

# Perspectives

The Christian Community



**Membership**  
**June—August 2015**

# Contents

<b>Membership in The Christian Community</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Roger Druitt</i>	
<b>Questing for my Creed</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Emilie Salvesen</i>	
<b>To be or not to be is NOT the question</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Paul Corman</i>	
<b>There is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>Kevin Street</i>	
<b>From 'Church' to 'Community'</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>Louise Madsen</i>	
<b>Letter</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Review</b>	<b>25</b>

**Cover picture by Cecil Collins:**

*The Great Happiness* (1974)

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# Perspectives

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*We look at this Son and see the invisible God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.*

*He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he is there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.*

Colossians 1:15–20 (The Message)

These words sum up Saint Paul's experience of the Cosmic Christ. This is the cosmic word, God's agent in creation, in whom the totality of the angelic beings of the hierarchies is contained. He is the origin and the destination of the earth.

Since the Fourth Century, knowledge of the cosmic dimension of Christianity passed out of mainstream Christian awareness. The

official creeds saw the Son of God as one of the three divine persons of the Trinity and rejected any idea that this utterly transcendent God could be involved in the process of the world's creation. Creation happened 'out of nothing' and the world was not connected organically to a spiritual world that was its source and purpose. Only in the church could salvation be found.

For Paul, there is obviously no tension between creation and the spiritual realms. The cosmic Christ, creator spirit of all that is, is also the head of the body of the ekklesia, the assembly of those who heed his call. There is an echo of this in the first communion prayer in the Act of Consecration, in which we pray that through the communion, we will be able to unite ourselves with the world's evolving. We are consecrated not so that we separate ourselves from the world, but that we can concentrate our efforts and allow something to radiate out into the world all the more strongly. This can embrace all the spiritual hierarchies. Each of us brings our and others' destinies with us to the altar, which touches the realm of the angels. We may think of great events that are shaping human history—the level of the archangels and archai. We even lift our gaze to those beings of the second hierarchy who are at work in the world of nature, or to the first hierarchy, which maintains the very fabric of being itself. Then our con-celebration reaches its fulfilment, and we take our place among the ranks of angelic beings with whom we celebrate the reality of Christ's resurrection for all of creation.

TOM RAVETZ

# Membership in The Christian Community

Roger Druitt

The Christian Community has *members*: they are mentioned in the Creed as the substance of the community. Such communities make up the Christian Church altogether.

Christianity was given into a *community* and not set up as a path of training under a guru or master so to the question what the Christian Church is, one would have to say it is a *community* gathered to receive the being and work of Christ on this earth—a community of the same nature as the one he founded so that his being could be part of it. The sacraments express the will of The Christian Community to be that and that will is expressed in the Offering, in confessing him (acknowledging him)—and being part of the Community so that it can be part of The Church.

Christ was able to carry out his mission upon Earth because he devoted himself to it with total commitment. That is what he came for and was anointed for that task ('Messiah' or 'Christ', the Anointed One). Otherwise he could not have succeeded but would have failed at the hands of his adversaries, *the* adversaries, who are also our adversaries. And what is it that fuels commitment? Either fanaticism or love. The adversaries are fanatical: they are not inwardly free; but Christ brings freedom, teaches love...and encourages commitment. There is much religious fanaticism in the world just now but there is also true religious freedom. The Act of Consecration of Man describes a community that knows Christ in freedom.

How shall we respond to these mighty facts if not to attempt commitment, out of love, in freedom? I can commit myself once I have realised that Christ committed *himself*, otherwise I cannot relate to him on an equal footing (the scale is different, as different as microcosm and macrocosm; but the commitment is of like nature).

As the Creed expresses, the Church is to be built of those communities whose members feel Christ within them; and this Church is to be the source of salvation, redemption. The Christian Community is therefore built on *commitment*.

We can express this commitment by becoming a member, because we want that relationship of microcosm to macrocosm.

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*The Great Happiness* (1965), Cecil Collins

often meaning 'I have a *feeling* for the spirit but do not want an outer religious form.' This statement is fine as far as it goes, but it is important to understand that it is a *soul* statement rather than a spiritual one: 'in my soul I feel the spirit but I do not yet (want to) grasp it in form.' But this is how the spirit is born in the central heart of the soul. It awakens there and gradually comes to form. Only then do we feel ourselves as spiritual beings with a soul rather than a soul with a dim sense for the spirit. We can then stand over against the soul and observe it independently, rather than realising our sense of self only within the flow of our sympathies and antipathies, ideas and impulses. The soul is one thing, the spirit the other. The spirit is born out of the soul; the soul can serve the spirit. The soul is centred between sympathy and antipathy; that is the soul's breathing, in all its colouring.

The features of the soul that initially have their own life gradually become the tools of the spirit. As that happens, so freedom grows and can

That is how we can grow in inner stature, by being related to something of a greater dimension.

It sounds so natural and ordinary even with this cosmic dimension that is so deeply real; and yet it is a high threshold for so many of us. How can we understand this fact, namely that we sometimes feel that something that should or could be a smooth enhancement of a good relationship is just not for us? We think of commitment as an inner thing, our private affair which does not have any outer consequences; after all, we feel committed to The Christian Community, don't we? We are supportive and active; we can partake in communion, so why become a member? Is it relevant to anyone else?

To answer these questions, we need to look at the difference between *soul* and *spirit*. For the world in general there is little difference; they are everything in us that is not 'body'. A phrase often used now is, 'I'm spiritual but not religious',

be articulated, with the new ego-task of bringing order and consistency to our thinking, feeling and willing. We begin to *understand* our deeper wishes and impulses and let our *feelings* judge their morality, and so on with other permutations of the three within the one, of which the sacraments so often speak.

In simple terms then, it is the soul that loves and hates and within that thinks, feels and acts, and it is the spirit that assesses, judges and decides—‘let your yes be yes and your no, no, for all else is of evil’ (Matthew 5:37).

So what do we really want? Is it possible to look on The Christian Community as a being in whom everything said and done in The Act of Consecration of Man is already established and real? A being that is greater than we are and knows that it is a healthy step to take to give up our old sense of freedom in order to find the beginnings of a new one, the freedom sketched out above...?

So we shall no longer want to convince ourselves that we are *committed* members before we have taken that step of talking to the priest. There we go through some preparation and by offering up our own *ideas* about membership, start to receive its real substance. In the centre of a Sacramental Consultation we can stand before Christ to set out on this path of world dimension and perspective, freeing ourselves of an illusion that inadequately grasps true membership.

What do we need to do then, we can ask, as did the listeners to John the Baptist’s proclamation of the coming of Christ? The beginning is that after we have listened to the gospel read in The Act of Consecration of Man and we hear the server say that we lift our soul to Christ, we notice that we identify with it. It is not just words, not just ideas but substance and being that is a sign that we have taken the Word in, as the seed that fell into good ground—and grew. That is the first step towards membership.

Later, as the cup is lifted in Offering, we might also feel we too enter into that gesture, sacrificing at least part of our soul’s activities to God. Later still there are many other steps where members of the congregation can feel that they are part of the process, of the ‘Act’. Finally comes, out of a feeling of communion with the prime mover of the Act of Consecration, the realisation that the only complete way to express thanks (Greek: *eucharistein*) is to return his commitment to us with a like, albeit microcosmic, commitment to him. And as we are in the realm of the renewed sacraments, let this too be a sacramental deed—of ours. We become, *make ourselves*, a member, sacramentally, with the priest as our helper and witness on behalf of The Christian Community.

This verse was read at the closing event of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference of The Christian Community in Southern Africa held in Cape Town at the Plumstead Community.

It was titled 'Wellspring Uncapped; Welcoming Light from the Future', and was attended by 110 members from all over the country and Namibia including ten priests (South Africa, Namibia, UK, Germany and the Erzoberlenker, Vicke von Behr).

It was a hugely successful landmark event at which the Act of Consecration of Man was changed from old English and old Afrikaans to more modern versions of the languages for the first time in Southern Africa. It also introduced a new way of working in community as a social art.

### *Praying with our Angel*

*Our devoted companion  
Our heavenly friend  
Our Angel*

*You, who have guided us  
Through all ages past  
And knows all that has been*

*You, who will work with us  
Through all times to come  
And knows all that needs to be*

*Our spiritual guide  
Our inner light  
Bright shining*

*May we find  
Within the Eternal silence  
Of our being*

*Your warming Love  
And Light filled guidance*

*So that we may gain  
The strength  
And insight*

*To find the Christ in us*

*Each on our own  
And together as one*



# Questing for my Creed

## On being a Member of The Christian Community

**Emilie Salvesen**

An article on how one became, and understands oneself to be, a member of The Christian Community is of necessity biographical and personal. The Christian Community challenges us to work out for ourselves how and what we believe when it says on its website: 'Knowledge, belief and understanding is the responsibility of each individual'. These three faculties are drawn together like an inseparable trinity which each of us has to grow and balance as life evolves. How do they relate? Are knowledge and understanding opposite to belief? On either side of a scale? Two sides of the same coin? Where is the laboratory, library, workbench or building site to explore these questions?

My place of exploration and enquiry became The Act of Consecration of Man. When, aged 28, I became a member of The Christian Community I intuitively felt a spiritual home there, a sense of belonging. My subsequent biography in The Christian Community involved getting to know that home, inhabiting it and transforming intuition into knowledge. How did that come about, and what did the work look like?

I was born with a natural devotion and a great deal of curiosity. Christened in The Christian Community in New York, I lived most of my childhood in the diaspora in the Swiss Alps, where I regularly attended the Sunday Services at my Steiner school. There was no congregation nearby and because of the place of my Baptism, we were to travel to New York for my Confirmation. Preparation for this sacrament was a homegrown affair, a valiant effort by my parents to engage me in reading the bible. The sacrament stayed with me through the earnestness of the Lenker, who sought to unite a wayward, disparate group of American adolescents into a 'destiny community' within one afternoon. I felt 'seen' by him, and for the first time had a sense of being asked to make choices for myself. Crucially, I was entrusted to conduct my own affairs of spirit throughout my life and to make choices as I saw fit. The earnestness of the moment was deepened by the concern of the Lenker who released me into this freedom.

And then I was on my own. My religious environment now migrated to the Church of England in an English school, where robust hymn singing became part of my education. But I knew that 'it wasn't me'; I belonged somewhere else.

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As I grew older though, I began to question that sense of belonging, yet had misgivings about looking elsewhere. Was this reticence to look beyond my childhood boundaries the 'dutiful daughter' syndrome? Could I make another choice? Was it simply easier to stick with what I knew than venture independently into other ways of believing? I was tremendously envious of those from different backgrounds who found The Christian Community and then made it their own. It seemed so very hard to find it from within.

At twenty-one I happened to come into a Christian Community congregation in Germany, where the priest took it as read that I would take up an orthodox anthroposophically-oriented working life. I wasn't so sure. It wasn't just that studies had steeped me in the 'isms' of the time and raised all the questions of social (in)justice, ambiguity and bigotry of society. I had a strong sense of 'Don't fence me in'. I was also overcome by the chasm between my own smallness and the overpowering Godhead and keenly felt that 'before thee we can do no works'. The mediating power of the Christ eluded me. So I settled into the rough and tumble of working life with under-privileged youth in industrial surroundings. Those I worked with were either Muslim or Communist, and despite my great interest in both, neither was for me. Beauty and reverence were in short supply in this milieu, and I thirsted for them. And I knew where they could be found. Throughout young adulthood I spent my summer months in Christian Community youth camps, children's camps, family weeks, variously building houses or organizing activities. Here I felt with tremendous imminence the grounding given by the Act of Consecration of Man. Around my 27<sup>th</sup> birthday I had an unexpected, immediate experience of beauty and reverence and 'knew' instantly, intuitively, that I would become a member of The Christian Community. And so I did.

So that was sorted, wasn't it? From now on life would be straightforward in the department of faith, I thought, rather like I presumed marriage to be, whereby one expects that such an act will be the end of uncertainty and lead to plain sailing with the loved one. And so it seemed to be. I became a member through the offices of a very patient priest who divined that this was my destiny, gently invited questions which I didn't have because everything was now 'sorted' and generously took the long view that I would come to my questions in my own time. Marriage followed soon after, and the sails of my charmed life seemed set fair.

At that time I was privileged to spend six months in the priest training seminary in Stuttgart, without a doubt one of the richest and most concentrated periods of my life. Life in every sense was so strong that my faith and belief simply were not questions; I was carried by the stream and the practice

of the daily services, and felt a deep sense of belonging.

That extended experience of 'the sacrament as a home' was a greater gift than I knew at the time. Life with my husband became nomadic and took me to several countries, cultures and languages. With a young family this meant interruptions of continuity, constant adaptation, struggles of understanding. Serendipitously though, wherever we settled, there was a congregation of The Christian Community. Through five languages and as many cultures, the Act of Consecration provided me with a refuge, a place in which I found my bearings, a sense of reference and home.



*A Song*, Cecil Collins

What is the safety of home? It is a place where one can simply be, enjoy, share. It is also a place where 'the wrestling soul' can safely question, feel held when doubting, bring life's hurts and pains, worries and fears. In this environment answers can arise from within. Significant events in my life prompted and enabled further searching. A close experience of death brought knowing and believing together: sorrow made me receptive, love connected me to the path of the other across the threshold. In a small, personal way, I could see beyond life with my sight, and my love for the unseen grew stronger. This intimate, personal experience deepened and gave credence to the Christmas event of birth and to sensing my way to an awareness of being after death. I experienced knowing and believing being closer to each other.

A decade later, now in my early fifties, I stumbled into a ten day Buddhist meditation training. I knew clearly that I wanted to experience a silent retreat, and never looked into how the hours would be spent. My ignorance was a gift: I immersed myself in the Buddhist meditative practice, appreciated it to the core, and knew then clearly that this was not my way. I find it impossible to bring into words what my understanding and experience of

the Christ is. But whatever it is, I could not find it in Buddhism, and I knew that this was and continues to be, what I am searching for.

The life-event that shook the core of my being was divorce. In the immediate aftermath of separation I clung, as to a life-raft, to the statement that Christ does 'bear and order' what was happening to me, as he does for the world. I needed to learn to bear and order my own soul life. Profound powerlessness overcame me at times when my soul seemed to slide into a dark abyss. Then I experienced that the abyss was not bottomless however. At the nadir I met an experience I could liken, in the context of my human state, to the suffering of Christ. For a fleeting moment I clearly knew something with my innermost being: the Christ is in me. The feeling has since gone, but the memory of its truth remains: that in the fragile, precious moment of insight I understood that the struggle for understanding and meaning of the vicissitudes that befell me were not only for my own becoming, but that within them 'God's becoming is veiled.' The idea that my own small, individual human experience might reveal and be of service to the Godhead is so grand that it can only be expressed with the greatest humility. Yet it seems to me that in a mysterious way the wrestling human soul is exactly the right place where the father-like, divine, spiritual-physical being can explore and discover his becoming. The seismic life-event became the key-stone for my spiritual life. It locked all that had gone before into position and formed an arch between knowledge and belief that could order and bear the weight of experience.

Life events continue to open me up to different moments in the Act of Consecration. They have prompted me to explore and question, and each struggle, each quest, has created an invisible building stone for my spiritual home and has led me from believing to knowing because I know through the reality of my own experience. The stillness of the sitting is a blessing, for the internal activity is great as I map my life events into the spiritual realities that are spoken. And in the outer stillness and inner activity knowledge, belief and understanding can fuse together into an at-oneness.

The quest and work of six decades have given me an inner assurance of my at-one-ness with the sacraments of the Movement for Religious Renewal. I stand in them and I stand for them. Within the community, I find ways of supporting the sacraments, like serving at the altar or being active in groups that ensure the physical existence of the church and priests. That is one aspect of being a member—to join the inner activity at the altar to the outer activity around it. Membership of The Christian Community is for me a lifetime of exploring, and, in the words of T. S. Eliot, 'the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.'

# To be or not to be is NOT the question

Paul Corman

It is rather one of becoming and continuing to become a member.

In my long years as a priest, working for the past twenty-six years in Lima, Peru and before that in a community in Germany, I have also had the good fortune to travel to many communities, helping out as a 'substitute' priest. In every one of these communities I have experienced how the question of membership arises: what it means to be a member, why become one, and how to become one. I share with you, dear reader, a compilation of my thoughts and experiences and hope that if you have comments about what follows, that you will share them with me and the readership. The topic, it seems to me, is at the very heart of the relevance of our name, the Movement for Religious Renewal.

There are several ways that one can become a member of a religion. One of the most traditional ways is by birth, through the blood line of the family, tribe or folk, as is usually the case in Judaism, where a child born of a Jewish mother is Jewish. Those who are born into the tribe share a common religion. Many Christian groups follow this same path. A ceremony, such as a baptism may be required to make it 'official', but the principle is the same: membership in the religion of the parents is passed on 'automatically' to the children.

One can, of course, become a member of a religion by converting to it. One may do this out of personal conviction, but convenience, economic, social or even legal reasons may also play a role.

Then there is the possibility of becoming a member of a religion through a conscious, well thought through and completely free decision without regard to the will of others or any outside pressure.

I would say that membership within The Christian Community belongs to this last possibility. Depending on the particular congregation, there may be some conversations with the priest about how the decision was reached. One might receive the Sacramental Consultation to fortify the decision and choose a particular Act of Consecration of Man to mark the beginning of the path within the Community. There is no 'official' rite

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to accompany the process and no baptism is required. One will probably sign one's name in the book of members and will probably receive some sort of card having on it the Creed of The Christian Community, and the Lord's Prayer, both meditative tools for a member to use. The new member will probably be presented at the next members' meeting, perhaps sharing a bit of his or her biography and some of the threads that are woven into the decision to become a member. All in all, it is a quiet and subtle process, and thus all the more so a profound event of lasting consequence for the individual and for the Community, for it rests on a completely free and individual decision.

It is useful to look at what the word 'member' means and how it is used in different situations. There are two basic ways to understand the concept 'member'.

It can be used in the sense of being a member of a club. One must meet certain membership requirements and promise to follow the rules of the club. Maybe one will have to be accepted by the other members with a vote or a recommendation of someone who is already a member, pay an admission and probably a monthly fee, and then one is entitled to certain perks, rights and advantages, and also has certain responsibilities, duties, and obligations that the club requires of its members.

The word 'member' is also used to describe a part of a living body. An arm, a hand, a leg, a foot or even the head can be considered along with other organs, members of the human body. Interestingly enough that is the way the apostle Paul speaks of Christians in communities (churches)—as *members* of the body of Christ. Just as with the human body, members of a community, according to Paul, share the same life substance that flows through them, which is the substance of the living Christ. This connects the members into one organic living body in which each member has his or her own individual and unique function in the whole. When one member is ill or weak or fails to do its part, the other members and the body as a whole suffers along with that member. Paul also alludes to the fact that the eye cannot suddenly decide it won't be an eye anymore, but would rather be an arm for a while. He underlines the importance of the contribution that each member can make to the whole body. (See I Corinthians 12:12–31)

There is also a difference in being a conscious or a semi-conscious member. Many Christian groups treat being a member of the church much like being a member of a club. One must meet certain requirements, agree to abide by the church's rules, be 'accepted' as approved by the elders and pay the 'price' of admission—not a money price, but a rite-of-passage-price. In

many churches, however, there is also a monthly quota, maybe a tithe, to give to the church, established by the church itself.

A member of the congregation in Lima once told this story. She invited a friend to attend the Act of Consecration of Man and the friend asked her 'What do I get in return? What does your church offer?' The member, somewhat confused, asked for her friend to please explain what she meant. 'What does your church offer if I attend?' she said. 'At such and such a church, if I go to the service on Sunday, I get a bottle of cooking oil and a kilo of flour. At this other church, they offer me eternal salvation. What does The Christian Community offer its members in return?' The member thought for a few moments and then said (I assume with a very straight face) 'Well, if you join The Christian Community, we can guarantee that you will have crisis in your life.'

Freedom makes a huge difference in becoming a member of a church, or any spiritually oriented group or initiative. It makes a difference in one's own life and karma, and also in the life of the community itself. Becoming a member in total freedom, through a conscious decision, carries a different weight in the spiritual world. An angel unites itself with every spiritual endeavour in community, whether a very small community like a marriage, or a larger one like a group of teachers working out of a common spiritual impulse, or an even larger community like a church congregation. The angel needs to know on whom it can count as it goes about its process of incarnation and uniting itself with the community.

In every true community, in order for it to form itself, grow in health and thrive, there has to be an element of sacrifice on the part of the members. This won't be the same for every member, but such sacrifice must be a personal one, not decided by anyone else except each individual member.

Now a somewhat delicate topic within The Christian Community in the English-speaking world is the name of the Community. The original name in German is *Die Christengemeinschaft*. In most other languages, it is a similar translation of the German name, but in English the Community was christened 'The Christian Community', which could be translated back into German as *Die Christliche Gemeinschaft*. It may seem like a small thing but there is a great difference even in English between The Christian Community and The Community of Christians. The first name, the one that we go by, can give the impression that the community is Christian and thus those belonging to it as members are also Christian. That is a very traditional way to look at a church or congregation in the sense that the members take their Christian being from belonging to a Christian community. The other name, The Community of Christians, seems more easily to imply that the indi-

viduals are Christians or at least they are striving to become Christians in and of themselves and by their joining together, they make the community a Christian one. It's not that we should necessarily change the name, but it seems to me important, at least for the members or those individuals contemplating becoming members, to think about this most important difference. It goes to the essence of the Movement for Religious Renewal.

We can also consider our use of the word 'creed' which comes from the Latin *credo* which means 'I believe'. In the Creed of The Christian Community nowhere does it say 'I believe' or 'we believe'! There is no obligation to believe in the Creed as written or to confess it in order to be a member. The words given to the members and the words used in the Act of Consecration of Man in the place of the Creed are a resumé of concise statements about the Christ being, the Father God, Spirit God and man's relationship to them and through them to the Earth and its evolution. The Creed in The Christian Community is a tool for contemplation by the members, if they so desire, to strengthen their faith and help them deepen their understanding of the workings of the spiritual world. It is a means of acquiring strength for dealing with daily life. The Creed is NOT what makes members. It is NOT what unites them in Community. What unites members into The Christian Community is the mutual respect and aid among all members for walking with and working with Christ, each, however, in his or her own way and to the best of his or her ability. Members in The Christian Community may believe very different things. The Creed itself tells us that it is an experience that unites us, rather than the assent to a belief about the nature of the world. This is the experience of the 'health bringing power of the Christ'.

The Christian Community cannot exist without the support of its members and friends. In the physical-material-economic sphere, the community must have a dwelling place. It will have to pay basic services and salaries. It will have to maintain its physical place. All this requires money and so, in this sphere, members and friends make a contribution in the form of donations on a regular, perhaps monthly basis, but also sporadically as a response to having participated in a sacrament or having attended a lecture or other activity. In this sphere there may also be donations in the form of legacies from a will and the like.

In the social, day-to-day living sphere, the community needs members and friends to make contributions in the form of time and interest in the daily workings of the Community and in maintaining a healthy social fabric within and around the Community. Here the member may attend.



One may not know the family or the child being baptized on a particular day, but would make an effort to attend and support the celebrating of a sacrament within the Community.

In the above two areas, both members and friends can make contributions. They are needed and greatly appreciated. However, in the spiritual sphere, the sphere of the angels, those who have taken the step of membering themselves into The Christian Community may make a further contribution by dedicating a part of their contemplative or meditative life, part of their prayers, to the angel of the Community; offering them up to that being. The angel lives from these sorts of thoughtful contributions by those who stand alongside of it by virtue of their having taken this step of becoming a member. The angel gains strength and the ability to work into the community through members

The Christian Community is not a proselytizing church. It is open to all who seek what it has to offer: to experience Christ's healing power and his guidance in our lives in freedom. Its goal is not self-perpetuation. If all the members were to lose interest and withdraw their support for The Christian Community tomorrow, the Community would not be able to continue to exist. The single requirement to becoming a member is to become certain that one wants to help assure that the healing power of Christ can flow into the world in the particular way which the sacraments of The Christian Community make possible.

If the reader is already a member of The Christian Community, I hope this article will animate you to contemplate the decision already taken, to strengthen and deepen it along with your own becoming.

If, however, you have not yet become a member, I hope that what is written here will cause to rise in you the questions necessary to lead you to seek out and speak to a priest of The Christian Community about these questions as steps along the path toward your becoming a member and joining your individual destiny with that of The Christian Community.

*Perspectives* has a new website at [www.perspectives-magazine.co.uk](http://www.perspectives-magazine.co.uk)

Along with news on the latest issue and the facility to subscribe and renew online, there is a full index of topics covered. We have also introduced an archive of all our back issues going back to 2003, which can be downloaded as PDFs.

# View from a Dog

*The master is out.  
He comes and goes (more often than not, he is gone)  
and I am left  
alone  
in the house.  
And in the quiet  
when no one is about  
(well, it may sound strange to you)  
I can hear how the house calls out for him. I can hear it.*

*When I'm alone, I suddenly realise how many rooms there are.  
And each one I explore again and again, curious of its contents  
but always searching for a clue to his presence.  
I sniff in the corners, hoping to catch his scent  
until the restlessness draws me back to resume my search.  
In one or the other room  
I foul  
forgetting his care for the house.  
Instinct overcomes breeding  
and I am lost in my animal self.*

*People, vehicles, pass by  
outside  
and I bark at them  
afraid.  
Do they want to harm me?  
I should so like to welcome them into this house, into my life.  
Are they not all like the master?  
But then this fear grips my bones  
and I bark, bark, bark.  
God, it's so senseless.*

*The hours tick by  
and eat into my existence.  
Still he leaves me alone.  
I wander again the well trodden route  
that I have always taken through the house.  
Was he here? I cannot quite remember.  
And sometimes  
I am no longer sure  
whether I have not merely dreamed him up  
some strange chimera  
with his strange voice that calms me.*

*And then,  
the master comes home  
and I forget all the rooms—all I see is him.  
His being transforms the house.  
His strong voice calls my name  
and I feel his form  
fill mine.*

Luke Barr

# *There is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will*

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 5 Scene 2

**Kevin Street**

Thanks, Hamlet—I've certainly been rough hewing mine for the last 20-odd years, ever since that day in July 1993 when it was agreed that I would not proceed into the 7<sup>th</sup> semester at the Stuttgart Seminary of The Christian Community, but—well—yes—but what? In a way my leaving was much like my approach to the training—very much on my own (and my family's) back.

From the mid-1980s, my well planned and on-track career to a secondary headship had been in disarray as the discovery of Waldorf education, anthroposophy and The Christian Community had followed in a spiritual whirlwind of a few short months. I came to question my aspirations. After hours of consultations, meetings and soul searching, I decided that I might well be destined for priesthood. This was no 'Well, I'm not really sure so I'll drift along to the Seminary and see where it all leads'—I was in my 40s, married with two children aged eight and ten, and to abandon my teaching career at this point meant burning some fairly serious bridges. I was told that our whole family should move to Stuttgart, and that I could continue to live 'at home' with them during my training, a radical decision in those days, when students were expected to live in.

Financially we could do all this by taking out a second mortgage on our Nottingham home, which would sustain us through the first year of training. Thereafter, various training funds could be approached to cover fees and living expenses. Preparation was challenging and exciting, and saw me for the Spring of 1991 living and working in Stuttgart in order to learn German and find accommodation and school places for our children. Progress—such as it can ever be measured on a course that is intended as much as a schooling as a training—was surprisingly good, despite my regular tongue-tied battles with the language, but I was often pulled up in my termly discussions with members of the Seminary leadership from having too much of a concern about my family and their future. OK—but I was a father and husband before a potential priest. Was this surprising? Throughout the whole of my time in Stuttgart I had been conscious of the balancing act that was necessary between family life and what seemed to me to an almost monastic ideal that was expected of the students who lived in. I found myself

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is a member  
in Stourbridge  
and editor of the  
Newsletter for Great  
Britain and Ireland.*

feeling guilty that I had been given the dispensation to live at home, whilst others so keenly missed their children and spouses. Indeed several left the training for this very reason. It seemed ironic to me that a church that depended on an ordained priesthood made it so hard for people to become priests. Not being able to understand this added to my own inner turmoil.

It was in my final semester in 1993 that I had a blinding realization that the whole future of The Christian Community did not hang on my becoming ordained. This was a feeling of wonderful liberation, but also no less of a determination that this was still the path that spoke most strongly to me. However, in the light of what then followed, it was as well that I had realized this, for a couple of months later saw an ultimatum (initiated through health concerns for one of our children), that I could enter the 7<sup>th</sup> semester, but that if I were ordained after that I would remain in Germany for a couple of years whilst my family returned to England.

So—that was it! In a half hour interview the hopes, the planning, the anguish and the sheer hard work of the last few years had been blown away and I was left gasping, bruised and not a little bitter. And I did not experience a great concern from the Seminary about my—our—future, with no guidance or advice as to what I could now do with my life.

However, the Lutheran phrase ‘priesthood of all believers’ kept resonating in me, and it became my ideal. Now my challenge was to discover how my daily life could reflect something of this. I started working as a supply teacher in difficult West Midlands schools with the aspiration of carrying those elements of spirituality, of soul care and of personal authenticity that I had come to believe were hallmarks of ‘priestliness’ into a challenging working life. I had left the status of a senior member of staff and now was the temporary help. For many pupils, such staff were ‘open season,’ as they thought there could be no comeback to their taunts and attempts to get away with it. It was a mangling time, but I quickly came to the realization that what was coming towards me was not personal. The qualities that I had been cultivating through my seminary training helped me to find a level that was to stand me in good stead over the next seven years. I was able to try (and not always succeed—oh no!) to keep a gentle hold on my personal core when all about me was dissolving in chaos.

For the first couple of years as well I thought I might combine supply teaching with the role of co-ordinator of a newly established youth charity, founded by a Christian Community priest in North Germany, which was seeking to establish itself in England and France. It was an inspired venture, but financially flawed, and when it imploded, I just managed to find a main-scale teaching classroom post. Finances were imploding for us as a family too, for during our time in

Germany the property market in England had taken a nose dive, and we sold our heavily mortgaged Nottingham house just this side of negative equity. Certainly, the financial consequences of not being ordained were pretty dire, and remained so for a long time.

In 2001 I started working with Looked After Children and Young People (LACY), supporting children on a 1:1 basis, liaising with schools, social services, other professional agencies and foster carers. My understanding of this cohort took a steep upward curve, and for the next twelve years I found more job satisfaction than I ever had before, and my own learning about child development, brain development and trauma grew and grew. By 2012 I was heading up a team of five teachers and four support workers, and as a team we were achieving educational outcomes far in excess of the national average for this highly disadvantaged group of children and teens. And then—redundancy!

What else had destiny up its sleeve?

Well, one achievement was that I wrote a book (*School as a Secure Base—how Peaceful Teachers create Peaceful Schools*, Worth Publishing, 2014). Perhaps here my attempts to live according to my priestly values have come to their clearest expression. It is a great privilege to be able to address teachers from a variety of schools who come from many different backgrounds, and to help them to find that inner core from which the leadership that is so sorely needed for the next generation can flow.

I am still involved in the destinies of children in need of love and care, in that I sit on two ‘panels’ (the final application hoop for potential foster carers to get through), and I regularly deliver foster carer training. Now that I have ‘retired’, I have more opportunities to develop my artistic gifts which had to take a back seat during my career, and thus I feel that I am living a rounded life.

But this destiny—how has it been, not being ordained? At times, very hard, especially in those early days. I can still recall, twenty years on, the early morning panics of waking up in the November dark, seeing the ghostly outline of the bedroom lampshade in our first house in Stourbridge and wondering just what the future would bring and whether I would find enough work to stay afloat financially. It has been a struggle to keep ideals alight, without being fully aware what those ideals really looked like in this setting. The tasks of a priest (the care of souls, teaching and sacramental work) are in one sense clear enough but how can this translate to the ‘outside world’ for someone like me? Throughout all this time I worked in and with The Christian Community, locally as a server, cleaning rota organiser, council member and so on, nationally on the now-defunct Forum, and as subscription manager and newsletter editor for *Perspectives*. At the time of my departure from Stuttgart, several friends who had keenly fol-

lowed the whole process questioned with a degree of incredulity my continuing loyalty to a body which they thought had ruined my life. Strangely, though, I had no problems with this. A priest advised me, when I was waxing lyrical about my new discovery of The Christian Community in the mid 1980s, that although the ideals were noble, people had a habit of letting them down, and her advice was timely in 1993, and helped me to re-forge and perhaps even strengthen my relationship to The Christian Community. However, although I was aware that my work with fostered children and within The Christian Community was making a difference, I still asked the question: was I as effective as if I had been ordained? Perhaps the one living the life is the last to see the truth of such a question.

Destiny had yet another twist, and that was in the form of vocational counselling that had been planned before my redundancy (as a way to try to get to grips with what retirement might look like), but which then fell at a wonderfully opportune moment. I was so sore from the whole process of redundancy, from how it had been justified and from the way it had been handled. In this vulnerable state I was sensitively guided to look back over the years and to analyse just what had been unfolding.

I ended up with four points of what I thought I had lost by not being ordained:

1. *Sowing seeds for the future*
2. *Leading souls into the realms of spiritual reality*
3. *New ways of looking at the world*
4. *Gentle care of others, nature, and the universe*

Further reflective questioning and conversation led me to realize that over the last twenty years all of my different activities, as a father, a teacher and trainer, and as an active member of The Christian Community had in fact embodied these ideals. I gained a new perspective and saw that I had been able to influence, guide and support many people; different people, and in different ways than I might have done as a priest; but no less valuable for that. I have also been freed to explore other spiritual streams in ways that might not have been possible had I been ordained.

For the first few years after my return from Stuttgart people would often ask if I intended to go back and ‘finish off’. This question hasn’t been asked now for some time. Beyond the outer marks of retirement, I wonder whether this is connected to my feeling of oneness with my life.

Yes—there has been a whole cavern of rough hewing over the last two decades, a few tears, a few sleepless nights—and a growing realisation that my life continues to sparkle and light up a path, for myself and others, that I had never dared to believe possible back in 1993.

# From 'Church' to 'Community'

Louise Madsen

The movement whose aim is the renewal of Christian religious life is called The Christian Community. This name calls up, for some, the idea of it being a community of people living together; for others, the title would be acceptable if 'Community' were written with a small 'c', and others, again, do not see how we can presume to write The Christian Community. This is experienced as being arrogant and offensive to other good and striving Christians.

As The Christian Community is a religious body, it might be thought that the word 'church' would appear in its title; just this one word would clarify the nature of the organisation and avoid various interpretations that are often placed on the present title. Yet, unlike in many other religious organisations, the word 'church' does not appear, and the subtitle 'Movement for Religious Renewal' only strengthens the impression of the difference. When this Movement first received its (challenging) name, was the omission of the word 'church' an oversight, or was it, perhaps, intentional? Was this designation, in fact, purposefully chosen, simply as being the one found best suited to its purpose? I believe the simple and straightforward title is to the point and well expresses its intention and endeavour. In my view it is inspirational and indicates what it is about and aims to achieve.

In 1526, William Tyndale published his New Testament, translated directly from the Greek. It was the first printed English edition of the bible, but it was published in Germany because the Church in England was not prepared to accept it: Tyndale's translation was condemned and his work banned. However, after his death in 1536 (he was strangled and burned at the stake), his translation was revised and printed many times and was consulted comprehensively for the Authorised Version (the King James Bible), published in 1611.

In his translation, Tyndale used the word 'congregation' or 'assembly' for the Greek word 'ekklesia', which appears 115 times in the New Testament. This word refers to those who are called out [to an assembly]. Paul, who uses the word very often, always understood it to mean the living, assembled congregation. In the Authorised Version, however, 'congregation' is replaced by the word 'church' throughout. 'Church', though, comes from another Greek word, 'kyriakos', which means pertaining to

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is a retired priest  
of The Christian  
Community living  
in Stourbridge.*

or belonging to the Lord. It is only used in the New Testament twice, where, indeed, it refers to the Lord. 'Church' is not the correct translation of 'ekklesia' and using it puts a whole different connotation on the meaning of 'congregation'. Churches are organised administrative structures under the jurisdiction of man; they are a form of religious organisation under the authority of a temporal power, e.g. the Church of Scotland or the Roman Catholic Church. Each such body has its own set of beliefs, guidelines and views as to how Christian religious life should be ordered and practised. Quite why 'church' was substituted for 'congregation' is not entirely clear, but it was done as part of the revisions made to Tyndale's work and, together with changing a few other important words, made what was previously entirely unacceptable to the authorities, agreeable enough for it to receive royal approval.

A congregation can be described as a company of 'God's elect', those who have been 'called out' to be his people. They gather together in his name and each one has heard that call for himself. Those 'called out' freely choose to turn to God, aware of his influence and agency in their lives and in the world. They seek an immediate and personal relationship to the divine—without an intermediate authority, the 'church', being interposed.

In The Christian Community, in its entire liturgy, the word 'church' appears only once, namely, in the Creed. Here it refers to 'a church to which all belong who are aware of the health bringing power of the Christ. *All?* This is, indeed, a very wide and inclusive formulation! All these form communities of which the Creed says that their members [who] 'feel the Christ within themselves' may 'feel united in a church to which all belong....' *All* communities which bear this crucial characteristic may consider themselves as belonging to this church: an invisible, universal church, an assembly not to be encompassed and counted by human intelligence, but only to be looked upon by the eye of God. Here the word 'church' is used in its proper sense as meaning 'belonging to the Lord'. By using the word 'congregation' or 'community' for those who gather before the altar, and reserving the word 'church' for all who turn to the Lord, a different picture is given: there are free gatherings of those who wish to come together, and there is a church which encompasses all those who in their hearts feel they belong to God.<sup>1</sup>

In that sense, this church achieves its universality by consisting of *individuals* not subject to outer constraints. Within one's own heart and soul lies the potential to feel united with others who also experience the divine, and there, with them, to discover that they thereby become members of a new kind of community, a community that arises out of what speaks to them within their own individual hearts. This is not a community formed out



of personal connections, but rather, its members are united by what they hold in common from above: a spirit that lies above the human and personal realm, becomes actively present amongst and within them, and thus opens the way for a great diversity of people to come together and share in what comes to life within them through the working of the spirit. Members may find they have no personal connection with one another at all, yet they nevertheless experience themselves as being joined together and sharing a common purpose.



*The Eternal Sun, Cecil Collins*

When the disciples gathered together at Whitsun this is what they, too, experienced: the Holy Spirit, born in each of their hearts, gave them their sense of being founder members of a new and universal church. Peter stood up before the sceptical and jeering assembly, a crowd that ‘was beside themselves’, and spoke with an authority, confidence and conviction hitherto unknown in him; it came from within his own being—he had come to himself.

Today each of us can ask him- or herself: what holds good for me in my relationship to the divine? Each one of us is nowadays strongly individualistic—this appears to be ever more the case; and yet, when we find ourselves on our own we do not feel at ease or at one with that state. We feel a great urge to do things our way, but then realise that that kind of isolation does not lead to contentment. Organised religion is considered ‘out’. But in the background the saying still rings true, ‘When men choose not to believe in

God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything.<sup>2</sup> We may look for other things to believe in and trust, because having no belief makes for disorientation and insecurity, and to believe in just anything might lead us where we have no wish to go.

Having found ourselves, or, at least, finding that we are inwardly sufficiently free, we may venture to come together with others with similar striving and questions. If we do not feel directed and dictated to from outside but are encouraged to experience and explore what we have come to share, we may trust into this form of religious life. It caters for, or, we might even dare to say, was made for those looking for a way of approaching the divine that does not interfere with their own beliefs and thoughts, but which motivates their wakeful and enquiring attitude of mind.

Such is the endeavour of the Movement for Religious Renewal. Within the limits of the physical world, at the altar, the sacrament, in its form and content, manifests something of what takes place in the heavenly spheres; it is an earthly image of what takes place eternally in the heavens:

*And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all those who are devoted to the Spirit, on the golden altar in the sight of the throne. And the smoke of the incense rose up with the prayers of those who are devoted to the Spirit... (Rev. 8: 3,4)*

*And the twenty-four elders who sat on their thrones before the countenance of God fell on their faces in worship and said:*

*Our thanks-offering is for you,*

*O Lord, divine ruler of all,*

*Who is and who was. (Rev. 11:16).*

Before the altar, 'where two or three are gathered' in the name of Christ, I can learn to experience what is happening between myself and the divine, knowing that at that same time, it is also happening in the soul of my neighbour.

1 The Christian Community is also an organised religious body: on the one hand it has a structured priesthood, on the other, its members relate to it through what they experience of its rituals and practices. This can grow into an ever richer relationship augmented by their deepening understanding of the relationship between the human soul and the divine.

2 G. K. Chesterton

## Letter

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To the excellent article *The sign of peace* by Christopher Hudson (Advent 2014) I would like to add a few thoughts.

The communion with bread and wine is first mentioned in the Bible in the book Genesis 14:7–20. Abraham, the forefather of Jesus, is greeted with bread and wine by the high priest Melchizedek. This happened about a thousand years before Christ incarnated for three years in the body of Jesus. This act could be called a prophetic deed. Jesus Christ fulfilled this prophecy during the Last Supper. He gave the greeting of peace to the disciples after He had risen from the grave.

When we pray during the Act of Consecration we pray to the Father God, to the

Risen Christ and include the Holy Spirit in the words spoken at the altar several times during the service. The Holy Trinity is being addressed.

The greeting of peace the Risen One spoke connects us to Him during the time after the resurrection, that is, by extension, also our time. This peace greeting brings the Last Supper from the realm of remembrance of an historic deed into the realm of the present.

Included in our communion are the words spoken by the Risen Christ. In this way the three-fold communion will be working into the far future of the Earth's evolution.

GISELHER WEBER

## Review

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*This review first appeared in the December 2014–February 2015 issue of Perspectives. It was wrongly attributed to Ayesha Keller. Our apologies to her and to Deborah Ravetz, the author of the review, and to Catherine Cowell, the author of the book.*

### **Ernest Simba**

#### **Catherine Cowell**

Hawkwood Books, £6.99

for ten years and older

*Reviewed by Deborah Ravetz*

Catherine Cowell has written an enchanting children's novel called *Ernest Simba*.

The book flows and has a magical atmosphere which takes us straight into the kingdom of childhood.

The story concerns the adventures of a disabled orphan who is accompanied by a shape-changing lizard and a magic cloth that becomes a flying carpet. The child enters a kind of reverie which takes him far from home. On his journey he meets other children who, with the help of Ernest's companion and his special powers, are able to overcome and

withstand great dangers, eventually even overcoming terrible illness.

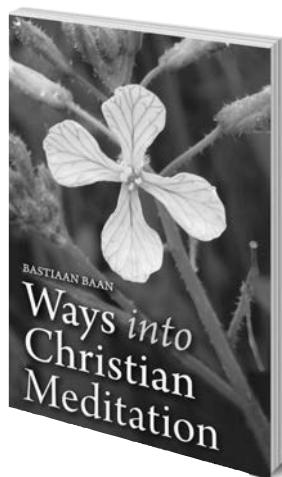
Knowing what we know about East Africa as adults, it is interesting how the story tackles the real struggles of Africa in a way that is suitable for children. There is something loving and touching about this tale and the way that death is dealt with is especially sensitive.

At the beginning of the book there is a short introduction in which the author describes her work in an orphanage in Africa and how she actually met Ernest there. When she left the orphanage she vowed to write a story about the child she had met. Perhaps this is why the story has such a beautiful atmosphere. One senses it has sprung not only out of the imagination but also out of love. My after-image of this story is of having been led into a special world.

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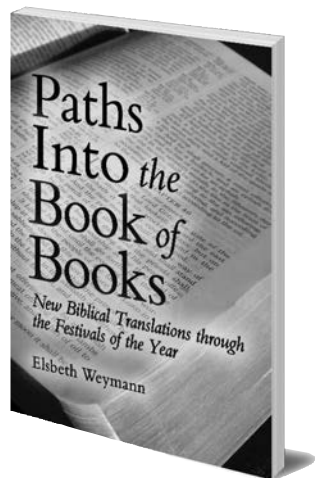
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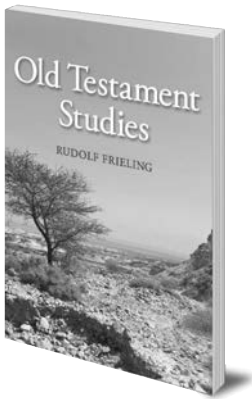
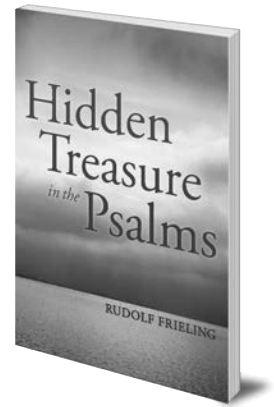
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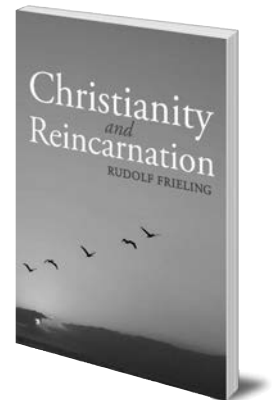
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