

Newsletter

No. 62—Michaelmas 2020

LETTER FROM THE LENKER

I am writing this in the middle of August, after we have enjoyed more than a month of being able to welcome our congregations back into our churches. At the end of July, the government guidelines for England were changed so that sharing out communion is no longer prohibited, merely advised against in strong terms—advice that would need to be taken into account in a risk assessment. At the same time, the requirement to wear face masks—initially a recommendation—was made mandatory. The priests have been trying to balance the need to comply with any legal restrictions with finding ways forward together with the congregations that seem appropriate to the circumstances in their local area.

Because the situation affects us in such an existential way, discussions about the facts of the public health emergency can be highly charged. Without even realising it, we may find ourselves belittling or dismissing a position that feels like a matter of life and death for our speaking-partner; for example, if we characterise the decision to self-isolate as giving in to fear, or if we describe someone's decision to exercise their discretion within the restrictions as reckless. Behind all this are fears about what the crisis and the public health measures mean. In many conversations, I have experienced that these in turn stem from deeply held assumptions about the power of the state, the underlying factors that lead to illness and maintain good health, and our relationship with wider society.

In a church which prides itself on respecting freedom of belief and individual moral agency, we can't expect that we will all hold the same opinion about any matter. Nor can we assume that each one of us will make the same decision about how to behave. Perhaps now more

than ever, we are challenged to find ways of meeting each other that allow each individual to be heard, their worlds of experience felt and validated, and their moral choices respected. Rudolf Steiner, without whom The Christian Community would not have been founded, describes a path to the experience of Christ in similar terms: to think the thoughts of the other as if they were my own. This may at first seem obvious—don't we listen to each other all the time? But if we recall our experiences of group discussions, for example, we may be shocked to notice how often we are busy with our own thoughts as the other person is speaking. We may even be getting an answer ready in our minds, waiting restlessly for them to finish. Even when I do manage to listen and what the other person is saying to me, have I really felt the deeper meaning of their words? Have I felt the stirring of my own will to do something that I hadn't thought of before, as if these thoughts were truly mine? We can see in this work a kind of antidote to the thinking that informs the public health measures, which of necessity deal with human beings as statistical units. Only when we truly hear each other can we say that we are meeting not a general-ity but a unique, individual human being.

After much deliberation and consultation, we have decided to cancel this year's Annual Meeting. It is hard to know what the coming months will bring and our priority needs to be to build up the life of the congregations again. I very much hope that we can schedule a meeting next year. There will be much to speak about and share! The annual reports from the congregations will appear in the next Newsletter: if you can contribute in any way, please get in touch with your local priest.

Meanwhile I wish you all a good autumn in these strange circumstances. *Tom Ravetz*

PRIEST ORDINATION—HAMBURG MARCH 2020

The experience of the Ordination Services in Hamburg, has helped me participate in the Act of Consecration of Man Services at home.

Our Lenker, the Revd. Tom Ravetz, has asked me to write about my experience. It has sustained me all this time, during lockdown, and since during this next phase of lockdown easing will mean that we are still not physically sharing the bread and wine, I thought I could still share my experience with you.

I wrote this on Monday 9th March 2020, after being part of the Ordination Services in Hamburg on Saturday 7th, and Sunday 8th March. I had gone at the invitation of Revd. Lucienne van Bergenhenegouwen, who was one of the five new priests to be ordained.

There were three most powerful high-points in the Ordination Act of Consecration of Man, for me:

The anointing of the new priests, with consecrated oil, on their foreheads, hands, and top of their heads, three times.

When all seventy-six priests, who were present, responded, "Ja, so sei es"—that was quite overwhelming—loud and so serious.

The quietest, most powerful, all encompassing part, was when the Erzoberlenker took the

consecrated elements of the bread and wine, and walked slowly and determinedly from the altar, around behind the lectern, down, round, past all the priests, (who were sitting separately, in front of us all), round, along behind them, round to the other side, round past the other outer edge of the priests, back up towards the altar, behind the sitting priests at the right hand side, back round to the altar.

Erneuerung, energising, and nourishing all the priests in Christ's Love and Strength, strengthening them all to work as priests in this world, enabling them to go out into their Christian Communities, their places of Religious Renewal, and to thus energise and nourish their Congregations.

We felt the rippling, outward flowing forces of that love and strength and nourishment reach towards us and into us, enriching our souls and beings; enabling us to go back out into the world, with renewed energy, positivity and love, to work and be a positive force in the world.

Joanna McLeman

Member of The Christian Community, Loch Arthur, Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland

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RITA WEIDMANN
29.5.1929–24.7.2020

Rita Weidmann was born in London in 1929. 1929 was of course the year of the Wall Street Crash. The London Stock Exchange followed suit, signalling the beginning of the Great Depression. Rita's parents were not wealthy but somehow they managed through this difficult time. Maybe it was this challenging underlying experience that created in Rita a life-long determination and strength. Rita was a pupil at the Guildford Grammar School for Girls, which was remarkable for someone coming from her background. The story reveals something about her life. Her mother had planned for Rita to be interviewed at a

particular school in Guildford; however, they lost their way and found themselves instead at Guildford Grammar School. On hearing about this mistake, the teacher on duty gave Rita an appraising glance and said, 'I'm sure this lass will do very well here with us; there's no doubt that this is a much better school than the one in which you were planning to enrol her.' Rita soon confirmed this teacher's intuition: she was very bright as well as being very talented at sport. These talents and capacities grew and at the conclusion of her school years she was accepted at Oxford University, where she initially read chemistry, lat-

er changing to Zoology. She was Oxford Hockey 'Blue'.

Rita's academic prowess was noticed and appreciated by her tutors. After her graduation in 1952 she began a PhD on the behaviour of black-headed gulls. This work took her to Germany, where she was supervised by two well known researchers: Prof. Conrad Lorenz and Prof Nico Tinbergen who both in 1973 shared with Karl von Frisch the Noble Prize in Physiology and Medicine. It was in Germany that she met a fellow student, Ulrich Weidmann. They fell in love and in a short space of time they were engaged. They married soon after, in 1952. Rita in the meantime returned to Oxford and obtained her PhD. Ulrich meanwhile found a job at the university. Ulrich had grown up in Zurich to parents who were keenly involved in the anthroposophical movement and as a child Ulrich attended the Zurich Waldorf School. This fact was going to play a central and definitive role later in Rita's life choices and destiny.

In Oxford, they started their family: Sarah, Nick and Crispin. Rita was very proud of her children and spoke always very lovingly of them.

Rita had grown up in the Church of England and had developed a deep interest in all things spiritual. As an undergraduate, she had developed an interest in Catholicism. Through Ulli she now heard about the Steiner school movement and The Christian Community. Rita resolved that her children should receive a Waldorf education. This became a central motif of her life.

The family moved to Kings Langley so that Sarah and later Nicholas could start in the Kindergarten. Almost at once Rita started teaching Biology in the Rudolf Steiner Waldorf school.

After a short time in America the family returned to Kings Langley; however, they did not stay there long, because Ulrich gained a new post at Leicester University.

Rita's connection and belief in Waldorf education was deep and living. Although she



lived in Leicester, she became a class teacher. Every week she would travel back and forth to Leicester to fulfil her chosen vocation to serve children on their way into life. Four years into her second class of eight years Ulrich grew seriously ill. She immediately returned to Leicester to be with him. It was an extended time of care but eventually and sadly in

1992 Ulrich passed over the threshold. The marriage had been a happy one; although that Rita, who was a born choleric, might from time to time throw a plate or two to release bit of tension, they were never aimed at Ulrich. Ulrich's death ushered in a time of change. She offered herself to the Camphill village in Milton Keynes, where she worked tirelessly and selflessly as a house parent with people with learning difficulties for the next twelve years.

In her 70's, Rita returned to the family home in Kings Langley. Energetic as ever she took up the recorder and from then on devoted many hours and days to playing, find others to play with. They gave numerous concerts all over the country and were well known for their musicality and sheer joy of performing. She supported in the Kings Langley area all musical initiatives both amateur and professional. On top of all this, Rita had an allotment and was an avid supporter of Biodynamic farming and gardening.

In these latter years Rita nurtured her inner life and ever present inner leanings. She was active in both the Anthroposophical Society and The Christian Community. She was dearly loved and appreciated in both movements. In The Christian Community we always felt honoured to have her as a member. Rita's qualities of warm humanity, her devotion in working for the sake of the greater good, her genuine humility and her alert and educated wakefulness for the important things of life were present and radiated from her right up to the end of her earthly life.

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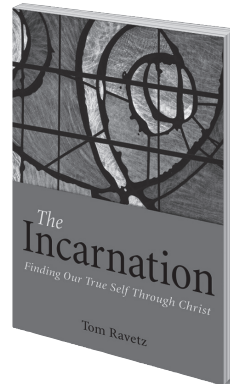
 Floris
Books

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In this inspiring book Tom Ravetz examines the theology of the Incarnation, and traces the history of human thinking about it. He goes on to discuss Rudolf Steiner's unique insights into the Incarnation and shows how the process of incarnation is reflected in each one of us, summed up in the well-known phrase from Galatians "Not I, but Christ in me".

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