

CONCERNING PROKOFIEFF

This piece was written in 2003 and was sent for publication to the Newsletter of the AS in GB. They refused to publish it on the ground that I was not a member of the Anthroposophical Society.

When so many years ago a young 'star from the East' suddenly appeared on the Western anthroposophical horizon everyone felt that it was not just a bright but short-lived shooting star; it was a new celestial body which was here to stay and shine ever brighter and brighter. It was one of those rare occasions when even the boldest predictions came true. Prokofieff is today perhaps the most outstanding figure in the Anthroposophical Society and, quite deservedly, one of its leaders. What nobody could predict, however, was that in parallel with this something else would be happening; so another prominent member would have to write that "both within and around the Society Sergei Prokofieff has for some time now been under consistent attack" (Andrew Wolpert in the April 2003 Newsletter of the ASinGB).

This should come as no surprise to students of spiritual science, for they know that everything new and genuine, especially of a spiritual nature, inevitably becomes an object of the attack from Adversary Forces. What is surprising here, however, are two things. That all these attacks come from within the anthroposophical movement, from Prokofieff's fellow anthroposophists who are, like himself, serious students of anthroposophy of long standing. The other surprising thing is that, according to A. W., all these attacks are motivated by base human instincts like jealousy, antipathy, fear, anger and such-like.

It is not a very charitable picture painted by A.W. of his fellow anthroposophists and if it is true, what a pathetic and mean lot we anthroposophists are! As soon as something genuinely talented and original appeared in our midst it called forth in some of us the lowest in our nature. But we do not know whether this is true or not because A.W.'s article contains no quotes, names, titles or references. But even they would be of little use to the majority of readers who do not read German and have no access to the original sources. The only thing they have got is A.W.'s opinions and attitudes. Not much for forming an independent judgement by members of the Society founded by Rudolf Steiner!

Nevertheless, I shall follow in A.W.'s footsteps and take a personal stance in this matter without, hopefully, mixing up personal views with facts. Like A.W. I have met Prokofieff personally, but unlike him I cannot boast a personal friendship. Our meeting took place when Prokofieff first arrived in this country from the USSR, and it was at his request to discuss some personal matters. We also talked about anthroposophical issues, and it was clear that Prokofieff not only had some message for the West but carried within himself a strong sense of anthroposophical mission. Not at the time, but soon it became evident, that this sense was well grounded in what had been achieved by this young man, in his qualities and abilities.

When his first book appeared I had good reason to read it. For me it was the first book written by a contemporary Russian anthroposophist. Its themes were very close to my heart. And obviously I wanted to experience first-hand the qualities that produced it. But before giving my impressions, I have to make clear to the readers my understanding of a term which is relevant here. It is so widely and arbitrarily used today that it has almost lost its meaning. The term is 'spiritual research'.

In the widest sense of the word, any mental activity which involves thinking can be called 'spiritual research', even reading a newspaper while travelling on public transport. On the other hand, in the sense in which it was originally applied within the anthroposophical movement to a particular phenomenon, it has a precise and clear meaning: it is research into the spiritual world by means of Imagination, Inspiration

and Intuition as was practised and described by Rudolf Steiner. At the time he was the only one who was capable of carrying out this research and to whom the term 'spiritual researcher' could be applied.

Although, within an evolutionary perspective, every human being in the right course of development would eventually become a 'spiritual researcher', the bridging of the gap between 'one' and 'all' had to be started, as every beginning, with the small, but most difficult, first step. In this respect Steiner fulfilled his evolutionary task and spiritual obligations by showing mankind the right path in his book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*. From that time onwards it was up to each individual to decide whether to tread this path and to seek personal guidance. It was supposed to be a private, intimate and, to all intents and purposes, 'secret' affair. This drastically changed with the foundation of the new Anthroposophical Society under Steiner's direct leadership.

If the founding of this Society was, in a certain sense, a 'spiritual gamble', the founding of the School of Spiritual Science was a more serious one. There are several aspects to this. The one that concerns us here is that the School's aim was to conduct *spiritual research* and to train *spiritual researchers*. In this sense it could also be called *the School of Spiritual Research*. Alas, when its only Researcher and Teacher was taken to the spiritual world there were no graduates and the School itself did not get beyond its 'prep' stage. After that, mankind, and anthroposophists as part of it, was and is again in the same situation for which Rudolf Steiner prepared it originally. Every individual who decides to 'attain the knowledge of the Higher Worlds' and become a spiritual researcher has to create for himself his own 'school of spiritual research' drawing from whatever sources he finds available and appropriate.

There is no doubt that true researchers into the spiritual world of Steiner's ilk (not Initiates of course!) will appear in due course. They might be here even now. Unlike Steiner, they do not have to declare themselves publicly even if they decide to go public with the results of their research. Other people's attitude, acceptance or rejection of their work should be of no consequence to them. As to these 'other people', even if they themselves do not possess the organs of supersensible perception they should have some faculties of discernment before approaching occult literature. These faculties and not someone else's declarations are their only true guide.

But is this spiritual research the only legitimate and acceptable form of contribution to anthroposophical knowledge? Of course not. Even in Steiner's time people around him shared publicly, often in Steiner's presence, their 'ordinary' thoughts and perceptions. So, especially today when only we, through our own efforts, can make anthroposophy alive and vital, such spiritual activities of ours, however inadequate, should be encouraged and supported in every possible way. But as there is a clear distinction between what Steiner was doing and what the rest of us do, there should be the same distinction in naming these different types of activities. As the name of Steiner's research points to the field in which it was conducted, the name of our research should point to what gives it its foundation and should therefore be – *anthroposophical research*.

This distinction is not merely a matter of semantics. If an individual who does not possess a properly developed supersensible perception of the spiritual world calls his activity 'spiritual research' his pomposity and pretence are rather harmless and can be ignored. But when such an individual tries to act in Rudolf Steiner's capacity within the School of Spiritual Science which should have been abolished at his death and which exists today in name only, this pretence, apart from being highly unethical and disrespectful to our Teacher, becomes a spiritual fraud and is very harmful to anthroposophy and the anthroposophical movement.

But to come back to anthroposophical research, it encompasses a wide range of individual activities which all have in common, apart from their foundation, one im-

portant feature – the use of one's imaginative powers and imaginative thinking. Of course the results these different individual capacities produce differ tremendously in substance, quality and scope, and here we come to another important difference between spiritual and anthroposophical research. True spiritual research is objective, and its truth can be recognised by any unprejudiced mind. While even most conscientious anthroposophical research inevitably contains subjective elements, and it is the proportion of the objective and subjective that defines its quality. The only thing an unprejudiced mind can and in fact should do here is to recognise and separate objective from subjective. Let us put it to the test now, both for the writer and readers of these lines.

Prokofieff's first book (and I can now say the same about what little of his writings I read later) greatly disappointed me. Endlessly quoting Steiner can take you so far. But even when he expressed his own ideas, I found some of them so off-putting, that I never finished the book. I know this did not do justice to the author, and one should not do it if one wishes to gain a sound impression of a book, and especially to pass a solid judgement on it. But this was never my objective; whatever I read was for my own consumption. If I missed something important or valuable it was my own loss. All in all, I felt I could not learn much from Prokofieff, though I recognised that others might find his contribution to anthroposophical knowledge very valuable indeed. And it never occurred to me to express my impressions of what I had read, publicly or even privately, if not asked. But that was until his book on Tomberg appeared.

The personality of Tomberg fascinated, intrigued and puzzled me from the time I first read his works. As it happened, I had heard about him and his conversion well before that from a friend of mine who knew Tomberg for many years. At the time the name Tomberg meant nothing to me and I was not very much interested in his views, activities, conversion, private life, etc. But when I started reading Tomberg and became immediately interested in him, it was too late to satisfy my interest – my friend had died.

I encountered in Tomberg the most profound anthroposophical thinker, apart from Rudolf Steiner, as was fully reflected in the quality of his writings. His conversion to Catholicism, or his departure from anthroposophy for that matter (if that was the case), was unfathomable to me. Without passing any judgement I wanted to know what had really happened here. Not just the external circumstances of his conversion – I wanted to know and understand the process of transformation as it was taking place in his soul and spirit. But I knew of no source which could provide answers to my questions.

It would not be true to say that I expected or hoped to get my answers from Prokofieff's book on Tomberg. Still, I thought some light would be shed on this unusual phenomenon. And I did indeed find something new about Tomberg, though it was not what interested me most. But Prokofieff could not be blamed for this of course. His objectives were quite different, and his very approach, his genre and style were unsuitable for gaining insights into intimate individual spiritual processes. His book was based on the syllogism I remember from my school days: (a) Rudolf Steiner said Catholics/Jesuits were bad; (b) Tomberg was a Catholic/Jesuit, therefore (c) Tomberg was bad. (This approach seems to be quite usual for Prokofieff judging even by my modest experience; to give an example: (a) Rudolf Steiner was founder and leader of the Anthroposophical Society; (b) There are students of anthroposophy who do not wish to be members of the Anthroposophical Society, therefore (c) They are not true anthroposophists.)

But it was the substance and not the method that roused my objection to this book. If you wish to tackle such phenomena as Catholicism, Jesuitism and Tomberg, why drag Rudolf Steiner into it, why use his words to attack them? All these phenom-

ena manifest themselves outwardly and are open to everyone to analyse, study, accept, reject, praise or criticise them. Whatever you wish to do apropos them do it under your own steam, use your own efforts and abilities and take full responsibility for your actions. *Do not make Rudolf Steiner fight your battles for you.* He had enough battles during his lifetime and, I dare say, is not idle now either.

This was the main reason why I wanted to write a review of the book at the time, but various circumstances prevented me from doing so. (And to think about it, who would have published it?) Anyway after this impersonal encounter there was another, very brief encounter with Prokofieff after one of his lectures at Emerson College. The lecture was again on the subject with which I myself was very much concerned, the Anthroposophical Society. Some points in the lecture I found objectionable or needing clarification, and I approached Prokofieff with my questions. He did not respond to them or to my suggestion to discuss the matter personally (I knew he was staying in Forest Row for a few days).

Some time later I sent him my own article on the subject with an accompanying letter which said, among other things, the following: "If you read my paper you will see that our views on the subject, as well as the way we approach it, as in fact our anthroposophical experience itself, are totally different. But the whole meaning of such differences is, from my point of view, that they can become a starting-point of the search for truth." There was no reply.

It is a very characteristic modern phenomenon that people do not answer letters addressed to them and do not respond to people who approach them. It happens routinely in various circumstances and spheres of life, public and private, when people have statutory or moral duties to reply or no obligations at all apart from normal politeness. It is like when you greet people and they do not reply. Apart from obvious rudeness and inherent lie, I wonder what is happening here, on a deeper level. Is it like what Christ said to his pupils who might be unwelcome at certain places – "let your peace return to you"? Speaking of our time and closer to home, I think that when people do not respond when approached out of a spiritual impulse, they thus destroy something spiritually.

When I mentioned Prokofieff's failure to respond to my communication to someone who also had contact with him, I was told he was only interested in those who supported and followed him and not in those who disagreed or challenged him. That person was Prokofieff's follower and admirer for a number of years. But when he started having doubts and reservations and wrote to Prokofieff with his queries, the latter's response was most extraordinary: "I thought we were friends." Obviously this way of thinking does not allow for the dialogue I suggested.

At that time I heard that there had appeared some critical appraisals by German anthroposophists of Prokofieff's writings, in which they apparently found some 'fundamental errors'. This I had neither experienced nor could envisage in Prokofieff's works. Whatever criticism I had of him (as above) it was not of that nature and did not warrant, on the whole, a public airing. I was curious about this 'German' criticism. But the real surprise lay ahead when I heard about 'Russian' criticism of Prokofieff, about Irina Gordienko's book. That this book came from Russia, Prokofieff's birthplace and native environment, and was written by a member of the 'fair sex' was surprising enough. But I was really perplexed by two things: What could motivate the author to write a book like that? What could be so wrong in Prokofieff's works that it warranted and provided substance for writing a whole book?

That the book was in Russian was very important for me because the language can tell you sometimes as much as the message it conveys. I managed to get a Russian copy of the book and took it with me on holiday hoping to get answers to my two questions. I did indeed get my answers, but they are irrelevant to other people. Today the book is available in English and German and everyone can form their

own opinion. The most important result of this exercise for me was that I found in the author an anthroposophist whom I wanted to meet and discuss 'things anthroposophical' (not Prokofieff of course!). Such encounters do not happen very often in one's life, and I decided to make a contact with Irina Gordienko on my return home.

Alas, when I came back I was informed that she had been killed in a car accident. I experienced this tragic death as a personal loss though I had never met her. I also felt that it was a loss for the anthroposophical movement. And as far as her book is concerned, her premature death had some specific adverse consequences. In the first instance she herself was deprived of the possibility to live in the consequences of her deed and be fully responsible for it. It also affected Prokofieff in a somewhat 'unfair' way because with the author's death he was deprived of the possibility of redress, and her deed concerning him acquired some form of finality, however much other people might twist and turn it. Finally, it had karmic consequences for both of them in that they have been denied the opportunity to somehow resolve the issue together in this life.

Gordienko's death had its consequence for me as well – I decided to return to her book again. When I had read it first I did not pursue every point, or analyse every assertion, or verify every 'piece of evidence', or check every reference. I would have done so had I wanted to investigate the credibility of the author or her subject. But my objectives and approach were different, and I was quite satisfied with results they yielded.

But now, because of the 'finality' I mentioned above, I felt duty bound to delve deeper into the book and the issues it raised. I knew from experience that however plausible, fascinating or convincing some general statements and assertions might be, 'the devil is in the detail'. However I was not prepared to go thoroughly through all the issues raised by Gordienko, but wanted to investigate fully just any one of them. I knew that whatever the result, it would not be permissible to automatically extrapolate it to the other issues, but I thought it would at least tell me something about both writers. It did, and I am now going to present my findings to the readers.

I had two criteria for choosing such an issue: it had to be familiar to me from my own studies and I had to have the relevant materials by Prokofieff in Russian. The issue I chose concerned the founders of Marxism, Marx and Engels. As is well known to readers, in his Karmic lectures Steiner speaks of their previous incarnation in the 8th/9th century, which sheds light both on their personal relationship in the 19th century and on how Marx's mind and soul were shaped. Elsewhere Steiner also speaks of the historical/spiritual connection between what took place at the Eighth Ecumenical Council in the 9th century (abolition of spirit) and what was intrinsically contained in Marxism as the abolition of soul.

All this knowledge received from Steiner Prokofieff incorporates into his book, *The Spiritual Origins of Eastern Europe and the Future Mysteries of the Holy Grail*, though he takes liberties in rendering it. But this is a minor thing compared to what happens next. *Prokofieff is not satisfied with the spiritual/physical facts as conveyed by Steiner and decides to amend them.* He is not satisfied that Marx and Engels were only spiritual heirs of the participants of the Council – he wishes to make them its actual participants and, moreover, instigators of its decisions which they then carried further in their 19th century incarnation. But how can he do this?

Prokofieff knows his anthroposophy – it is not easy to make a convincing case for two incarnations of the same individuality taking place virtually at the same time (died in the 9th century – Steiner does not give the exact date – and took part in the Council as a mature person in 869). As he cannot possibly 'move forward' their earlier incarnation, Prokofieff chooses a different route. In the first instance, he creates the space between the two incarnations of these individuals by making them die "at the very beginning of the 9th century" (p.483, note 180) and 'participate' in the Council

while still "without doubt ... very young" (p.234). Then he uses his anthroposophical ammunition to show us that such rapid successions of two incarnations are quite possible. And to dispel any remaining doubts in our minds he draws further on his anthroposophical knowledge to tell us that the participation of the above persons in the Council might have been not physical but spiritual – they either inspired the real participants from the spiritual world, or were 'temporarily incorporated' in them.

Having achieved this Prokofieff can now announce that "the future founders of Marxism can and must be called the 'fathers' of the dogma of the abolition of the Spirit at the Eighth Ecumenical Council" (p.234). This allows him to make a concluding statement about them taking "their cause further in their 19th century incarnations" inspiring the abolition of soul (p.235).

That someone – anyone! – should indulge in speculations and fantasies of this magnitude concerning real historical personalities and events and spiritual facts, beggars belief. However, it is entirely the responsibility of the one who begets them. And of those of course who, in their gullibility, disseminate and consume them. Unfortunately the matter is not limited to these individuals and has much more serious implications.

But let us see first what Steiner had to say about the successive incarnations of these two personalities: "I was able to follow the paths taken by these two men who passed through the gate of death in the ninth century and were born again in the nineteenth... However greatly the outer circumstances differ, speculation leads nowhere" (lecture of 9 April 1924). We shall see now where speculation led Prokofieff.

Neither here, nor anywhere else to my knowledge, does Steiner speak of any interim incarnation of these individualities, of their participation, physical or spiritual, in the Eighth Ecumenical Council, of them as 'fathers' of the Council and of their ideas implemented there and later metamorphosed into Marxism. In fact, Steiner says quite the opposite as Prokofieff himself quotes on page 235 of his book: "What the fathers did by way of abolishing the spirit, Marx and Engels carried further in their very far-reaching attempts to abolish the soul." There is no question of them taking "their cause further" from the 9th to the 19th century.

Thus we have two incompatible versions of events, which cannot coexist – one is true and the other is false. Which is which? I called Prokofieff's version pure fantasy and speculation only on the basis of his presentation in the Russian edition of the book. Unfortunately, some important points pertaining to the case do not coincide in the English and Russian editions. I shall mention only one, perhaps most important here. When Prokofieff for the first time speaks of "the participation of both individualities in the work of the Council" (p.233) in Russian he precedes these words with the phrase, which I emphasise here, '*in our supposition*'. Can you see the difference? And only gradually does he turn his 'supposition' into a 'fact' while in English the 'participation' is presented as 'fact' from the word go.

As far as the substance of Prokofieff's and Steiner's versions is concerned I have no way of verifying it, and objectivity requires that equal credence be given to both until a way is found of exposing one of them. However, there is another very important consideration which cannot wait.

I have been a student of anthroposophy for forty years and, as most anthroposophists, learned to trust Steiner, his method of research and his spiritual communications, not out of belief, but as a result of my own thinking, judgement and experience. And I learned to trust his silence as well. I can think of three main reasons why Steiner withheld or did not divulge anthroposophical facts. Either he considered it premature to make them public, or there was no time or occasion, or the facts were in the process of research.

If we are to accept Prokofieff's version, we have to admit that Steiner, as a spiritual investigator, did the worst possible thing – he presented a picture incomplete

in its most essential part. If this is the case, it betrays an immature and irresponsible attitude to spiritual investigation and seriously undermines Steiner's status and credibility as spiritual researcher. I have no idea, nor do I want to know, what method of research Prokofieff uses and what the quality of his voluminous writings is. But if he has any sense of responsibility towards Rudolf Steiner, then, even if this is the only case of indiscretion, he must explain himself. I hope my fellow anthroposophists will join me in this appeal.