

The Anthroposophy and Social Justice Project

Background

A powerful awakening of conscience is currently evident in North America that is seeking to bring about a new relationship of human beings to the earth, through various ecological and climate related initiatives, and to one another, through various movements often associated with the term social justice. As relevant and hopeful as these awakenings are, it is also important to try to discern the degree to which these movements are in alignment with their true source of inspiration.

The mainstream social justice movement, for example, claims to offer a philosophy and method for redressing the wrongs done to groups that have long been discriminated against and marginalized by society. This movement shares with anthroposophy a 'postmodern' stance to social progress, i.e., it recognizes that the roots of the modern world lie in the Enlightenment period and that a new paradigm of social progress is required to deal with the overwhelming problems modernity has manifested.

Unlike anthroposophy, which locates the source of these problems in the continued adherence of the modern world to materialism, today's new social justice movement has embraced a deeper connection with materialism to address these issues. For example:

- The one-sided thinking produced by materialism has led the social justice movement to the perspective that '*all knowledge is a construct of power,*' made, not discovered. As such, truth is an illusion and objectivity a tool of oppression
- The misuse of power produced by individual and collective egoism has led the social justice movement to the belief that the factors determining social life *can all be reduced to power relationships*
- Recognizing the role that group identities such as gender and race can play in social life has led the social justice movement to the perspective that individuality is at best irrelevant to positive social progress and at worst nothing more than a western social construct and tool of oppression

These perspectives reveal a much deeper materialistic view of the human being and the social realm than social justice movements of the past century. Through idealism, pressure and/or ignorance, anthroposophical organizations in North America and elsewhere are now adopting these perspectives by working with Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training programs and directives based on this philosophy. We believe the adoption of these approaches is contributing significantly to the erosion of the spiritual foundations, identity and viability of the anthroposophical movement.

Anthroposophy shares the humanistic dimension of the goals of diversity, equity and inclusion— from a certain perspective these are in fact the goals of the Consciousness Soul era. But like the ideals of the French Revolution that wound up leading to violence and bloodshed rather than genuine social progress, we might ask: *can these lofty ideals and hopes for the world, and marginalized peoples, be achieved without an understanding of the threefold nature of the human being and of social life as a whole?*

The purpose of the Anthroposophy and Social Justice Project is to articulate a new foundation for social justice work through a different ‘postmodern’ understanding of the human being and society. From this ground we will develop new approaches, methods and resources for DEI practices that can be used both in the worldwide anthroposophical movement and in society as a whole. Through this effort, we hope to bring strength, intellectual clarity and true practicality to the powerful Michaelic strivings at work in the larger society and in our anthroposophical organizations.

History and Goals

The project came into being in late 2022 through a dialogue between Mark McGiven and Robert (Karp) Karbelnikoff, who were both seeking to do something practical and accessible to address the problems articulated above. The overarching goals of the project are to:

1. Deepen our understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion and our ability to realize these goals within anthroposophical institutions in a fashion that is aligned with the wisdom of spiritual science and social threefolding;
2. Foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of Rudolf Steiner’s teachings, particularly as they relate to race, culture and social change;
3. Build community and cooperation among those working to achieve these goals.

In consultation with a group of close colleagues who are serving as our advisory group, we have created the following plans for 2023-24:

1. Offering mini-grants to individuals who want to do work and research in this area;
2. Holding a research symposium and publishing a book on this topic in partnership with Steiner Books;
3. Developing an alternative methodology for embodying DEI in anthroposophical institutions and partnering with several institutions who want to work with us to pioneer these new approaches in their organization;
4. Offering multiple other resources to support people exploring these issues, including webinars, ebooks, powerpoints, short articles and a website.

BIOS

Mark McGivern

After finishing a bachelor's degree from Trent University in Ontario in Philosophy and Comparative Development Studies, Mark worked for Energy Probe and Probe International as a researcher assistant. Mark has been a teacher most of his adult life. He taught English at the Toronto Centre for Victims of Torture and other contexts for new immigrants to Canada. After touring Nicaragua with Oxfam Canada in 1985 during the Sandinista Revolution he returned to teach for a year, then taught in Japan and later in Dubai for three years. He was trained as a Waldorf class teacher in 2001 and worked for six years in middle grades in Nelson BC.

He is the author of *Tolkien's Hidden Pictures: Anthroposophy and the Enchantment in Middle Earth*, published by Steinerbooks in 2022. At the Rudolf Steiner College Canada Mark mentors adult students in the Foundations Studies Program and is a writer and designer of online courses in anthroposophical topics.

Mark lives in Victoria, BC Canada

Robert (Karp) Karbelnikoff

Robert is a consultant, educator, writer and long-time leader in the sustainable agriculture movement in the US. Robert is the former executive director of the *Biodynamic Association* in the United States and of *Practical Farmers of Iowa*. Robert's writings include:

- *Social Justice in the Light of Anthroposophy: An Awakening Call*
- *Toward an Associative Economy in the Sustainable Food and Farming Movement*
- *Agriculture and the Sacred*, published by Sacred Spirit Books in Journeys and Awakenings, Wisdom for Spiritual Travelers
- *A New American Revolution: Associative Economics and the Future of the Food Movement* published by Hawthorne Press in Free, Equal and Mutual-Rebalancing Society for the Common Good

Robert has an M.Ed from Iowa State University and has completed a 3-year training in Anthroposophic Psychology. You can learn more about Robert and read many of his writings on his website at www.robertkarp.net

Robert lives in Viroqua, Wisconsin, USA