

Thoughts on Brotherliness in The Christian Community or: The Association between “Free Congregations” and the Entire Community.

In the first lectures held in June 1921 for the future founders of The Christian Community, Rudolf Steiner speaks of the main task: **forming community and founding “free congregations”**. At the same time he points out the necessity of putting the threefold social order into practice, if religious renewal is ever truly to gain a foothold. And he speaks of his hope that an **attitude of brotherliness** must live in the new community.

What about these initial impulses today?

Free congregations in the sense it had in those days – that is to say, of being independent of interference from the already existing churches or of being influenced by the state – exist in many countries. In them, spiritual life is free to develop through the sacraments, proclamation of the gospel and pastoral care, as well as in all the other activities of the community. In the legal sense, congregations are usually organized into a greater context (regional corporations, national bodies and the like). Economically they are independent; that is to say, they are self-funding. At the same time very many also support the interests of the entirety of The Christian Community.

How do we see Brotherliness?

- Quite a few **accounts and salaries are pooled together**. A great deal occurs unnoticed, such as when individual priests live rather sparsely, without becoming dispirited, and in this way create surpluses for others.
- By **combining building funds**, many hands help at one site to make possible what would be too much for a single congregation to cope with alone. Hardly any church construction would have ever been accomplished without this assistance from the community.
- **Financial support for congregations** in development or possibly in urgent need is the expression of a brotherly attitude.
- And finally: we could not exist at all without the **unselfish voluntary work** done in all the different areas within The Christian Community.

However, is this all that was intended at the very beginning? Are we free of egotistical tendencies? Isn't there, in addition to our personal selfishness, also a congregation-egotism or regional egotism? For example, what about this view: What a congregation or region might receive as an inheritance is of no concern to anybody else outside it, nor does it concern the whole Community in any way?

Does this not *always* concern The Christian Community as a whole?

When someone joins a congregation or lives in it, do they not always come into contact through its people and context with The Christian Community as a whole, with the entire being of it? No congregation can exist spiritually on its own – it exists only because the other congregations and the entire Christian Community also exist. Is there one cell in an organism that is not part of the entirety? What does the Apostle Paul say about the single members of a community and the congregations – that they form an organism together – indeed, the body of Christ? What happens if single organs isolate themselves or promote one-sided growth, disregarding the entire organism?

Has the bond of mutuality yet become sufficiently manifest in our management of economic resources? Rudolf Steiner says: “To the extent that one senses the need for brotherliness, one permeates oneself with Christ” (Vol. 187 Complete Works, p. 50). Is it appropriate for us to bear the name “The Christian Community” already? – or not till we keep this much more vividly in mind and more strongly in our practical work?

Is not the cultural age of brotherliness, “Philadelphia”, also to be prepared among us and with us?

Can we still afford to be but partially aware of our entire strength and resources, because in some areas the genuine circumstances are not completely transparent? Is it not time to take a step forward?

Perhaps existential anxieties overwhelm and hamper the expanding consciousness of the whole community – but are these anxieties really justified? By becoming aware of the prevailing needs and possibilities, suitable cooperation may initially take shape and the path to making decisions can be found.

It is most likely that we in The Christian Community could take a large step forward, if we succeeded better than in the past, out of a mood of confidence and straightforwardness, to exert the available strength in such a way that it would have beneficial effects on the entire community.

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