysteries of Social Encounters* is an invaluable mirror for any group and a necessary path of study for those groups who consider themselves anthroposophical. As communities we must come together and realize that the social condition much be created together, not imposed by experts. In this era of pronounced intellect and ever-deepening individualism, we must take up the work of community building with the new thinking of anthroposophical social science. This new thinking is based not on theory but on action; not on what I work out for myself, but what the other reveals to me; not on preaching a new world order, but on listening to what is living and, with patience and love, helping it grow. Brüll makes a convincing case that shows how too often, social theories that were intended to support the freedom of the individual are brought forward as moral imperative, forced into situations that are not ready for them, and thus forced to live a malnourished existence, if they survive at all.

Now, as in Steiner's time, world events show us how far we have to go in our social development. The tragedy and weight of world events, of local conflict and personal struggle must be confronted, however. Steiner encourages us to say to ourselves: "I am, in any case, called to look at everything without illusion; I must neither be pessimistic nor optimistic, so that forces may awaken in my soul which give me the power to aid the free development of the human being, to contribute to human progress in the place and situation where I am." What better contribution to our "place and situation" than developing a love and understanding of our own community"? With this new translation, we are offered the opportunity to take up this challenge enriched by a new treasure chest of social insight.

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