

The Christian Community

Perspectives

June—August 2019



What is Christian
Community?

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Image from the illuminations of the
Master of the Vitae Imperatorum, active 1402–1459

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Humanity is on a journey from old forms of community, bestowed by nature and blood, to new ones. Sometimes, the direction of travel seems unclear and sometimes the trouble it takes hardly seems worth it. It is all too easy to understand the appeal of those voices that say we should turn back the clock and return to older forms of community life, where smaller groups with strong conventions exercised stronger social control. However, we only have to remember the shadow side of such societies to know that this cannot be the future. Human beings seem to be challenged to find their own standpoint, free from the blandishments and purported solutions of populist politicians.

In this issue, we turn to the question of what Christian community can be from a variety of viewpoints, from practical questions of how congregations grow and sustain themselves to the deepest question of how our community striving can serve higher beings. We hope that this will help us to feel the importance of what we can do as community for the wider world. In times of turmoil such as we are living through, it is all the more vital that we feel this importance and celebrate community life together. TOM RAVETZ

Humus

*Humus forms from unused remains—
the core, the pit, the rotten spots,
overripe fruit with fungus, sludge,
what was left on the plate or in the pot,
mulch hot with fermenting, moldy cheese,
decomposing petal of a scented rose,
sewer slime and kitchen grease,
food spilled, spoiled, past its prime,
bloated body of something dead,
some unstayed living thing
given over to transformative decay,
hay fibers that will not become cow,
that, even with four stomachs, she cannot absorb,
reject residue of all life-forms.*

*At some point the offal dregs of matter—
waste, dung, slag—putrefying
purify,
become the very stuff of newness,
fertile earth in which life begins.*

*And there, at that instant,
in the soil
in the soul
in the course of a life
is the Christ.*

MAUREEN TOLMAN FLANNERY

Christianity: a future community

Luke Barr

An experience

In my previous profession as a teacher in a Camphill school in Germany, I occasionally had the privilege to partake in a very special experience. It was the so-called *Kinderkonferenz*, the ‘child study’. In this evening hour, we would meet in order to turn our thoughts to a particular child we were working with, often one who was in a crisis.

It would take place in a large, spacious hall, and we would sit in quiet at first. The house co-workers, the teachers, the therapists—everyone who had anything to do with the child gathered for this meeting. We sat in a circle—and in the centre there would be a small table with a vase of flowers.

In the space of an hour or two, we would share our experiences about the child. Everyone spoke out of what they experienced. There were no claims that any individual held the whole truth about the child—that would clearly be absurd. We shared only our own perspectives. No one contradicted the other. In fact, whenever, an apparent contradiction was spoken, it seemed more like an enhancement of the picture we were creating, rather than a diminishing of what someone else had said.

In this brief evening encounter, the circle of souls present would circle about the being of the child, coming ever closer to the holy ground of the child’s soul. It felt as if that table in our centre was the altar of the child’s soul; that vase of delicate flowering beauty, the child’s presence.

Would our observations, shared with warmth and reverence, yield us insights? Was it the being of the child itself, who led us to further avenues of action that we could aptly explore?

The reverent mood of conversation, the stillness and silence between observations and contributions, the respect for the other’s perspective and view, all of this revealed a working together in a way that was otherwise seldom possible. It was as if we no longer spoke out of our

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own usual small selves; we seemed to be speaking with a new tongue. We grew beyond our limits, as if we were speaking out of our future, greater selves. For we all knew that we were in the presence of the spirit of the child; all felt its angel. In the Bible, when the spiritual world draws close, often in the form of what we call an angel, human souls on this side of the threshold feel fear—or its spiritual counterpart, awe. This awe informed our deliberations, and we took our shared pictures with us into the night.

Some days later, we would meet (in the full light of day) in order to discuss how we might implement our deliberations; how might they prove fruitful? In what way had the being of the child revealed to us what it wanted us to know and help set in motion in its destiny? The mood of that evening was still palpable and we would feel confident that our suggestions could be taken up and acted upon.

Higher community and the process of consecration

It seems to me that this is a true expression of community in our times. We sat Whitsun-like in a circle, with something greater than ourselves in our midst. We all renounced our own need to be seen, to be in the middle; and turned as one to this being. All the gathered individualities enhanced their individuality by not asserting themselves, but by working together. We seemed to speak as one, as a community. We were in *communion* with one another.

There is a clear parallel to the holy archetype that lives in the Act of Consecration, the service. The service unfolds through four stages: Gospel, Offering, Transubstantiation, Communion. We met under the auspices of a particular child. This was our gospel: the bold and good news that Christ is in us, and that we would find his creative impulse in this child.

We would then renounce our own agendas, in order to approach the being of the child. Otherwise it was not possible to come close. This was our offering. Our shared experiences came together in a selfless mix, and became the consecrated ingredients of the transformation of the child's substance. And we found ourselves to be a community, growing aware of what we were to do. It was a communion, and a dim experience of *the health-bringing power of the Christ* within. For the

health meant here is not merely an absence of illness. It is something far greater—an intimation of the *preservation of our life: the eternity*, and eternal communion for which we are destined.

We learnt in this way to listen in a more profound manner to what the child said to us, who were its destiny-community. We could listen in a deeper way than any of us otherwise could with our normal sense of hearing. We developed a spiritual hearing, and we tried to hear what wanted to come out of the future of this child, what will it wished done, what future-word it spoke. We observed our work with the earnestness that comes with such responsibility, but with the levity of joy that we were given this task. We were serving—and what great joy lives in this earnest task!

Communities: oriented to serve

Communities, I believe, are *organs of service*. A desire to serve must live at the heart of a community, not a will to impose itself. Otherwise, it cannot truly be a community. Service, as a foundation, makes spiritual communion a possibility. The community must actively live with an imagination of service. It must learn to continually listen what the world speaks; to discern the essential from the non-essential; and to understand and grasp the needs of the world. It cannot lazily assume that it knows what the world needs. It requires repeated effort to get beyond our own opinions and habits of thought, in order to listen into the world.

This puts such a community necessarily in a precarious position. For it cannot be a given that its existence is simply accepted by the world. We cannot expect support for our endeavours, whether that be financial or from the world making it easy for us. Such a community cannot rest on its laurels. It must continually renew itself. It must continually re-invent itself. The will to serve does not find its place easily in this world. It must be repeatedly re-imagined, re-enlivened. This does not imply a gradual changing beyond recognition. The essential form remains; but it must be living, and all living things change.

As a Whitsun community, we must become like a circle that meets in the holy evening of day. In a way, every time we attend the Act of Consecration, we do something similar. Although the Act of Consecration has a morning mood, it is still close to this threshold of the night.

The morning mood is an Easter mood. It is the mood of resurrection, of new transformed life, greater life. When the Act of Consecration is truly our foundation, then we may be able to consecrate all our efforts to be a community, a serving organ.

The Act of Consecration is a perpetual Easter; the communities that arise from it are Whitsun-inspired.

The angel of the community

We may as a community discern something greater 'in our midst', or 'in our centre'. What is this? The spirit or angel of the community? The Christ? The human being? The spirit of our age? Perhaps all of these merge into one, in a way. Whatever it is, it is there, just as it is *not there*. Just as the child was not present physically at our child study meeting; and yet its presence overarched us all, and raised us beyond ourselves.

And whatever it is that is in the centre of our community, whatever strangely tangible but invisible presence it is, it is still 'a child'. It is still yet to come fully into being. It is not finished, even if Christ's redemptive deed is. His deed of creating the possibility for true human community is finished. Our part of the work is still in process; we are still creating, and learning to create community. The angel in our centre is still like a child, somewhat helpless in our chaotic world of human will. It depends upon us to take care of it, to help it flourish in our world, until one day it becomes strong enough in our world to bring to bear its own influence in the current of our daily affairs.

Perhaps to speak of a Christian community is a tautology. Perhaps all true community is Christian; and any *true Christian who is born* is nothing less than a soul (whether they call themselves 'Christian' or not) who is in the long process of creating true community. Many people long for community today but seldom for Christianity. If it were the other way round, and people sought Christ first, then community would unfold naturally. Perhaps we may be bold enough to suggest that community is only possible through Christ. That is, where true community exists, Christ is at work, even if he is not known or acknowledged. But this Christ withdraws far into the background, so that we may also actively take up the responsibility of creating community. Christ withdraws so far that we hardly notice him in our everyday consciousness. It

is only in those heightened moments of earnestness and joy, such as in that ‘child study meeting’ or in the Act of Consecration, that we find our true *niveau*, our true selves again. We don’t need then to seek Christ: we are living in him, and he in us. Through such experiences, we can begin to build true communities, *Christian Communities* for the future.

Then, just as in the picture of Whitsun, the dove of peace descends with grace upon us as individuals, and as a community.



Detail of Exultet roll Barberini latinus Montecassino



From 14th-century health handbook based on 11th-century *Maintenance of Health*
by Ibn Butlan of Baghdad

Becoming an I makes us lonely...and free

Ilse Wellershoff Schuur

Nature makes of humans merely natural beings; society makes of them beings who act in obedience to law; only they can make themselves free human beings. At a definite stage in development, nature releases human beings from her fetters; society carries this development a step further; they alone can give themselves the final polish.

RUDOLF STEINER, *THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREEDOM*

All the important challenges that we are facing, all the problems that affect us globally, are connected with the fact that we live in a time in which every person is becoming more and more herself or himself and as a consequence feels less and less part of communities of natural descent, with their set patterns. We are on the path towards an ever more versatile, colourful and free future, which sets us at odds with all that has come about so far. Individualisation means the transition from determination from outside to self-determination. This goes hand in hand with industrialisation and modernisation. This process began in the time of the Enlightenment, perhaps even at the beginning of the modern age, the age of the consciousness soul.

Sociology sees symptoms of increasing individualisation in the choice of career or of life-partner that is made independently of the family; in the emergence of the ideal of romantic love as opposed to arranged marriage or marriage among relatives; in the preoccupation with the destiny and biography of the individual in literature and in the emergence of the academic discipline of psychology, whose subject is the inner life of human beings. None of this existed a few hundred years ago. It is the hallmark of a modern pluralistic society that is made up of a multitude of individuals who have to struggle with their incipient capacity for self-deter-

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mination. They can easily become confused and frightened being left to their own devices, without fixed forms, guidelines or authorities. Recently, I have become aware of this transition in three major areas. Perhaps they are so urgent in my life because I have a lot to do with other cultures in which developments have taken a different course with very different results. It is precisely these contrasts, however, that make many generalisations clear.

Family—Tribe—People

Of course, we all share that fact that we have a family. But that's where the similarities end. In western society, for example, it is no longer so clear who belongs to the family. When does a girlfriend, a partner or a roommate become part of a family? Which children belong to whom? The names on the congregational address list don't always tell us who belongs together, who paid for the confirmation trip for which child or made a donation.

Also, it is no longer laid down and enforced with the power of moral imperatives, who should take care of whom. Of course, there are ever more complicated laws. But who truly feels responsible for whom cannot be regulated. The emancipating ego is increasingly detached from the family and the place where the person was born. Conversely, parents have to learn to let go of 'their' children. As they grow older they are often alone, because nobody feels obliged to take care of parents and grandparents. Some also have no children or only one child, who lives on the other side of the world... Filial obligation is often felt, but there are no more 'ancestral homes', and our globalised lives make it difficult to stay close. In addition, there are rigid working hours and the tasks that arise from caring for one's own children (which has to be mastered alongside career), which make it difficult for people of the so-called 'sandwich generation' (those who stand between aging parents and not yet independent children) to help as much as they would like to. One's own needs and wishes, which are becoming more and more important, are easily neglected.

This all looks very different in the Middle East. Many people there have no idea what a 'retirement home' might be! Aren't these terribly unfortunate people who have to live there? What? They founded it

themselves? Because they wanted to be independent of the children in old age? They shake their heads about such a heartless society... And of course the only son feels responsible for the widowed mother, even if he has to change his lifestyle in order to stay with her in the village and take care of her. And of course the father and the grandfather have a say in the choice of partner and career... But just as naturally the children of the many aunts and uncles often grow up together looked after by many adults. They can hardly grasp how a small, nuclear family could manage this!

Our lifestyle, on the other hand, has become so individualised that we cannot simply assume that parents and children, siblings or other relatives, will have any more to do with each other than people unrelated by blood. This is new—as recently as a hundred years ago, our family structures resembled much more what we still find today in many other parts of the world.

But even in those parts of the world, this way of life is not unchallenged. On the one hand, the traditional structures live on. On the other hand every single person is a child of their time and thus on the way to an individual consciousness in which the patriarch of the tribe is no longer allowed to decide about my lifestyle. Small steps are being taken, and many setbacks and obstacles are part of this transformation of society on a large scale, which can seem unbearably slow and sometimes explodes in revolution. Ultimately, this is probably the deeper cause of the ‘Arab Spring’, which was then appropriated by many interest groups, not least the authoritarian and reactionary religious communities. But in the long run, this awakening of the self cannot be suppressed completely!

In a somewhat larger context it is also about the larger groups from which individuals try to free themselves: nations, peoples and ethnic groups. This is a big topic—but here too the question is, to what extent should our biological destiny determine our life? The increasing mixing of peoples opens up new possibilities. If I look at the list of students at our seminaries, or at the register of a European school—how few people today have to do with only one country or ethnic group! Parents from different countries, adopted children from all over the world, immigrants who have come for a whole variety of reasons—we are seeking

new, freely chosen homes, with which we choose to be connected. So much is possible and 'normal' that the nationalistic behaviour of certain political groups, motivated by fear, must seem bizarre to us. Can't I decide for myself where I experience belonging? Can someone else tell me whether I belong? That I may have only one home? Who decides that if not me? Every human 'I' seeks self-determination and suffers where it is denied!

All this can help us to understand what Rudolf Steiner meant when he stated that nations and races are an outdated model in the development of mankind!

Man or woman—or both; or something completely different?

In recent years we have been confronted increasingly with questions of gender and sexual identity. It has become clear that in our time the way in which we live our gender roles can no longer be prescribed from the outside. Whether I am 'female' enough for male demands when I work professionally as well as being a mother, perhaps even performing 'unfeminine' activities—this can no longer be dictated to me. And a man must be allowed to decide for himself whether he wants to cry or knit or wear a ponytail or skirts. The fixed gender roles have dissolved in the last hundred years—just as Rudolf Steiner had already suggested would be needed in a society that emancipates human beings from prescribed roles (*The Philosophy of Freedom*, ch.14 'Individuality and Genus'). In 1894, Steiner saw it as a presumption for men to decide what women's essential nature ought to be! We can no longer conclude from our own standpoint whether others' choices are right or wrong, if the ego is to become free. When I was a child, a woman could not become a newsreader (too subjective), and women's football was only allowed on the children's playground (too brutal). Married women were only allowed to work with their husband's permission. For today's ears that sounds almost Saudi Arabian! But even in that traditionally Islamic country, development is underway: from last summer, women have been allowed to drive.

But role models are not the only factor. The gay rights movement gained acceptance in our diverse societies. Homosexuality, same-sex

love, is no longer a 'security risk' that makes a politician susceptible to blackmail. On the contrary, whether mayor or minister, TV presenter or war reporter, there are role models that make it easier for young people in our society to find their own way in the thicket of possible forms of life and love with the worldly 'blessing' of the state.

People who feel trapped in the wrong sex are allowed to make a change. My schoolmate James Boylan married and was the father of two sons before he dared to admit that he had always felt like a woman. Today her name is Jenny. She has described the process in a touching way and, as it happens, she is still happily married to her wife...

Tolerance towards such individual paths is not yet as pronounced everywhere as in the USA and Western Europe. In many places the traditional habits of thought and feeling still live very strongly, and individuals make unconventional choices at danger to themselves. This divergent rate of social progress around the world stimulates the desire for change, which can perhaps only be realised in another form of society, so that it becomes a motive to emigrate.

Much that is old still hinders the new. This is true everywhere, but where the confrontation is as crass as it can be in many parts of the so-called Third World and perhaps especially in the Middle East, there are great upheavals that can lead to a great sense of conflict. And often only inner or outer repression or flight remain as alternatives.

Religion or tradition?

A retrograde tendency seeks the security of established forms. This might be a traditional, conservative way of life in which the laws of life are taken from the writings of the ancients, the rites of religious institutions or the customs of the people. These norms, however, increasingly lack truly profound content, because they are not refreshed by true initiates who can pass them on for today's world, nor are they taken hold of in the spiritual life of individuals, but they have ossified into mere form. They become crutches of the ego which is still too weak and afraid to learn to walk on its own two feet.

This phenomenon is not restricted to the traditional Muslim communities and Orthodox Judaism, but can also be observed in some of the forms of institutional Christianity. When the laws of the so-called Old

Testament are understood literally and the lifestyle of a few centuries ago is held up as the model, as some evangelical Christians do above all—but not only—in North America, this is a retrograde step. Trying to uphold the values of the Christian West by holding onto the fading traditions of church Christianity only means that one loses touch with the mainstream of society. Taking refuge in a community of like-minded people who know that they are right and that everyone else is lost, has a similar effect. All this is in some respects similar to what happens in the Islamic world with the turn to totalitarian Islamism and with the resurgence of religious authority figures.

The phenomenon that people are leaving the established churches is not new, but as a trend it cannot be stopped, despite the many PR attempts and efforts to reconcile the church with ‘modern life’, which always seem to come a little too late. But on the other hand there is a growing search for meaning, for real help on the path of self-discovery and also a longing for places of genuine spirituality that can become a source for a transformation of the greater whole. We may be moving towards a more individualised world in which we find access to a spirituality of the future as individuals.

‘We are not at the end but at the beginning of Christianity,’ says Christian Morgenstern. And perhaps this applies to other religious paths that lived in groups in the past and can be taken up today in a completely new and individual way, as Christianity must be.

Karl Rahner says that the Christian of the future will be a mystic—or he will no longer be a Christian. To be a mystic means in the broadest sense to bring the spirit alive in our own soul. There are many ways of doing this, but they are ‘narrow’ ways, demanding individual, creative energy. Only through a lived mysticism will the isolation of human beings become their true liberation.

'I am there in their midst' *Being a Christian community*

Peter Holman

I have a friend who knows The Christian Community well but is not a member. He has often maintained that we are neither 'Christian' nor a 'community'! We don't run soup kitchens, help the homeless or donate money to charities—the kinds of things that other churches are often much better at. Not a community? Because, at least in my then congregation and in my friend's eyes, we are often not very good as laity (sometimes as priests) at caring for our fellow congregational members when they get sick and need visiting, or are in need of extra finance to attend to medical needs, and so on. Nor do we share community life much from Monday to Saturday; we are not life-sharing communities like Camphill and others.

How true this may be within The Christian Community generally we can consider later. So, what is community? And what makes it Christian?

The first Christian community consisted of twelve: the twelve disciples. At the time of Easter and all the rich community-building experiences of the forty days, there were only eleven. Judas was no longer there. So members of a community come and go, but the community is still there. It is there where 'two or three are gathered together'. And to be a *Christian* community, one must add: '... in my name'. The Christ is present: 'I am there in the midst of them'. This verse from Matthew's gospel (18:20) has brought immeasurable comfort, courage and power to people over two millennia. It lies at the heart of any understanding of Christian community, also in our time.

St Luke tells us in the Acts (4:32) that the early followers of Christ—first called 'Christians' in Antioch (Acts 11:26)—'were of one heart and one soul'. This is one of the most decisive characteristics of such a community. On a heart and soul level they shared a warm bond,

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Edinburgh.*

a common feeling of commitment and of belonging. They also 'had all things in common' (2:44); they seemingly shared everything. (My friend had this in mind.) A third feature mentioned in Acts is that they attended the temple together and 'broke bread in their homes'—or, 'from house to house' (2:46).

One could say from the above verses that on three levels of their shared existence they put into practice a reality of human togetherness that strengthened their community life: on a physical level of shared daily objects, in their feeling-life of warmth and caring, and in the spiritual and sacramental realm. How much of this can be applied directly today?

Many of us have experienced life in a Camphill community, or a kibbutz. Camphill is a rich and fulfilling way of life for some people, even if great changes are occurring now. It is possible to practise real living together and sharing in every way. There are other intentional communities, e.g. Jean Vanier's L'Arche places. For many people in our time, this is too intense. Perhaps we are not yet ready for this; maybe the majority of us still need to experience a life where we have individual freedom in our ideals and the ways we structure our day, to be spontaneous, to enjoy privacy, to relax when we want to and just be alone.

Looking back over thousands of years, tribal and community life was a given; it held and strengthened humankind. This has been so in all cultures. More recently, especially in the western world, much of this holding-force has been dissolved, allowing individuals to discover and practise freedom and autonomy, leading lives with more focus on the self, developing the self. A certain loosening or disconnecting from the group was necessary to attain this.

Along with all the benefits of this necessary focus on 'me' have been drawbacks and dangers; aloneness has become loneliness and desolation, often despair. This is nowhere more crass than in modern cities, where individuals in their own little shoebox-sized apartments are surrounded by millions, yet feel isolated and don't even know their immediate neighbours. Clearly a further step in human togetherness is needed. We need to rediscover community, more consciously and with individual effort and intention, and for our very survival it will become ever more urgent that we connect again as human beings.

From time to time a book appears that is timely and urgent in its message, identifying the roots of modern problems and possible solutions. Such a book is *Lost Connections* by Johann Hari (Bloomsbury, 2018). It is a book that is ‘an exquisitely lucid treatise on why no person is, has been or ever should be an island’ (Emma Thompson).

Hari starts by highlighting the rampant and serious mental health issues of anxiety and depression that have reached epidemic proportions in our time. He describes his journey of discovery that led him around the world and into conversation with countless people involved with social initiatives, experts who have conducted studies, and encountering new communities. He came to see that mental health is almost always far more about what is outside our brain than what is inside it. Antidepressants and other medicinal drugs that attempt to solve the problems by balancing out brain chemicals rarely actually make us better, content or at peace. It became ever more clear and obvious to Hari that so many of our modern malaises have as their root cause our being disconnected.

First and foremost, writes Hari, we have become disconnected from other people, especially from meaningful relationships. We have become disconnected from meaningful work, from nature, from a hopeful and secure future, from that which gives us intrinsic satisfaction, from life itself to some extent.

The author traces our early evolution from the savannas of Africa, where humans survived through co-operation, the dense web of social contacts and being embedded in nature. In recent decades all kinds of community activities have been declining. Collective structures have collapsed. We have become shut away in our own homes, often within the home in our own rooms. Often now, when we have problems, we have no one to turn to; the average American apparently has no confidante.

Hari tells a remarkable story from Germany. In Berlin in 2011 in a concrete housing project where poverty and crime were rife and people never spoke to their neighbours, something remarkable happened. It started with an old, wheelchair-bound woman sticking a note on her window saying that she was about to be evicted for not being able to pay her rent and would kill herself before the bailiffs came. She didn’t

expect anyone to help her; she knew none of her neighbours. But she didn't want her death to happen without people knowing why.

As it turned out people did come to her, one by one, asking, diffidently, if she was OK or needed help. It turned out they were all in a similar situation. The area, Kotti, was an insalubrious neighbourhood where no one had much and no one trusted anyone else. Everyone was angry and in despair but knew no way of expressing this. Now, in an almost miraculous but utterly natural way people banded together to save the old woman, to protest against the high rents, to remind the world that they had helped build the city and were worthy of respect. People from all cultural backgrounds got talking to each other and made new friendships.

One of many details of this story touched me. Turkish immigrants now living in Kotti told of how, when they had lived as children in Turkey, the people there referred to their entire village as 'home'. When they came to Germany they realised that 'home' was much smaller: the space within your own four walls: 'a pinched, shrivelled sense of home'. As they took shifts sitting on their street protesting, and as things developed, their sense of home expanded once again—to cover the whole housing project, and the dense network of people who live there. By being released into something bigger than themselves the residents found a release from their pain and despair.

Eventually the protest movement became a group of people who formed a community and set up a thriving community centre where all manner of social interactions took place—and still do—and where people are human again. So much more was achieved than a mere rent freeze!

Hari describes a similar transformation in a London community, Bromley-by-Bow, where derelict land is turned into a beautiful garden through the work of people who themselves undergo healing and ennobling in the process.

Hari's book can teach us much. In the second part of *Lost Connections* he offers his thoughts and some guidelines on how we can reconnect again. He speaks of 'restoring human nature' and of 'reawakened connections'. In his concluding chapter he reflects on how for decades we have been disconnecting from one another and from what matters.



‘We have lost faith in the idea of anything bigger or more meaningful than the individual, and the accumulation of more and more stuff’. He points to how, if the problems of our modern lifestyle such as anxiety and depression weren’t created by the individuals who suffer, then it is not just they but the whole of society that must work to bring the necessary change. We can’t do it alone.

The concluding page has these words, when Hari is speaking to his teenage self:

‘You have to turn now to all the other wounded people around you, and find a way to connect with them, and build a home with these people—a place where you are bonded to one another and find meaning in your lives together.’

What a splendid characterization of community!

We in The Christian Community are all to some degree wounded and need to find healing. (One possible synonym for ‘disconnection’ might be ‘sickness of sin.’) We seek ways to connect and to build a spiritual home. At the centre of our community life is the altar, with its aura of sacramental wholeness, the ‘breaking of bread’. Christ was once described as ‘the homeliest word in the world’ (Michael Bauer). He is the one who sits at the table that is our altar, dispensing bread and wine, around which we are gathered as a community ‘in his name’. All flows from this. To ‘connect again’ is to ‘make whole’, linking to the divine.

How this manifests itself in the rest of our life together will vary from place to place. Some of us will find ways to engage in charitable

social work. Perhaps the thought holds good that not everything can yet be done in the name of the church, but there will always be individuals in our congregations who perform great deeds of love and service in the local community. Prisons are visited in some countries by Christian Community priests, and some people get involved in telephone counselling services, such as The Samaritans.

We can try to share material possessions, to lend community friends our lawnmower or digital projector, to establish projects such as a community garden or social café.

In every way we can cultivate warmth in our congregations: from the way we speak with one another and the genuine interest in our eyes, to the tact with which we welcome newcomers, and helping where we can, showing kindness.

Whatever ways we can find in the social realm among ourselves in Christian community to bond, to share, to build soul-fabric, will strengthen all that we do. Making sure we have fun together, young and old—pancake evenings on Shrove Tuesday, barn dances, games evenings, making music, making Advent stars and Easter decorations, introducing art and eurythmy into our lives wherever we can; these and many more things could foster community life.

The sharing of our own biographies in the congregation can generate warmth and appreciation between us. Study groups are important and opportunities to learn together and increase our knowledge of Christian insights. Commitment to what we do is decisive: who can we count on? Will you be there to support this event and help with it? Are we in this together?

Let us as The Christian Community never cease in our striving to be a Christian community!

What is the task of a Christian community?

Jens-Peter Linde

Any business organization or social endeavour needs a Mission Statement which makes clear its purpose and its tasks. Politicians have their party manifesto. Even the sacrament of marriage states the purpose of marriage with its last sentence: marriage is for the good and happiness of all humankind.

When I look at the many tasks of the priest, I know that beyond being a kind of cultural entrepreneur, a community leader, a manager of a social enterprise and a spiritual counsellor, I have a specific task: to be the conduit for spiritual forces to flow down into the worldly vessel of the community, and to let human concerns reach up into a receptive spiritual realm.

But that is my task as priest. If the community receives these spiritual forces through the power of the sacraments, where will they feel that this potential might flow onwards? Is our calling to become stronger, happier and healthier for ourselves as individuals through this grace, or do we also have a task to do something with it as community?

Perhaps we can come closer to answering the question if we remember our name: The Christian Community. We can be mindful that Christ took the way from heaven to earth because divine love wanted to reach out to creation and instil into it a conscious dimension of itself. Therefore, as Christians we are encouraged to partake in this loving gesture—into the world, not away from it; to love the earth even as heaven does! After all, Christ sent out his disciples into the world to be ‘teachers of all peoples and to baptise them’ (Matt. 28:19). Teaching would mean today to help people understand their destiny in the world and baptising would mean to help them experience grace in the events of their biography, which can come about

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through our presence, when we have ourselves been touched by the love of Christ.

This turning to the world cannot mean that we are to set ourselves up in competition with social work or fundraising agencies as our primary task, when expert organizations are already doing that with a wider membership than we will manage. However, if the healing grace which streams through the sacraments into each participant is to become a communal impulse in the world, we surely ought to do something about it.

As a priest, I could stand in the way of the community fulfilling such a task, if I imagined myself to be the kingpin around which everything should revolve. At the same time, I could become a blockage if I didn't become aware of and support whatever initiatives might have been inspired by the spirit of our community or the spirit of our time in our human constellation.

The second part of our name—Movement for Religious Renewal—may help us understand this a bit better. For here is a real task: to renew the way in which the heavens can speak to us and how we can speak to the heavens. If we manage to renew this movement in us, renewal can begin to flow through us. The world will continue to evolve, but that can be more or less painful or less or more graceful. We can help the divine to be in tune with the world's evolving by tuning in ourselves through our religious life by the strength, the care and the inspiration with which an enthusiastic community endeavour can provide us. Then we'll begin to smile—as people around us will do, if they meet us being graced by and fulfilled through the sacraments of The Christian Community—Movement for Religious Renewal—for the good and happiness of all humankind, the virtue of culture, the health of nature.

How do congregations grow?

Aaron Mirkin

What makes congregations grow and how do people get and stay involved? Wouldn't we love to have the answers to such questions? What follows is one possible approach to seeking such answers.

We are building a new church in Stroud, England which we hope to consecrate on October 20 this year. It is a big project that has been more than ten years in the making and has involved many people and resources. There has been and continues to be wonderful enthusiasm and support for the project from many fronts, and yet there have also been many hurdles and challenges, particularly in the social and financial spheres. At some points we had to question whether we could ever hope to achieve it; and we have had to keep asking ourselves: Why are we doing this? Who do we think we are to dare attempt such a thing? What gives us the right to do this?

Our convictions and community fabric have been tested every step of the way, and although it hasn't always been easy, it has been so good for our life and work in the congregation. In many ways these tests have stimulated wonderful inner community strength and growth—especially because we have had to keep reflecting on who we are and why we are doing what we are doing. We have had to review and revise many of our old habits and patterns of doing things. We have had to learn to practise the old farmer's adage: 'Get better before you get bigger'. In other words: Make sure that you do everything you already do as well as you possibly can and with as much conviction as you can muster before you can expect to be able to grow, for when you grow you will have to be even better at all those things than you were before.

And that brings us once more to the question we started out with. Put more simply: How do we build community? To which we might now tentatively reply, whether one is in the middle of a major building project or simply ticking along: Community is built through

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constant self-reflection and self-renewal. Through cultivating a congregational self-consciousness.

...And what else could the self of a congregation be than the community angel, a servant of Christ.

It implies that this practice of congregational self-consciousness will always have something to do with the consciousness of the angel of the congregation. As a consequence, one could come to the conviction that all processes of self-reflection in a congregation enable the members of the congregation to draw nearer to the angel of the congregation, and thereby the angel of the congregation is in turn all the more able to draw nearer to its members.

Before we begin to consider some possible ways for practising such congregational self-reflection and self-renewal we might, in preparation, consider the following: The angel of each congregation draws together the sacramental substance produced by the congregation and takes it where it is needed in the world. A good portion too is used to weave and harmonise a dynamic karmic network between all those who gather each week at the altar. Especially through the communion, the members and friends who come together at the altar are brought into a special relationship with each other. The strength of the one is made available to support the needs of the other, and this will vary of course from week to week and from year to year depending on the unfolding individual destinies of the various community members and friends. In addition it is quite possible to imagine that the broader human environment of village, town or city in which each congregation is placed will also have its impact on such a karmic network and it would make sense to include this social context when reflecting on the congregation itself.

With all this in mind we can gradually come to view this karmic tapestry as something of an ever-unfolding community biography that is unique for each congregation, indeed for each congregational angel, and that develops from year to year somewhat like a human biography with a rich past, evolving present and promise for the future. This picture can provide us with one possible starting point for our striving towards community building. We can take as a guideline the three aspects of the congregational past, present and future. We can begin practising honouring and acknowledging all that has gone before in our rich con-

gregational past, celebrating and bearing the joys and challenges of the unfolding present life of the congregation, and opening ourselves to all that wants to come towards us out of the future.

It is perhaps now possible to lay out a range of concrete self-reflective activities and approaches to community building based on this view of the unfolding community biography.

Honouring the past

This is essential especially when one has an elderly congregation who have memories and experiences of the history of the congregation. One can never acknowledge enough those that have gone before us, many of whom are now on the other side of the threshold, and who have brought the congregation to where it is today. Any such honouring of the past strengthens our extended community across the threshold. The following activities can be helpful:

- Create a community chronicle and update it every so many years. This can really strengthen the sense of community self and community biography. Invite the older members to share their memories with the congregation in one way or another. This exercise could be important for congregations that are faced with having to close down. It could help in releasing the community angel that has faithfully served that congregation over so many years.
- Commemorate or at least remember in some way important community milestones like the founding of the congregation and the foundation of The Christian Community worldwide.
- Cultivate a regular gathering for remembering the dead. The dead still have an active interest in receiving from and giving to the congregation that might have been a central part of their lives.
- Maintain good, clear records (special sacraments, past programmes, congregational archive, etc.). This is essential as material for updating the chronicle and maintaining consciousness for the unfolding life of the congregation.

Honouring the present

Here, it is important to cultivate a well-managed and regular congregational life where there is a feeling of acceptance and everyone is welcome. Some things that seem to me to be important here are:

- Maintaining clarity and discipline around sacramental life and make sure the best substances and materials are used. It doesn't pay to cut corners. People will pay for what matters most.
- Creating an attitude of listening. Everyone is worthy of being heard, even the most apparently difficult, for each one has the possibility to be a mouthpiece for the angel of the congregation, perhaps especially when they are saying something challenging or controversial. The more that we can take this seriously, the more it can have a therapeutic effect on the social life of the congregation and enhance the feeling of mutual respect and sense of belonging for all.
- Creating safe spaces where community members and friends can get to know each other through art, conversation and doing things together.
- Maintaining an up-to-date address and contact list including birth-dates, and from time to time go through the list and contact those who have not been seen or heard of for some months. Address forms in the foyer can be helpful. Remembering notable birthdays like over 80s takes very little effort but is worth so much.
- Maintaining a regular programme, newsletter and website. Our website presence is becoming increasingly important.
- Cultivating membership of The Christian Community by speaking about it in meetings and articles. A strong core of individuals who have taken the step into membership adds a great deal to the inner strength of the congregation. The members make themselves available to the congregational angel in a far deeper way than might ordinarily be the case in lending substance to the weaving of the karmic tapestry of the congregational soul life. This is a real deed for the future.
- Cultivating an active interest in the town and country where one is. Invite members and friends as well as guest speakers from the broader social context to share their work and their stories with

the congregation. Being open to renting out community spaces for outside initiatives that might otherwise struggle to find such spaces. Mutually supportive friendships invariably arise from openness to the broader community.

- Being careful of judging too quickly other spiritual streams that we might feel do not fit into our Christian Community world view. They are invariably carried by people who have a genuine spiritual striving and any signs of self-protective 'preciousness' or indeed dogma in our congregations pushes the world away from us. Similar thoughts no doubt apply to other initiatives in our social surroundings that may come towards us. How can we expect the world to be interested in us if we are not interested in the world? If we are clear in our convictions and strong in our self-consciousness/ angel-consciousness we need not fear losing our substance and may indeed find new and creative ways of sharing just this substance with a far broader circle of people. Many members and friends, especially the older ones, know and understand this well and know how to discern and manage such encounters in a healthy and human way. We should be careful not to think that we know everything. All true spiritual life must be grounded in the reality of the modern world.
- Maintaining beautiful and well cared for buildings and gardens. It is worth building up a stock of appropriate pictures and displays for the festival times.
- Keeping the finances as clear and transparent as possible, and making sure the congregation is well informed about the finances. Not being afraid of budgeting a deficit at the beginning of the year. If it is based on a meaningful and forward looking year ahead then people will want to pay to make sure it happens. Cutting one's suit according to one's cloth is sometimes understandable but can often be a dangerous thing by instilling a fear of spending money on things that matter, and the community slowly loses its enthusiasm. My experience has been that if we are generous with each other, we will experience generosity coming towards us. This goes hand in hand with communicating about the needs and acknowledging donations that have been made.

- Cultivating festivals, celebrations and activities where children and youth are welcome. It can be especially community-building to organise events in which both children and adults can participate.
- Creating social forms and groupings where congregants and priests together are able to oversee the life of the community and take decisions together. The future of The Christian Community will increasingly depend on the growing sense of ownership and decision-making participation of members and friends in our congregations.

Honouring the future

We are still at the beginning of what The Christian Community could become and we have a lot of work to do to free ourselves from the fixed habits still so strong in the modern Christian world. Our Christian Community congregational life still leans heavily on the Middle European cultural references and forms that it was born into, and we still have far to go in creating congregational social and cultural forms that reflect the countries and circumstances where we are. Here are some ways that can allow the future to speak to us:

- Welcoming new initiatives and ideas even if they might seem unusual. They are always worth exploring and will show in time whether they can bear fruit or not. It is wonderful when community members and friends feel themselves empowered to do such exploration. Sometimes the angel of the congregation has strange and unexpected ways of making itself heard.
- From time to time reflecting on what is working and what is not, and generating a plan for making those changes that are felt necessary. Being willing to question what is done and how it is done. What was appropriate last year may no longer be appropriate this year.
- Embarking on vision-building exercises.

This overview and list of possible activities for awakening and maintaining a healthy community self-awareness and life is surely not complete. It is not intended as a recipe, but perhaps it gives some stimulation for ‘getting better before getting bigger’ and helping congregational life unfold a healthy and authentic biography which may indeed grow and encourage new people to get and stay involved.

Cultivating the garden of meaning

Carol Kelly

There is a bird feeder right outside of our Parish House, which is full of winged activity from early morning until just before sunset. Our birds have brought a special quality to the house and the land here. Besides bringing life, beauty and birdsong to our environment, they inspire us to stop and watch them, to behold if even for a minute, these lovely ‘messengers’ between earth and sky. I feed them for the pleasure of seeing them.

This is a kind of signature of our community: a flurry of activity, a liveliness, a rhythmical coming and going. We share coffee and conversation after the services on Sunday but also breakfast on Tuesdays and Thursdays. We work on a theme or a question that one or the other member has brought. This has led to many interesting and deep investigations of the gospel readings, the epistles, and many other wide-ranging subjects. The members who come on Tuesdays change week to week, with a core group usually there, carrying the thread. We share a wealth of life experience on various topics from health care, child care, biodynamic gardening, personal difficulties, insights and transformation.

Like a garden, community life needs tending. It does not just happen. Our souls are like the soil, and if we are to be fruitful we have to make ourselves available for cultivation. Culture, cultivation and cult all have to do with turning the soil—and the soul—to rise to something higher. We might have imagined in the past that community life, or social life, would just unfold on its own. But today it has become alarmingly clear that conscious, earnest cultivation is necessary. Human beings need to be connected, to feel a sense of belonging, to have a place within a group and to have meaning in their lives. The Christian Community is one of the places where all of these things can come together.

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The gardener poet Gunilla Norris puts it this way:

Is it not our basic work as persons to make of our lives a garden of meaning, a garden whose fruits we can share? We do not do this alone. All along, the soil is there, perennial and quiet. It is mute unless we consciously lean our ears towards it and try to hear. It is from the earth itself that we have evolved.....The words humus, human and humility are deeply connected. We are soil.

We glean from the parable of the sower (Luke 8:4–18) that we are responsible for the condition of the soul-soil, into which the word of God has been planted. But we are not alone in this. We are a community, a garden, a farm! We share our fruits and we do the weeding together. Together we produce the enduring good, a hundredfold.

We have to cherish and tend our community life. We may be in separate groups—teenagers, young adults, older members—but something connects us all as we come to the altar.

I must admit that I like to bake a chocolate cake for the youth group. I think it keeps them coming! Like the birds, I feed them for the joy of seeing them. Then, like the birds, we sing together and our song unites us and raises our humanity. We sing for the beauty of the sound and to have a gift to take out into the world to share with other people. We are continuously amazed at how grateful people are when young people gather together to sing. It gives them hope for the world.

The young people and the confirmands have the opportunity to get together with others, to share experiences, have conversations, fun, music, artistic work and outings. The older members usually do not have this!

We need to gather together as adults for retreats and conferences, to be able to turn off the phone, to become quiet, to listen, to gather insights from one another and to pray. We do not take this seriously enough. Retreats are opportunities for deep community building, for deepening our understanding of the passion and resurrection of Christ, for learning one another's biographies and strengthening our connection to one another. We have one direction in church, facing the altar. But we have another direction to cultivate in community life, looking toward one another and building Christ-community.

We face great challenges in our world. As the old forms fall away and things become increasingly chaotic, our community life can lend strength and guidance. We are quietly, invisibly building a new culture, a new way of thinking, a new way of being so that something will be there to replace what is continually dying away. One can hear in conversations, 'Turning this world around now would be like turning the Titanic!' Yes, indeed. But when we take Christ's message seriously, we can see that that is exactly what we are meant to do. His words and His deeds are radical. The ideas that we may espouse such as feeding the world, or taking care of everyone's health, or giving our abundance over to the poor—these ideas are against the driving forces in our world. We may want to love and care for the earth. We may think that there is such a thing as 'world peace.' We may believe in forgiveness and mercy and morality as principles to live by. These are radical, Christ-imbued ideas which cause great panic in the established world. If we are to unite with the world's evolving, we need super-earthly strength. We can know together that what is impossible for human strength will be possible through the power of God. We also know that we have to work with the divine will, as far as we can intuit what that is. Healthy community life gives us a foundation out of which to work. We need the gifts that each one of us has to offer. We need to adopt an attitude of selflessness, even in our great personal struggles, so that we become a strong circle, a vessel for the spirit.

Grey and white, or red, brown and blond(e)

A year in the life of a growing community

Siobhán Porter

In Stourbridge, we seem to have two communities in one, two distinct groups who come in and out regularly, and who sometimes seem in danger of passing each other like the proverbial ships in the night, although we are trying to forge something of a bond. That said, the activities of one are not necessarily compatible with the taste and pace of the other. What we've begun to recognise is that if at the very least, each could be more aware of the other, there could be a beneficial outcome, a coming together and hope for the future.

Much of our 'bond forging' entails talking about activities, issuing invitations to some, and striving to share as many events as possible.

In Council someone asked the question, 'What is our future?' Do we have anything after all we greys and whites have moved on?

We replied, 'Well yes, there's a growing army of reds, browns and blondes; they're just here at different times so you don't get to see them. They, like you, contribute to keeping the atmosphere alive, and are bringing young life to these walls...it's their seasonal table in the church entrance, and they are in the church more than once a week for stories, or services, or looking at the new colour on the altar.'

The work with children and young people has increased dramatically in our congregation, not through outer efforts on anyone's part, more through word of mouth amongst children and parents, and perhaps a little creativity on our part, allowing people to discover deep needs of

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which they were unaware, not just meeting the ones they're already aware of (although we try to do that too). The children's work is that 'other group', who come in and out when others are not around; they are the answer to the question of the mystery of the muddy footprints, the 'not put away' dishes in the

rack. They provide the ever growing supply of very small jackets, socks, jumpers, hats and scarves on our lost property hooks. And yes, these enthusiastic young people are truly worth getting to know.

I recently asked my colleague what he had hoped for of his new colleague in terms of work load. I had guessed it wasn't that I'd be spending most of my time working with children. But then...it's the children's work that helps keep a flow; we endeavour to create gatherings and celebrations that we hope will benefit all, together; one could say it's our creative flow!

Originally we had one faithful child who managed to bring others along in order that we would celebrate the Sunday Service for Children. We also had a group of children and parents who liked to come along to festivals that was quietly increasing in number. We'd had a bonfire on some local land that is being redeveloped, and some dragons appeared in the bushes at Michaelmas, followed by a pumpkin party at Halloween, and a Saint Martin's lantern walk. People seemed to like to join us, so we decided to keep up the energy and the children celebrated Santa Lucia in December. They invited the whole congregation to come to share the 'S' shaped saffron bread, and they came! My colleague had been asked to be St. Nicholas at the local Waldorf school, so good bonds were being forged.

Then came the question from a parent, Do you offer religion lessons for children? We said, Well no, but we could. We started straight away, during Advent, which was a wonderful time to start, awaiting the birth of something new, and the beginning of the church year. Somewhat tentatively, we began with our first group.

By the following summer the first religion lesson group had expanded beyond itself, and we started another group, which became overcrowded in its turn, so we started another. There are now four lessons a week at the church, for different age groups. During the lesson time the children completely 'own' the church, community room, and the garden, and the pond; there is a special game of tag (the rules of which I will never understand) that has been developed for the area around the doorway of the church. Regular members of the 'adult' community who may wander in are welcomed, but with an air of 'who are you and why are you coming into our space?' (We

look forward to that question becoming a recognition of someone they know—it is beginning.) The children are learning to respect the church space, to use the community space for their work and practical things, and to let go outside.

During the lessons the parents talk. They have their questions and ideas, and requests. Out of this, we realised that we needed more time to talk, time when the children aren't there, so we now have a regular parents' breakfast. The coffee and croissants are an essential part of this. We talk about the children, the sacraments, the church; we plan events, bring ideas for the children's work, share thoughts and feelings and worries and successes.

Out of a discussion about the children's service came a request for families to be given the opportunity to worship together. Most of our children have a long time to go before they will be old enough to join the Act of Consecration. We have developed therefore a new Family Service, which does not replace, but is in addition to the Sunday Service for Children. We use the form of a Close of Day: a short service with a sermon, and much music and singing. It is very special to see children set out on the path of seeking independence in life, as they stand alone at the front of the church in the Children's Service. It is equally moving to see the families come together as families, spending time together in a devotional situation.



By last summer we had found more nice things to do: the early morning Ascension day breakfast which we shared before school, to which some hearty early birds from the congregation, who didn't have to go to school, also came. We rounded off Ascension day fully by climbing Mount Snowdon at the weekend. We didn't just see the clouds, we were in them: the weather blessed us with four seasons in one day. The children were much faster climbers than the adults, but some of the adults did manage a plunge in the ice-cold waters of the high-up mountain lake! We are going again this year, but a less popular, less busy mountain beckons.

There are other activities too: camping in the summer holidays, with all sorts of tents and sleeping bags, gear found in attics and cellars from the younger days of their parents. Long forest walks and a campfire, watching the sunset and the sunrise and enjoying being together.

The latest big plan is a trip to Australia, to meet with an Australian group from The Christian Community of similar age, hopefully in an indigenous community.

We have our acting troupe. Selma Lagerlöf's *Christmas Rose* was performed this last Advent, and the children are now rehearsing their summer play. This is in response to the everlasting enthusiasm of this group who love to learn lines, to dress up, to sing beautifully and to share it with others. They ask and ask: when will the next play be?

This enthusiasm for theatre has meant that the traditional Christmas and Epiphany plays have had to have extra roles written in to accommodate the younger actors wishing to take part, and there we see the two sides of the congregation coming together, the colours mixing. Indeed it's not just about the children's work, it's bringing the grey, whites and the red, brown blondes together.

So then we decided to do more together...

Whitsun festival was the first; we all sat in a large circle in the church, the prologue of St. John was read out in many languages and the children guessed the language. It was a true and joyful joining of the whole congregation.

A member of the congregation recently produced the most marvellous rich home-grown concert. The children played bells, the parents sang pop songs, children sang solos, played pianos, cellos, and so did

the adults. Christmas dinner: the first year we thought we may get five or six people who would prefer a bit of company rather than being alone at Christmas, a nice meal, a story, some singing, and a present under the tree. This we did, but we also have whole families coming along too, young and old, celebrating Christmas together; everyone who can brings a dish of food. It's the easiest Christmas dinner ever to prepare, satisfying and full of excitement and much joy in our packed-out community room.

Now the confirmands are beginning to feel the responsibility of their young adulthood. One comes weekly to help in a religion lesson, and is loved and admired by the younger children. Another, an artist, has already provided a poem and a painting to uplift a seasonal programme handout; soon she will have her own exhibition in the community room.

We try to always make ourselves available, and we 'do' things together. And we make our physical space available, and we like to aim high, whether it be climbing mountains, or giving children our beautiful Whitechapel bells to ring. We are always open to suggestions and striving to create a need.

We are so grateful for the involvement of so many who wish to spend time in the environment we can provide. We can honestly say, and see, how the arrival of youth has helped to bring more events to an already busy congregation, and through their arrival we can enjoy the natural coming together of the very young and the very elderly, and all ages in between.

Who would ask for more than that?

The healing John 9 of the man born blind

Douglas Thackray

The healings in the gospels not only show Christ's compassion for the sick: they can also guide our attention to what needs healing in ourselves. The healing of the man born blind can be especially helpful in this respect. The story opens as the disciples are passing by the temple where the blind man was begging. They ask Jesus whether the man's blindness was caused through his sin or that of his parents. Jesus replies that neither he nor his parents had sinned but that this had happened so 'that the glory of God be revealed in him'. We need to be clear that the issue concerns the cause for his blindness. It does not refer to his human condition of sinfulness. 'The glory of God' could mean the noble way in which he bore his blindness, or it could point to Christ's light that shines through him after the healing has taken place. Rudolf Steiner reveals another aspect when he states that the man had chosen to take on his blindness as a trial of purification, in his life before birth.

We do not know whether the blind man had overheard Christ's conversation with the disciples as they passed by the temple when he proclaimed: 'While I am in the world, I am the light of the world,' but if he had, it would certainly have prepared his soul for the hour of destiny which was about to arrive. It seems clear that we are dealing with a man of special spiritual attributes. He has the quality of the 'poor in spirit' (also translated as beggars in spirit) to whom the Kingdom of Heaven belongs, or of St Paul's description of those who walk by 'faith and not by sight'.

When Jesus meets this man, he sees deeply into his soul and perceives these qualities. He leans down, takes up some dust from the ground and makes a clay-like paste with this spittle, which he places upon the blind man's eyes. This act recalls the creation of Adam, when God breathed upon the clay, giving divine life

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Cornwall, UK.*

to the mortal creature made in his image. Once he has applied this paste, Jesus tells the man to go and wash himself in the pool of Siloam in order to complete the healing. As he comes back, he is questioned by the crowd as nobody has ever heard of such an extraordinary event. They ask him whether he was the one who had previously been blind, to which he answers: 'I am'.

The healing takes place on the Sabbath and this in turn angers the Pharisees who now join the discussion. They declare Jesus a sinner for having broken the Sabbath law. The crowd for their part remain divided on this issue. The parents of the healed man are now called out and questioned whether their son had been blind from birth, which they confirm. The demeanour of the healed man must have been very impressive, so much so that the Pharisees, who considered him a beggar and sinner, nevertheless asked him who he thought Jesus was to which he replied: 'He is a prophet.' The Pharisees, however, remained unconvinced. They continue questioning him about the exact circumstances of his healing. Clearly exasperated, he replies: 'I have told you already and you did not listen, why? Do you also want to be part of his disciples?'

The healed man has not finished with them yet. He continues to challenge them: 'Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. Now we know that God does not hear the sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God, and does his will, him he hears. Since the world began it was not heard that any man opened the eyes of one who had been born blind. If this man was not from God he could do nothing.' The Pharisees could not answer him but their anger was so great that they threw him out of the temple.

This very long story continues when the man encounters Jesus outside the temple. Jesus asks him: 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' The healed man replies: 'Who is he that I might believe in him?' Jesus answers: 'You have now seen him, in fact he is the one speaking with you,' in response to which the man born blind proclaims: 'Lord I believe,' and he worships him. The story ends with Jesus' final conclusion on the event: 'And Jesus said "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." This angered some of the Pharisees who were present. They demanded a

further explanation: “What? Are we blind too?” to which Jesus replied: “If you were blind you would not be guilty of sin but now that you claim that you can see, your guilt remains.”

Hearing these words may give us a sense of unease regarding our own blindness. The healing asks us to look more deeply into our conscience and to search for our own answers.

In 1999, Jonathan Aitkin, a former British cabinet minister, was found guilty of perjury in court and as a result was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment. On that very same day he had been served breakfast by his butler, and in the evening he heard the clang of the prison door that closed him off from the privileges of his past.

Because he had been recognized as the ‘educated one’ by his fellow prisoners, he was asked to help by a prisoner whose family was being threatened with eviction from their home. He drafted a strong defence and as a result became known as the prison’s scribe. He also lent an ear to hear their stories which highlighted their background. Many of them came from broken families, had been brought up in care and as ‘no-hopers’ had drifted into crime and prison as their way of life. Becoming involved in their lives showed him a world for which he had been blind; it showed him too how he could make a difference, not now as a high-flying politician of great entitlement, but as a servant of these disadvantaged souls. He said that he was grateful to God for the turnaround in his destiny that had brought meaning and purpose. This turning point led him to seek Ordination and become a prison chaplain. ‘The main point of my work is to create opportunities to give prisoners who want it a second chance, just as I have been given one,’ he says.

Our relationship to reality is unreliable. Like the Pharisees, we are aligned with reality for a moment; then we slide away again and see the world through the illusion of the self and the expectations of society. Jonathan Aitken’s life was changed when his eyes and his heart were opened to feel compassion for his fellow prisoners and he decided to allow this compassion to be his guide. Through prayer he found hope and the way to piece his life together again.

To be a Christian is not to blind ourselves to the realities of life by blanketing over the questions, the riddles, the injustices. On this journey we have much to learn from the man born blind, as he progressively

came to recognize in Jesus not just the holy man, the prophet, but the Light of the World, the Christ, his personal saviour through whom the glory of God was revealed. And he bowed down and worshipped him.

We become aware how the fundamental forces of guilt and redemption are essential to who we are, to our “I AM”. No one steps outside this soul configuration without in some way losing his or her humanity. In this respect the Act of Consecration of Man awakens in us what we need to experience to acknowledge the ‘Not I’ aspect of our soul so that the ‘Christ in you’ can be real when we receive the communion. In the space created by the ritual, we embrace these two aspects of ourselves in our consecration. In Lent we pray that our weakness might not cut us off completely from the gaze of the spiritual world. In Advent we hear the comforting words that ‘God’s becoming’ has joined with our own becoming and seeks to ‘redeem our errors in his own divine soul’. Without these words, humanity would lose all hope; without the communion we would not have the means to become “anew”. Paul describes this in more detail:

Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. (2 Cor.5:17)

The glory of God which was revealed in the healing of the man born blind is the grace of redemption which is bestowed upon us when we too bow down and worship him.

The great transition

Memorial Services in the Christian Community

Alfred Heidenreich

It is customary in the Christian Community to hold a Memorial Service on the first Saturday possible following the funeral for one who has died. Both the custom itself and the choice of Saturday follow indications by Rudolf Steiner.

The form which the Memorial Service takes is the usual communion service of The Christian Community, the Act of Consecration of Man, but with some modifications which give it a dynamic all its own. At the beginning and at the end the epistle, the usual prayer of the season, is read in the normal manner. The day of the person's death is linked with the spiritual character of the season, which is reflected in the epistle. Much more than we generally realise do we, or rather our higher selves, choose our own death, including the actual time. The early Christians took the date of passing from this world altogether more seriously than a birthday. Death was the spiritual birthday, and therefore more important than one's physical nativity. By casting a death horoscope one can learn, according to Steiner, much more about a person's spiritual personality than from a birth horoscope. Therefore the dating of the Memorial Service through the liturgical prayer of the particular season is quite relevant.

The liturgical colours of the altar front and of the priestly vestments are however not those of the season, but are always black; not so much because in our Western world black is

the customary colour of mourning, but more as a witness to the grave solemnity of the occasion. Black is worn by the priest also at the funeral rites. The passing from incarnated existence into the spiritual state is a majestic occurrence even in the humblest of lives. Death is not only the great equaliser but, as Goethe remarked, Death makes aristocrats of us all. 'The black suit' is a formal tribute to the occasion. Moreover, black, says Rudolf Steiner, is the spiritual image of departed life.

The reading taken from the Gospel is always the first eight verses of St. Mark chapter 16. This is the earliest, briefest, most tender and moving fragmentary record of Christ's resurrection. In its few terse lines it contains the Magna Carta of man's immortality. Christ died and rose so that the souls of men can live, we tell our children in the Service of Confirmation. In the Memorial Service this historic fact becomes present action. After this reading from the Gospel the service follows its normal course up to the moment of general communion. But the significance of its four stages—Gospel Reading, Offertory, Consecration, Communion—acquires in the Memorial Act a special urgency. It may not be obvious, and certainly it is not generally realised, that these four stages represent a path which reverses the stages of man's incarnation into physical existence. When we descend 'out of the everywhere into here' in other

words, from the non-spatial world of spirit into the realm of matter; we begin to be excluded from the immediate community of our fellow spirit-beings. In the words of our Sacrament of Baptism, the soul is sent 'from the community of spirit to that of earth.' In this descent the moment occurs when mysteriously and almost miraculously the spiritual soul enters into an affinity with the germinating physical embryo in the body of the mother. And in the further process of gestation and in the early period after birth, the descended soul takes increasing hold of the physical organs and limbs and unites itself with them. With the beginning of articulate speech, that is, the power of making oneself understood and communicating, this process of incarnation can be said to have reached a certain conclusion.

In the Act of Consecration of Man we retrace these steps. To begin with, in the action of reading the gospel, earthly human speech is made to fit into a spiritual context. In the Offertory which follows, words and actions express—among other things—an offering up, a relinquishing of our tight hold on our body; a surrender; a willingness no longer to cling and hold fast. In the events which constitute the third section—the Transubstantiation—'mysteriously and almost miraculously' our affinity with matter gives way to, or at least embraces, an affinity with the world of spirit. And in the Communion we make again a real link with all the company of heaven.

These events, remote as they may seem from the normal sphere of our technological and extrovert inter-

ests, are nevertheless a real part of life, and if we attend the Act of Consecration of Man we share in them, whether we are conscious of them or not. We are drawn into them, we take part in them, they live in the wider ranges of our consciousness, albeit hidden from the intellectual clay mind. They are true and active realities of the inner space.

It can now be seen how significant this inner sequence is, especially in a Memorial Service. It makes us go, at least in our subconscious, to the very threshold of the world where the departed live. When we then take communion, either by coming to the altar or by sharing in it in the spirit, we can truly say we unite ourselves in communion with the dead.

This is the moment when in the Memorial Service a special prayer is said in which twice the name is called of the departed, in whose honour the Service is held. The first time our souls turn to Christ, and lifted up by the words of the Service our loving thoughts reach out to the departed soul. The second time, carried by the power of our heart's sacrifice, our souls send their prayer for the departed friend to the Father of all worlds. Loving memory and active concern are gathered up from the congregation and sent across the threshold in truth and reality.

In what one could call the second section of this relatively short special prayer, the great transition is spelled out. It is a climax, but difficult to describe and even more difficult to analyse. It implies at least an instinctive awareness of the complexity of human nature; of the fact that we are 'fearfully and wonderfully made'.

It may help a little if we fall back on Steiner's terms, and so let us do so.

We have an etheric body. It is that functionally organised unit in us which produces all the manifestations of sheer life. It is the sum total of what outside us a plant has in addition to what a stone has; the power of growth, transformation, adaptation and procreation. This body is fed by light. Its inner dynamic is closely integrated with the dynamic of light-filled space. And now the prayer asks that this light of the widths of space may turn into spiritual light for the departed soul. In the great transition let outward space turn into inward space.

We also have an 'astral body'. We are conscious of it as the vehicle of our sensations and emotions, but it has also a sense of time built into it. It makes us age and grow old in observable rhythms. Not only do we completely replace our bodily tissues every seven years: every seventh year is also a landmark in our biography. This rhythmical beat of time, which we can sense with our astral body like a majestic poem spelled out in measured metres, carries us through the heights and depths of existence, through the joys and sorrows of life.

*By one pervading spirit
Of tones and numbers all things are
controlled,
As sages taught where faith was found
to merit
Initiation in that mystery old.*

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Now the prayer asks that this word of the depths of time, this 'one pervading spirit of tones and numbers' may reach and pervade the departed soul with its intrinsic spiritual sound.

And we have, thirdly, an 'I', an individual self, a spiritual personality which says 'I am'. Even while in the body it can feel itself as substance of God's substance, created in His image. Now the prayer asks that the departed spirit-self may share in the revelation of God through God's grace. The great three: space, time and revelation—Father, Son and Spirit—go with us, but transformed. In the transition they turn inward. Inward space, inward time and inward revelation become immeasurably great; they become all in all. The soul can learn to be aware of it all. For, again in Steiner's terms, the departed soul grows into the faculties of Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition.

When the magic words of transition have been said, the third and last section of the special prayer assumes a very homely and moving form. Christ stands at the Gate of Death and hands the soul over to the Father into whose care the souls are led and in whose worlds there is no more night nor darkness nor death. It stands to reason that such a Memorial Service should be held as soon as possible after the funeral. It is an organic part of the whole sequence of ritual acts which can accompany our transition from bodily to spiritual existence: the Anointing, the brief Departing Blessing in the house, the funeral at the graveside or crematorium, and the Memorial Act. Steiner advised the Saturday following the burial. He gave no explicit reason. But we recall that Saturday is the day of rest; the day on which the Creator rested from His work, the day on which Christ rested in the grave. It is the day which takes its name from

Saturn, which also in pagan tradition was the power who, represented by the outermost planet of the old solar system, was thought to lead the soul across the frontier of this world into the next. If for technical reasons the service has to be held one or two weeks later—as is sometimes unavoidable—no serious problem arises.

But we are sometimes asked whether we are prepared to celebrate a Memorial Act of Consecration for someone who died a considerable time before, perhaps abroad, whose death became known only after some delay. Sometimes people even request a service simply as an act of remembrance. In such cases a sense of discretion is needed. Steiner warned against following the Roman Catholic practice of simply saying memorial masses for the dead. There must be a special and convincing reason to hold a Memorial Service if it is to be held apart and independent of the other funeral rites. And in any case, its significance is bound to be different. The great transition is already accomplished. The service becomes more a confirmation of what has already happened, than a solemn support in the transition itself, for which it is originally intended. Rudolf Steiner remarked once that it is more important for a people to

have right funeral services than an efficient parliament. This remark is only startling when one reads it for the first time. On second thoughts one will realise that 'right' funeral services reveal the reality of life after death. They establish the knowledge of our immortal being. This knowledge takes precedence over all other factual knowledge. This knowledge—or the lack or denial of it—will influence and colour all legislation. Therefore the right funeral services are of the utmost social importance. They can and should inspire legislation with the right ideas concomitant with the dignity of man. We trust that with the practice of our Christian Community we are making an indispensable contribution to this.

This article has been reprinted to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Dr Heidenreich's death.

Alfred Heidenreich was born in 1898. He was the seventh priest to be ordained in The Christian Community in 1922 and was part of the original lenkers' circle. He was made Oberlenker in 1938, having founded The Christian Community in Britain in 1929.

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Consecration of the new church in Stroud October 18th–20th

*The LORD who created
must wish us to create
And employ our creation
again in His service*

T S ELIOT,
FROM CHORUSES FROM THE ROCK

The congregation in Stroud, England, has been working steadily for more than 10 years to bring to realisation the building of a new church. The existing church and community spaces that were built in 1968 under the guidance of Rev. Michael Tapp have served us very well but are no longer adequate for our growing community. The existing chapel seats 76 whilst the new one will be able to seat 120. In addition we will have a larger office, foyer and vestry as well as purpose-built wake room and consultation room. The old chapel will be converted into a multi-purpose community hall. There is also an old two bed flat which has already been altered to provide a larger kitchen, further meeting and storage rooms as well as space for our Parent and Child group. The old vestry will become a guest room, which will make it easier for us to accommodate community helpers in the future. The new church with its larger facilities will allow us to serve not only our local congregation but also the region, by hosting larger conferences, synods and ordinations in the future. In that sense we also consider it a regional centre.

Nic Pople (architect) and David Tasker (structural engineer) have come up with a pioneering design that already looks very impressive, a few months before completion. The work began in July 2018 and is planned for completion by the middle of August 2019. The entire structure is made of self-supporting cross-laminate timber elements. Effectively it is an enormous three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle that had to be swung and mounted into place piece by piece by a great big crane. The interior of the chapel as well as several other inner spaces are exposed wood which has a beautiful effect enhancing the complex angular geometry of the design. The striking geometry of the vaulted inner roof space, which rises to 9 meters at the highest point, is reflected on the outside with multiple planes of cedar shingles all angled to each other with many more ridges and valleys than one might normally expect on a roof, but which adds enormously to the interest and overall wakefulness of the building. A specialist roofing company was needed to achieve the final form.

The entire project will have cost us close to £3m once the last bills are paid. No small amount indeed, but one that reflects the value that the community places on our precious sacramental work and the strength of community faith and will that lives behind this project, as well as the engineering challenges that arose from building on our highly constrained site. The funds have

come through the sale of property, several legacies and many, many fund-raising ventures and generous donations from members and friends over the past years. In addition we have also received many low or zero interest loans from members, friends and three German regions to help us with bridging the final cash-flow gap. An expected property sale and a large legacy will enable us to repay all the loans within the next two to three years. If you would like to donate or lend us money to help us to reach the finishing line, please contact Paul Abel in our Stroud office by email, phone or post on

ccstroud@talktalk.net
+44 1453 762926

The Christian Community
73 Cainscross Road
GL5 4HB
Stroud
England

After the handover in August we will still have work to do with decorating and installing various fittings and furnishings, but we are confident that everything will be ready for the grand opening on the week-end of October 18–20, 2019.

AARON MIRKIN
*on behalf of my colleagues
Carmel Iveson and Selina Horn,
Paul Abel, community secretary
and project administrator, as well
as our tireless and enthusiastic
Development Group*



Reviews

***Reincarnation
A Christian Perspective***
Friedrich Rittelmeyer

Floris Books

Third edition 2018

£9.99

Review by Anna Philips

*Reprinted with kind permission
of Camphill Correspondence*

Nearly ninety years have passed since Rittelmeyer published, in 1931, the results of his quest to understand the doctrine of reincarnation and its connection to Christianity through his encounter with Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy. In these ninety years reincarnation has become a household concept thanks to the revival of eastern spiritual practices becoming mainstream in the Sixties and again in the Eighties. Yet despite its general acceptance as a concept, reincarnation still lies at odds with traditional Christian modes of thinking where it is not preached or acknowledged and even despised as non-Christian. Rittelmeyer's research presented in *Reincarnation, A Christian Perspective*, is based on his own need to prove that the two ideas are not mutually exclusive, as Steiner revealed to him. He does this from three angles: in the light of thought, religion and ethics.

In the first section on thought he meticulously overturns literary and philosophical arguments against the possibility of reincarnation. Steiner was the first scientist to apply the rigours of scientific methods to spiritual investigation. Rittelmeyer starts by applying Steiner's spiritual

investigative results to the event of death and the soul's subsequent journey. After the etheric body, the life force, separates from the physical body, the soul experiences purgatory when material desires residing in the astral body burn unfulfilled to extinction. Our past deeds are judged by our conscience and all that clings to the soul is either purified or accepted. And so the soul travels to its own highest plain or heaven and beyond. Rittelmeyer argues that though we may not remember this journey and that place, that cannot be an argument to deny its existence. After all we do not remember all our dreams either yet their mood on waking can influence our whole day. The same goes for memories of childhood: simple and pure feelings of joy that we find it hard to recall as adults but which are there and affect our whole life. Artists and especially musicians have easier access to these memories apparently and it is the ability to hear music which is also the last sense to leave us before dying, making it the most spiritual of sense perceptions.

In the second section on religion Rittelmeyer quotes Bible passages which were used in the past to prove reincarnation was visible in the Bible. But surprisingly Rittelmeyer will not accept any of them. A tug of war about the interpretations of such passages, as the one about Elijah having 'come again', in Matthew 17, could easily be engaged in. But if one looks for an explicit, systematic statement of the reality of reincarnation in the Bible, it is not to be found.

There is the issue of the resurrection of Christ and the ideas of paradise and heaven fit with the possibility of reincarnation. Rittelmeyer asks these questions as the sceptic might do, as questions he himself had struggled with. The answer comes through anthroposophy which explains that it was out of necessity for human development to forget and be ignorant of reincarnation for the 2000 years following Christ's birth, in order to become fully citizens of the earth. The issue of heredity as seen by anthroposophy makes clear that the soul chooses and adapts its own body to suit its developmental needs. Thus Rittelmeyer refutes the eastern idea that reincarnation into another physical entity aside from a human body is possible. With this is tied up the idea of karma as punishment and reward which he judges pre-Christian. The Christian way of seeing reincarnation acknowledges karma as training: an active undertaking for improvement of the soul towards its purification where the justice residing in destiny leads to wisdom. In this book he shows us how reincarnation and karma are essential demands of a true Christianity. In the east the law of karma is an irrevocable necessity; in Christ it becomes an act of grace. Grace may follow when asking for something out of free will. This can only happen if a person has allowed the reality of Christ to permeate his soul. When someone lives in Christ, his burden becomes a wish to be shared which leads to reincarnation. True Christians do not want to have a rest and play on a harp in the clouds for all eternity but bear a consciousness that longs to ease the suffering

of humanity through working with Christ. Thus we move on from looking at what the Bible has to say to what Christ actually teaches.

The last section on ethics focuses on the issues of free will and morality. The law of karma can be seen as a prison with no room for free will and thus without hope. People generally wish to understand their life though, and the thought of living with the effects of a past life working into the present one can bring comfort. It leads to seeing this life as being part of a bigger plan. Consciousness expands just like we seek to enrich our small self-centred life with our higher I. Fate is no longer endured but destiny accepted and embraced in unison with spirit-will and lived with the help of spiritual beings. Without an acknowledgement of destiny and reincarnation our inner urges for perfection may lead to a materialistic egoism such as the longing for wealth and comfort. New morality is reached through self-discipline. We have moved on from laws laid down by Moses. The new morality is beyond rules. This morality is at work not only in daily life; it allows us to share in cosmic, eternal and divine life itself. Thus karma is an act of mercy which guides us towards growth of spirit and unity of all worlds through Christ.

Throughout the book Rittelmeyer challenges methods of investigation. He asks a lot of questions which could be posed by opponents and by refuting them he strengthens his own position. This may sound intensely intellectual but he is genuinely concerned to be precise and accurate and the questions could be

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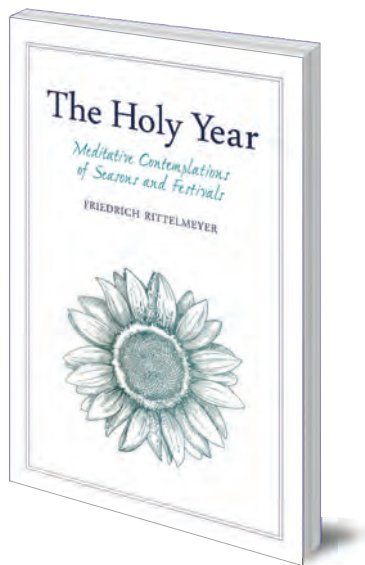


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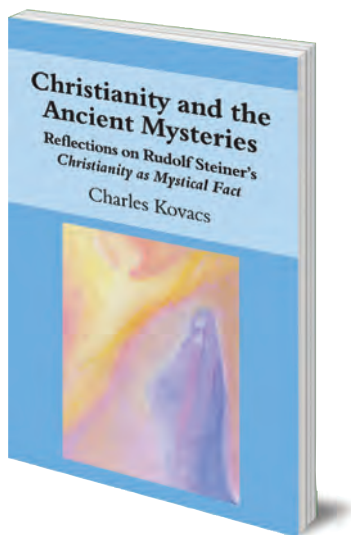


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my own so as a reader I felt curious to see where he takes me. When speaking of his encounters with Steiner his tone is reverent and the wording exact and *Reincarnation, A Christian Perspective* is as much a promotion of spiritual science as about the quest for understanding the Christian attitude towards reincarnation. His own method of substantiating his belief in reincarnation comes down to three ways to which he adhered diligently throughout the investigative process. Firstly he rigorously tested his own impressions, next he practised spiritual exercises in total freedom to know the relationship between body and soul better, and finally the conclusion to his quest provides the most satisfying world view to him.

Rittelmeyer quotes mainly German writers and scholars. For an English audience these will be mostly obscure but the names and out-dated arguments are less relevant than the thread of thought Rittelmeyer is spinning here. Reincar-

nation and Christianity are after all not confined to Middle Europe; it merely places Rittelmeyer firmly in his day and age at the time of writing before the Second World War. Particularly interesting is to read how freely Rittelmeyer quotes from Nietzsche in the last section, appraising his values and perhaps doing something to re-establish a tarnished reputation after Nietzsche had been used and abused by Hitler not long after this book was first published.

His thoughts on social issues and marriage conclude *Reincarnation, A Christian Perspective* and offer a fresh perspective on the why question we may have regarding our lives. When we have read this book we will look upon the people we meet in our lives, however briefly, with clean eyes and new thoughts and an unprejudiced mind to allow that person to be who they are now. We walk together for a while giving each other a chance to meet and grow towards a common humanity.

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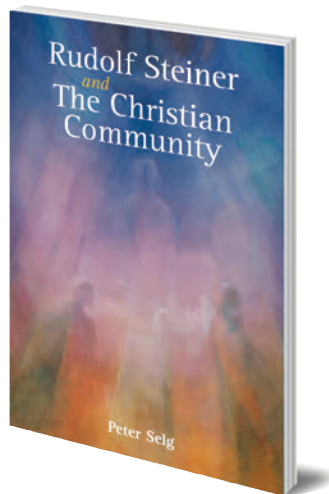
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Temple Lodge Club

a quiet oasis in the middle of London



Temple Lodge—a Georgian Listed Building in the middle of Hammersmith—was once the home of the artist Sir Frank Brangwyn. Whilst his studio has been converted into a chapel with a **vegetarian restaurant** on its former mezzanine floor, the house itself is given over to accommodating bed and breakfast visitors. They come from four corners of the world to enjoy the quietness and tranquillity of the house. Many have described it as a really peaceful haven, despite being a stone's throw from the centre of Hammersmith and its busy traffic interchange. The absence of a television in the house and rooms adds to this atmosphere. There is a quiet secluded garden.

Most rooms look out over this large and sheltered garden. Two rooms look out over the front courtyard and garden.

Upon becoming members of the **Temple Lodge Club** (£1.00 annual membership) visitors seeking Bed & Breakfast accommodation may share in all the facilities the house has to offer. Breakfast is served in the ground floor Dining Room looking out over the quiet, secluded garden. A library provides a space for relaxation or quiet reading. All the rooms are well appointed and comfortably furnished, the two double rooms being deluxe rooms.

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All rooms have hot
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For any further information or
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Guest Rooms

The Christian Community, 23 Chapel Street, Buckfastleigh TQ11 0AQ

The Christian Community in Devon is situated in Buckfastleigh, halfway between Exeter and Plymouth. It is located on the edge of Dartmoor and is 40 minutes drive from the coast and South West Coastal Path. The attractions of Cornwall, including Tintagel & the Eden Project, are within 1 to 2 hours away by car.

There are four small guest rooms at the top of the building. Three of the guest rooms have a wash basin; toilets and shower are separate. There is a kitchen for self-catering needs.

Unfortunately we do not have disabled access and there are steps and stairs inside and outside the building.

**Suggested contribution
at £20 to £25 per person per night.**

Further information and reservations:
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