

IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIFE STYLE : NEW RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

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1. New Emerging Groups :

Today people of all ages and from a wide divergence of religious and social backgrounds form already a certain kind of new movement, a movement of the dissatisfied who seek new ways of authentic life. In Europe, secularism still seems to be triumphant, even if alternative movements—often associated with the peace issue and ecological responsibility—gain ground. This is different in the United States and the so-called Third World, where secularization and post-secularistic reawakening of different forms takes place at the same time. What seems to be common to this rather diverse and even contradictory scene is a (re)discovery of values which had been neglected in purely economy-oriented societies, values such as the sacred, the interiority of man, meditation, silence and leisure, communion etc.

I would like to focus attention on these countless communities and groups which develop more or less spontaneously all over the globe and independent of each other in most cases. They are and feel united in their search for truth, for the centre, for genuine life or however one interprets their search. This movement is surely an indication that societies can be restructured, which would have significant consequences for religious

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institutions as well as for political and economic structures sooner or later.

Often these groups have an intercultural character, if not directly through persons coming from different religions, at least they do ideologically and with regard to patterns of behaviour. They are less oriented to the established religious or ideological systems, but rather to certain, diversely interpreted, ideals of self-realization as well as to specific social tasks which they set themselves. Ecological and social responsibility often join spiritual discovery which is no surprise since most of these groups have a basically holistic outlook.

It must not be overlooked that often good intentions become misused by self-styled "gurus" who tend to exploit particularly young people psychologically as well as economically in various ways. But such scandals should not make us close our eyes to the importance and urgency of the intention as well as to the genuine examples of the movement found in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, the dubious examples sometimes get more publicity. Particularly critics with a Christian background often blame "the gurus" or "seductive leaders of Eastern cults" for an intrusion into their own sphere of moral as well as institutional rule, without asking first what makes these youngsters turn away from the traditional religion. We would be better advised to acknowledge the lack of spirituality and genuine presence of integrated personalities in our societies and should first of all blame ourselves for the confusion.

The question arises whether these groups or some of them could be called "monastic" because they often try to live out a deep religious commitment, either oriented more towards contemplation or engaged in social action. They reflect a dissatisfaction with and withdrawal from a society which appears degenerated and meaningless for many. At the same time they indicate dissatisfaction with the cult of individualism on the one hand and forced collectivism on the other. The solution is sought in genuine *communion* which wants to avoid and overcome both

these extremes.¹ Phenomenologically there seem to be similarities with the rise of early Christian monasticism and maybe even with the Buddhist *sangha*. To 'discern the spirits' in this regard is of utmost importance for all those who are concerned with renewal towards an authentic Christian life-style.

2. Contemporary Monasticism in a Secular World :

One of the most important events contributing creatively to the debate on monasticism in the 20th century was a symposium held in the USA in 1980 under the title "The Monk as Universal Archetype."² It was found that the monk is a universal archetype; the monastic archetype is a constitutive dimension of every man. Yet, this dimension can be realized in different ways. Each actual monk is a particular expression of this dimension. People who are not "monastics" still have to realize their monastic dimension in their special ways if they want to be full persons. The monk, however, aspires to reach the ultimate goal of life with all his being by renouncing everything else which is not necessary in the ultimate sense. He concentrates on the single goal, i.e. the Ultimate. This singlemindedness or *ekāgratā*, the exclusivity of the goal, distinguishes the monastic way of life from others.

By concentrating on the Ultimate the monk goes beyond desires that cause superficial pleasure and unavoidable suffering as well. Sorrow in most cases is created by our desires and our attempts to fulfil them through passion-motivated or self-willed actions: *karma karmodbhavam duhkham*. This holds true also for the religious or monastic desire. Here we meet Luther's point. Only if the monastic search is not a desire but based on the *experience* of the presence of the Ultimate, can monastic life

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1. Cf. my article: 'Gemeinschaft oder Kollektivismus? Bemerkungen zur Transformation Menschlicher Beziehungen', in: *Rechtsstaat und Christentum II* (Hrsg. E. L. Behrendt), München 1982, p. 173-195.
 2. Cf. My article, 'Monasticism in Transformation: Hope for the Future?' in: Materials on the seminar "Luther and Monasticism in India" Gurukul Madras 1983 (not yet publ.).

be genuine. Unless he is based in *faith* or on *ontic presence* which is really experienced (*anu-bhava*), the monk goes astray.

This reveals another problem, i.e. the basic paradox of religious life : The Ultimate is present, but at the same time it is absent. If the presence were fully realized there would be no need for a search. And if there were only absence there would be no possibility of a search. This problem is experienced and expressed in all traditions. The Christian will say he lives under the tension of promise and fulfilment, or *proleptic anticipation* (in Christ) and *eschatological realization* (in a new creation). The Hindu might say he lives in the presence of the One, but still has to *dis-cover* it, because the clouds of *avidyā* hide the reality of the one *brahman*. The Buddhist, at least in the *tathāgata-garbha* tradition, will speak about the universality of the Buddha-nature (*buddhatvā*) in all sentient beings as a potential which human beings can realize. *It is there, but it is to be realized*. Or in terms of Japanese *Zen* there is the paradox of original enlightenment (*hongaku*) and acquired enlightenment (*shikaku*).

The monk is one who wants to be centred. He is in search of the centre of personal or spiritual *gravity*, the *hara* in Japan and the *heart* in the West. The centre has no dimensions. It is void. Thus, it is at rest when the surface is at whirl. It is united, free and therefore compatible with everything inasmuch as it remains unattached.³

Therefore, monkhood does *not* necessarily imply a *dualism* of world and other-worldliness, body and spirit, monastic life and engagement for the benefit of the society. It rather aims at *integration* of the different polarities into one meaningful and *centred whole*, i.e. authentic life. It is true that traditional monasticism, in *all* major religions, has been in most cases dualistic. But contemporary monasticism wants and tends to be integrative, non-dualistic, holistic or *tantric*.

3. Cf. R. Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity : The Monk as Universal Archetype*, New York (Seabury) 1982, p. 17.

We have to clarify the term *tantric monasticism*. It expresses a universal type of spirituality, namely a real sacramentalism: the world as creation reflects the light of God. In fact, it partakes in the divine nature and has, therefore, sacramental character. It bears the marks of the divine, though in a broken way, and can therefore be a symbol for the source, the Ground, the Ultimate. The problem is man's attitude. He can use everything as a vehicle to glorify God. This usage leads him on the journey to God. Or he can misuse everything for his own egocentric purposes. This misuse leads him on the journey towards isolation, alienation and destruction. The tantric way in this sense uses every event in the process of life as an opportunity for spiritual transformation which is given by God. The demonic way of sinful separation uses every event in the process of life as an opportunity for egocentric grasping thus fulfilling disintegrating desires. So called "secular actions" as well as "religious acts" can be used or misused in this sense. We will go into this a little later.

For contemporary monasticism *fuga mundi* would not mean any more a flight from the world, but flight into the world on the basis of the proper attitude of detachment. Thus, the monk in his monastic presence would have a transformative power. The monk would be an example and pioneer in realizing the constitutive monastic dimension which is *integration and centredness*. Yet, finally, every man has to realize it in order to become and be a person.

The problem arises that according to these reflections we would have three different types of monks:

1. The monk as a universal archetype constitutive for every human being;
2. The traditional monk who lives in a monastery apart from, usually superior to, the world in order to realize this archetype in a way which is in danger of being not integrative but dualistic;

3. The new type of monk who wants to be centred and expresses the monastic ideal *within* the structures of daily life, thus aiming at some kind of "lay monasticism" or "married renunciation" etc. Different types of new-age communities, certain *Ashrams*, spiritual brotherhoods etc. which we mentioned above are to be listed here.

The main question now is to define the relationship between the three types. Not only in Christian history do we encounter "second" and "third" orders, built somehow concentrically around a "core" monastic community which represents an integrative centre in social dimensions. A lot of discussion and experiments deal precisely with this problem.

The essence of the universal monastic dimension has been defined as *Blessed Simplicity*.⁴ Yet, it is a simplicity built not upon reductionism but on *integration*. Reductionism would neglect the *advaitic* or *incarnational* experience of the non-duality of reality. It would imply a dualistic rejection of either body or spirit. Interestingly enough, a lot of traditional monasticism and contemporary materialism are just the two opposite expressions of this reductionism: one rejects the body, the other rejects the spirit, but both on the same ground of the basic dualistic mistake! But it seems to me that all the great intuitions and experiences of our respective traditions—*advaita*, *incarnation*, *pratityasamutpāda*, the *Trinitarian perichōrēsis* etc. — call for an integrative solution in the search for centredness and simplicity. These concepts are different in other aspects, indeed, but they meet each other certainly in this one point of the experience of interrelatedness of reality and the universal presence of the One or God.

The monastic search implies a break, a real *con-version*, a change of the direction of life. It is our being which is to be changed, not the things around to be rejected. It is the priority

4. Pannikar, op. cit. R. Panikkar was the animator of the monastic symposium already mentioned. My remarks on the universal monastic dimension are based on his analysis to a large extent.

of *being over having* (E. Fromm) which marks the genuine monastic life. The simplicity of the monk is the fruit of his seeing everything in the transforming light of the One, not in reducing his sight to a single "thing". It is a unification, not a selection of dimensions. This is what Martin Luther called *faith*. The Augsburg Confession also puts it clearly in CA XX: *quia per fidem accipitur spiritus, sanctus, iam corda renovantur. . . , ut parere bona opera possint*. Through faith the Holy Spirit is given. Thus, the heart becomes changed and able to do good works. The monastic dimension is concerned with this necessary transformation in the *Spirit* which can be compared functionally with the discovery of the *ātman* as the only subject, the *antaryāmin*, or with the realization of *bodhicitta* as I have shown elsewhere.⁵

To explain the point further, I will elaborate now on the monastic dimension which seeks integration in *blessed simplicity* by contrasting it with the opposite attitude which aims at possession on the basis of a dualistic structure. Thus, we follow up the problem raised above in connection with a *tantric spirituality*. There are two principal attitudes man can have towards reality. The first I call the *religious*, the second *magical* attitude. Human beings live in relationships which create mutual interdependence. A network of relations is the result. Man in this network is both subject as well as object. He is determining and determined. Harmonious relations require a balanced practice with regard to these two factors.

Religious attitude

surrendering
integrative
non-dualist
monastic dimension
detached in wholeness
love

Magical attitude

grasping
possessive
dualist
individualistic dimension
attached to things
power

5. Cf. M. V. Brück, 'Advaita and Trinity', in: *Indian Theol. Studies*, 20 (1), 1983, p. 37-60; M. V. Brück, 'Sūnyata in Madhyamika Philosophy and the Christian Concept of God', in: *Jeevadhara* Nov. 1983, p. 385-402.

to be realized in communities today prevalent esp. in techno-
 focusing on becoming logical conquering
 centred

It is obvious that this analysis describes ideal states. In real life all action arises from a multiformed intentionality. Hence, both attitudes are mixed, and at various stages of evolution (ontogenetic as well as phylogenetic) power, possessiveness etc. may be necessary for survival. The process of spiritual growth, however, marks a *shift of emphasis* from the magical prepersonal attitude towards the religious transpersonal attitude. Thus the spiritual process is identical with the process of becoming a mature person. The dichotomy of *religious* and *magical* is dialectically overcome as well as preserved (*aufgehoben* in Hegel's sense) in the accomplished personality.

Even if the realization of the monastic dimension or the experience of *blessed simplicity in harmonious complexity* is the process of maturing for every man, I do think that we need a special sphere of life where integration is lived with *exemplary intensity*. In other words, we have to speak about the institutionalization of monasticism. Institutions cannot be avoided, and the more human a need the more necessary the institution. "But the moment that the institution monopolizes the very value it represents, the danger of 'institutionalization' appears. The institution is the ritualization of the means, but when the means become ends the institution becomes totalitarian."⁶ Obviously this was the case with regard to monasticism in Luther's time to a large extent. Thus, his criticism of monasticism can be understood as a special case of criticism against a totalitarian institution. This insight may help us to understand and appreciate his point. The problem for us today is, however, that we have to find ways to express the monastic dimension also in its institutionalized form as a human dimension which does not lose its universality and pluriformity.

6. Panikkar, op. cit., p. 15.

The monk, we can summarize, is a solitary but not an isolated being. The monastery should be a solitary but not an isolated institution. It represents a different dimension than other social dimensions and their corresponding institutions. But it has to do so in a clearly understood social *corpus*. Since it claims to represent wholeness and integrated centredness it has not only political significance, but also socio-political responsibility.

The monk represents a different value-system in a fundamentally materialistic society. He opposes the powerful ones by ignoring their power. Thus, he "demythologizes" human hierarchies and political legitimations used for exploitation. In this way he could represent a most radical revolutionary potential. Precisely since his motivation is not "from the world", he can realize a genuine motivation for *blessed simplicity* "in the world". He is a sign and starting point for integration in a fragmented world in all possible aspects: spiritually, economically, socially.

On the basis of our reflections here and with regard to Luther's experience and criticism referred to in our earlier paper⁷ I would like to formulate four principles for a rather comprehensive understanding of monasticism in contemporary societies:

(i) The monk is part of society in spite of a qualitative distance from its values and structures. The monk needs society for moral and economic support. Society needs the monk as a living example for a constitutive dimension which people in the 20th century tend to neglect.

(ii) The monk is a point for crystallization in the process of the realization of religion. He is a catalyst for the "experiments with truth" (Gandhi). This is so with regard to the individual monk as well as the monastic community.

7. M. V. Brück, 'In Search of an Authentic Christian Life-Style: Luther and Monasticism', in: *Bangalore Theological Forum* Vol. XV, 3, 1983, p. 218-236.

(iii) The monk is the spiritual teacher par excellence because he tries to live spiritual realization and makes it the main goal of his life.

(iv) The monk renders service to the community of all people through prayer, meditation and other activities disclosing the transcendent dimension which is vital for the solidarity of all beings. Thus, he is not excluded from service but differs in the way of service.

These principles suggest that contemporary monasticism should realize spiritual depth *in* the world and not embark on some kind of devaluation of the physical sphere. Transformation, not rejection, is required, because *nirvāna* and *samsāra* are not two different realms; they are perspectives of our being. Further, the monk is a symbol of and for a universal and constitutive dimension. He is not a mere sign for he participates in the symbolized with his whole being. As "teacher" he mediates what and *who* he is. And, finally, monasticism should not be seen in opposition to society as if both were able to be realms of exclusive isolation. We rather should conceive of monasticism in a model of concentric circles: the monastery being the centre for the practice of *blessed simplicity* which radiates into all aspects and layers of society, thus renewing itself continuously as well as constantly changing and challenging society. All this, of course, is possible only when the monastics are really *aware* of the needs and crisis in the present world. Only then a *centering action* into society can come out of a *centred being*.

The model which I am proposing here suggests also the need for different types of monks/nuns and monastic communities. Uniformity will not work because it cannot meet the diverse needs. Generally speaking, I feel that monastic communities, or at least more of them, should be more open towards society. They should be engaged in a continuous exchange of ideas and people. Monastic communities should be centres for *qualified* spiritual training. They should be centres for the renewal of a

dimension which is lost for so many people. Hence, temporary monkhood for retreats etc. should gain in importance (as it is practiced very much in Zen circles). Such organizational structures as time-limited monkhood, married monasticism etc. would be most desirable as forms existing beside the classical patterns in order to complement them. After all, marriage seems to be able to function properly only when both partners learn detachment (understood as above), overcoming of possessiveness, when they practice centredness and blessed simplicity, or in short, when they live according to monastic ideals.

To elucidate these suggestions I could mention a number of communities trying to live some kind of open monasticism in an integrative, i. e. trantric way. Ashram movements, meditation and yoga communes, open communities for couples or families centred around the celebration of life in a liturgical form etc. are mushrooming in different parts of the world.⁸ Some are in direct opposition to the established monastic orders, some are linked with them and some are without any connection whatsoever. It seems to me, that the process of integration should also work here to form a real network of different types of realization of the universal monastic archetype.

In this paper I do not attempt a description of these groups but would like now to reflect only on one important aspect : their search for genuine *communion*.

3. Communion

Human relationships are decisively, but not exclusively, determined by egocentrism which might be necessary at times but drives the individual finally into isolation and despair. The

8. It is not yet possible to give a survey. I visited many of these groups in India and outside India. Their diversity is puzzling, but all have this common drive which makes them belong to the worldwide "new-age scene". The only comprehensive sociological survey which I know of deals with the situation in Italy only: Giancarlo Quaranta, *L'Associazione Invisibile* (Rome 1982).

age-old problem of egocentrism is aggravated because of economic competition during the last few centuries. Modern cultures tend to "economize" life. The result is that the egocentric mentality becomes the principle of survival. The danger that Marx' prophetic criticism becomes true is obvious: "Capitalism has left as the only relationship between human beings direct, naked cash." The lack of solidarity and love among humans could lead towards the total destruction of life on earth in the foreseeable future. In order to fight each other and to win a deadly competition already now the earth is being exploited to such an extent that soon there will be no clean air to breathe, no pure water to drink, no unpoisoned food to eat, no sources of energy to give light. We know that we act irresponsibly, but we take such acting as unavoidable.

One of the main problems is the isolation of more and more people during the process of modernization. Human community is destroyed where economic competition gets the centre of attention. And this happens increasingly everywhere, even here in India. This process comes over all cultures and civilizations. In our present situation the *prophetic engagement* which draws its strength from religious roots gains in importance.

A radical change of direction is called *metanoia* in the New Testament. That is what Jesus Christ preaches. The sense for totality and universal harmony are eschatological expectations which are linked with a new creation. Can this expectation and hope motivate us to work for a change in the right direction which seems to be impossible? Christian faith sometimes has been blamed because of its utopian character. Today may be it is the important impulse we need if humankind is to master its future.

Concerning the root-causes of the present crisis I would like to mention only three aspects under which we all suffer, our religious institutions not excluded, of course. These problems are not new. Yet, due to the modern technical means to exercise

power, old problems appear in a new and *qualitatively* different light.

First, it is the overemphasis on the economic principle which causes problems. Second it is the thirst for power which destroys possible harmony. Third, it is the lack of awareness for the unity of life which hides truth. Without analyzing these single points it is possible to see one common feature underlying them : the uncontrolled egocentricity and individualism at all levels of personal and social life

As far as I can see there are two possibilities to overcome this problem : *communion* or *collectivity*. *Communion* in my understanding is a free relationship of human beings which form a certain wholeness without losing the specific character of the individuals. This is possible since the *centre* of a communion is *outside* itself. Therefore it is capable of integrating different polarities. *Collectivity* in my understanding is an organization of individuals which seeks its identity not beyond but *in* the collective formation. Therefore the individual is required to develop in such a way that it becomes gradually more and more similar to the form of other individuals in the collective formation. The ideal is uniformity, and therefore there is no place for pluriformity or plurality.

It is not necessary to argue that collectivity in this sense is not very desirable, because it allows neither creativity, nor multidimensional pluralism, nor the joy of difference. It hinders the holistic development of personalities. The mechanisms of advertising which want to induce certain consumer behaviour are equally as collectivistic as totalitarian claims of states. The call for discipline as well as the dogmatic claim to possess the truth can be dangerous in this connection, too. It is a temptation not only for certain forms of Christian church life and monasticism but we can observe it in all religions and ideologies.

It is my assumption that either destruction of life on earth or the slavery of personhood are unavoidable if we fail to build up

and realize *integral communion* on all possible levels of human relations. This is the wider horizon in which we have to consider the monastic question today! Communion is founded in freedom, plurality and a relation leading towards integration. There is no definition for what communion is because *communion is a process* of metamorphosis. And the result cannot be known in the beginning unless uniformity, dogmatism and intolerance prevail again. Communion is founded in the personal maturity of the fully integrated individual and at the same time it is the *path* and *means* for this goal. In the Christian tradition we have a deep symbol for this kind of communion: the *trinity*.

Father, Son and Spirit are an integrated wholeness without losing the characteristic features of their individualities. They are in a continuous process of integration, in the dance of becoming one, as John of Damascus points out with his term *perichōrēsis* (dance). This is a symbol: it means that God, the ground of reality is integrated communion. The structure of reality itself is interrelationality in love pointing towards personal integration. It is communion.

This also describes the symbol of the Kingdom of God, and all that Christian theology has contributed over the last decades concerning the present and future aspects of the symbol of the Kingdom of God is valid here, too. For Communion, interrelationship in love as ultimate structure of reality is the trinitarian expression of this symbol. We are called to realize this reality already now, because in Jesus Christ there is the beginning which sets us free to work for a new order of reality, including the organizational structures of human life. The formation of the body of Christ is a trinitarian process. Here, in the midst of our life with its deadly dangers and unfulfilled hopes we ought to recreate the archsymbol of *perichōrēsis* in building *communion* and thereby participate in God's trinitarian dynamism.

We said that the centre of communion is beyond itself. This means that unity and identity of communion is founded not in the communion as such nor in its zeal or power. Rather, the unity and identity of communion are derived from the participa-

tion of each individual in wholeness. Such a communion lives in the spiritual awareness that it participates in the self-realization of God in history. Communion never *is* wholeness, but *participates* in it. It is on the move towards it and at the same time lives already from it. Therefore, communion has the freedom to realize itself in pluralistic and yet imperfect forms.

This is the decisive distinction from collectivity which implies a compulsion to be perfect according to the dominant value system of a given society. Communion is a spiritual event, collectivity is more an ideological endeavour. In our real social behaviour we find always a mix of the two.

4. Principles for Communion Building

How can we build up communion? In drawing conclusions from our short theological analysis I would like to come out with two principles.

(a) What communion is and how it can be achieved is to be derived from the process of practical communion building. This, I guess, is so concerning all creative activity of humans and their history, including history of revolutions.⁹ There is no doctrine, ideology or programme of communion which we have to put into practice. Theory and practice are in a dialectical relationship. The revolution of the new creation which has its first manifestation in the *metanoia* of human beings in order to transform finally the whole cosmos, means that we expose ourselves to the freedom of the Spirit. Thus, we develop spontaneity and egolessness which is appropriate to each different situation according to the freedom of and in Jesus Christ. Otherwise again the individual character would have to be sacrificed on the altar of collective uniformity, and this is precisely what communion does not aim at.

9. Marx also conceived revolutionary theory as the product of revolutionary practice. The dialectics between the two in my opinion forbids the attempt to establish a logical primacy of one of the sides.

(b) The integration of the personality and integration of personalities into a communion is one process because being person is "being in relationship". It is a form of polarity in which both poles create a field of tension which becomes the cause of energy, movement and change. Yet, we have to be discerning: integration of the person and integration into communion is not the same even if both poles cannot be separated.

Integration of the person means that everything we think, feel and do is thought, felt and done in the awareness of unification and wholeness. It is probably not only an experience of people in our time that the reality of life often appears discontinuous, that time runs out, that we haste from one engagement to the other, that we have lost the integrating centre. We lack rest, the centre which is the condition from which we master all daily tasks. We are not rooted in the centre which is God, but we act as if we were the centre. This is the first step into relationlessness, isolation and dualism. And finally the interrelational structure of the person breaks down.

The egocentric isolation we are referring to all the time is called *sin* in the Bible. There is no need to go into exegetical details because we all recognize ourselves in this mirror of sin which reflects a desintegrated image. The decisive question is: what can we do? Theologically it is correct to say that prayer, faith or, better, the life from faith, alone is the right answer. But what does this mean? The danger is great that we *have* and *use* faith instead of *being* in faith or in God, respectively.

So how can communion happen? Without claiming to be able to give a comprehensive answer to this question I would like to emphasize only one important aspect: *We must learn to meditate*. Meditation is an attitude towards life which sees the One in order to shape wholeness in daily life or to live in centredness. Meditation is the liberation of consciousness from its egocentric determination into an interconnection which unites all physical, psychic and spiritual potentials of man.

It is not the place here to go into the details of how meditation can be actually practiced. It is a long path which is definitely not easy. But it is the one precondition for all further steps which the Bible summarizes under the term *metanoia*. We should venture to go this way which is a way of faith and prayer. It is the way of participation in the divine communion of the Trinity. It is participation in the Spirit which *all* people are called for: to be one among each other and with Christ or in Christ as He is one with the Father.¹⁰

The meditative attitude towards life is immediately connected with the New Testament's or, better, Paul's term justice. For Paul *dikaosynē* cannot be achieved by law, because the law is under the sin, i.e. it functions in connection with human egocentricity. What matters is the *justice of God* which draws man towards itself. Justice is God's action which we are to be aware of and accept.¹¹ Meditation can be understood as the attitude of man which is this awareness and acceptance. Justification is the beginning of the renewal of man¹² which leads towards sanctification¹³ and has the power for new life.¹⁴ Therefore, since meditation is the attitude of surrender into the one-pointedness of all potentials for the creative power of the Spirit, *communion* appears as the *social expression* of the basic attitude of meditation. For justification, in other words, is participation in the body of Christ in the dynamism of trinitarian movement.

I do not want to be misunderstood when I call meditation *the practical way towards communion-building*. Meditation ought not to be withdrawal from activity oriented towards political and social tasks. For communion emerges in the context of concrete political structures. Communion grows or fails in this context, and it will fail definitely if it dreams of

10. John 17, 11.

11. Cf. Rom. 1, 17f.; 3, 21ff.

12. Rom. 8, 20; cf. Luther, WA II, 108, 3ff.

13. Rom. 6, 13. 17-22.

14. Rom. 5, 12-21.

being able to live apart from political possibilities and necessities. The point is not at all to withdraw from "the world" but to intensify life *in* it, so that change at the root becomes possible. Genuine re- or evolution must be grounded in a spiritual *con-version*, i.e. in *metanoia*. For unless man is an integrated person he will destroy the relation with the whole due to his egocentric motivation. This is precisely the dilemma analyzed above. To change structures one has to change consciousness. And to change consciousness, at least with regard to a group or the society, structures have to change.

This relation would be misinterpreted mechanistically if one were to coin the formula: First meditate, then act! Rather, this is *one* process, and change in one direction stimulates the other dimension, but only as long as egocentric motivation is minimized, if not excluded.

Without going further into theological analysis I would like to discuss only two practical consequences which follow from the above notion of *communion*.

(i) Separation of an Ego and the integration of personality are probably best understood as polar moments of one human *process of maturing*, and therefore the cornerstone for the ability to live in communion is a different *education* of human beings.

A large part of our educational effort is directed to making people fit for competition. Egocentric efficiency is the yardstick for success in education. This is the root for a destructive attitude which can hardly be changed later.

In order to overcome this one-sided economic principle in education, *aesthetic values* should be given much greater emphasis, but in such a way, that art does not degenerate into a means for egocentrically motivated, and commercially stimulated, competition. This is a very important aspect of *communion*-building and any reflection on monastic values for our situation.

For in the artistic expression there is a chance to anticipate in the form of vision a *participation in the whole*, to practice and express wholeness. Further, aesthetic education helps in learning a pluralistic attitude, because art does not and cannot claim to achieve unequivocality. Further, arts educate in values which cannot be expressed in financial calculations (presupposing that the commercialization of art is avoided). Art also teaches that there is meaning in an activity for its own sake without the expectation of other and external benefit. Thus, it leads towards the essential. This is what meditation and arts have in common. And finally we have to consider the deep connection between religious and artistic values in general.¹⁵ Hence, often religious values are much better mediated in a wholistic expression of art than in one-sided intellectual instructions. The beauty of a poem, of the psalms, paintings and dances express existentially the dedication and one-pointedness of the artist. Even more, the one who views is participating in this intensity. This intensity could be a step to overcome egocentricity and isolation which, as we have shown, is rooted in the depth of the psyche hardly accessible to intellectually understood commandments.

(ii) Communion is *communion of seekers*. Nobody has the truth, nor is anybody in *command* over spiritual things, but truth and spiritual things command over the ego. All are on the way because nobody has already reached the goal. This is one aspect of Luther's famous formula: *simul iustus et peccator* which enables us to achieve corporate humility. Still bound by egocentricity the Christian rejoices already in the freedom of the Spirit. This difference between starting point and goal characterizes the way or the seeking. As a seed the power of the new creation is already working in us in order to transform us finally. The process of growth is the task of life. Nobody

15. Cf. R. Otto, *Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy)*, Breslau 1917, p. 72f. For Otto the numinous and the aesthetic have an extremely close affinity. Cf. also the discussions on aesthetics in German idealism, especially by Kant and Schiller.

claims to have found "it"¹⁶ but is open for plurality which is necessary for communion. In this way egocentric misuse of power could be, if not excluded, at least minimized.

5. Conclusions

A number of further questions have to be raised in connection with a theological analysis of new religious communities and the universal search for communion. I am sure that they could be answered quite effectively if different religious traditions share the riches of their experiences, but open up themselves also for very new ways in our multicultural situation. On the basis of my earlier reflections on Luther I would like to contribute five suggestions which might be considered in our further discussion:

(i) Luther emphasizes the priesthood of all believers. He opposes monasticism because of its elitist trends, thus promoting a democratic principle in the spiritual realm. This is fine; but are we not tempted, therefore, to remain at the lowest common denominator? Are we not in danger of giving up an intensive spiritual practice altogether because of a misunderstood "equality"? This problem is urgent today in other spheres as well: modern mass-education for instance.

After all, the monasteries have been the great producers of saintly figures who have inspired the life of millions over centuries, among them Martin Luther. Further, in medieval Europe monasteries have been the seed for a new culture, a revolutionary potential for immense socio-cultural changes. This could be of importance in our present cultural changes as well. I have tried to spell out what this means with regard to the search for *communion* and *spiritual awareness*. More aspects, however, have to be taken into consideration.

(ii) Monastic life-styles depend very much on the socio-economic and cultural context. A study of different types of monasticism in different cultures could inspire us with creative imagination to

16. Phil. 3, 13f.

deepen, intensify and widen our life-styles in areas which we have not yet explored. There are married monks (Tibet, Zen), socially involved monks (even guerillas), total hermits etc. Sharing experiences will be important for finding, 'unthinkable' ways.

Against the background of the Indian tradition the life-style of Jesus is particularly interesting. He lives as the *guru* in the midst of his disciples. He is a *sannyāsin* in total freedom and independence from the established religious and political values. This might be of great importance today. But unlike the traditional *sannyāsin* Jesus is involved into the struggle of the people, in their suffering and the process of liberation. He was, unintentionally maybe, a revolutionary who dug deeper than intentional reformers. This holds true for the Buddha, too. And I guess that there is an intrinsic connection between this "unintentionality" and the depth of the efficacy, because it has something to do with egolessness.

(iii) What can we learn especially from the *tantric* tradition for the practice of a spiritually integrated life? I think that the Christian experience of incarnation is tantric, i.e. it makes us see life as a wholeness. There are no areas (individually, socially, ecologically) which would be less holy than others. It is a sanctification of the ordinary, the mundane. What could an interreligious tantric monastic vision contribute to the "sanctifying" of politics, economics etc. ?

(iv) Some monastic life-styles are extremely centralized under a centre of power with hierarchical obedience etc. This has its strength but it has problems as well. Other monastic traditions, such as the Tibetan, are much less centralized in terms of spiritual authority. This model might be more suitable for a democratic consciousness. But we have to see here the ambiguity as well.

(v) By living in West-European, East-European, American, Hindu, Tibetan, Thai and Japanese monasteries, I have realized that one problem has emerged as the most urgent: What is the role of practical service to others in contemporary monastic

communities? Can Luther's contribution help to see the problem more clearly? Could Zen, Franciscan piety, Mother Theresa etc. contribute to a solution which is really integrative?

There is a great search today both for spiritual experience and for communion. New religious communities are emerging. They need nurture and support from the mainstream of the different religions. They are a hope for the future. Everything is or ought to be founded in the awareness of wholeness. The whole is always there. It is *in* pluriformity. When pluriformity is destroyed the experience of the whole vanishes subsequently. When we become aware of the whole we become sensitive for the particular which is experienceable in pluriformity. We take it as a form of expression of the whole but we are not threatened in our identity by the otherness of the other. The whole comprehends everything, but everything is not the whole.

What we have been speaking about is a process of personal transformation which can be expected in the social net of genuine communion. This process requires a lot of energy and patience as well as the willingness to allow change. It requires courage.