

BEING A MEMBER OF A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

1. To live means going a way

Although we hardly might ever think about it, to live always means going a way. The way from birth to death. To be born does not only mean that we appear in a physical manner. We are born in a certain family, anyway out of a certain family, anyway out of a certain mother. From the very beginning we have people around us. Very quickly we are in the spatial mimesis with them, doing what they are doing, wishing what they are wishing. In the same time we begin to be in the temporal mimesis with ourselves, repeating what we learnt.

Our beginning is given. Possibilities and difficulties are given to us. Although very quickly we too are acting ourselves, putting up powergames with the will to win, that does not change the reality that with our birth, which in a sense goes on till we die, possibilities and difficulties are given to us.

In fact they are the possibilities and difficulties for our life, to fulfil the task to live and to die in a human manner. Dying, although it more and more looks like that, is not just disappearing. Dying in a human manner means to give life back, consciously, having fulfilled the task. To stop all the desiring and to be free to die.

2. To live always means to be together with others

We go this way from birth to death together with others, human beings, animals, plants, the whole of creation. There is no way without them. Everything we are we got. Life is not possible without them, although very often they make life impossible for us as well.

We too being on our way, always make life possible or impossible for others, so fulfilling our task and so making it possible that we can die in peace.

It is the achievement of culture that human beings are capable to make life possible for others, for the people and other realities around them, for their children, for the future. By making life possible (and impossible) for others, it becomes in the same time possible for us ourselves. Everything is mimesis. We can't speak about the others without speaking about ourselves in the same manner.

In fact our way is part, a very small part, of the way all human beings go together, in culture, through time. In the unique intermingling of spatial and temporal mimesis, which is the history of everybody, we are certainly unique. Our uniqueness is in the same time bedded in the temporal and spatial mimesis of culture. Without the latter we can't exist. See from the latter, the whole of culture, our uniqueness is a compound of merely fortuitous elements.

3. Christ as the beginning of the way

Culture is the possibility humans found to restrain the mimesis, which destroys all of us if it has its way, the mimesis of desire. Structure, the law, rituals, myth, they together kept us in our places, refraining our desiring, our rivalries. Now culture is disintegrating. We are coming back to our origins, to unlimited violence, grand scale, between nations and “worlds”, between people, such scale, in families and everywhere.

There is no way back to old culture. That is the way of more violence, accelerating the disintegration of culture. In fact, although we have to be very careful with the remnants of culture we still have, there is no way back. If there is a way forward, out of the violence, then it only can be a way out.

We are, in fact, not the free people we always think us to be. We are caught up in the mimesis, which always happens before we think, before we become conscious of it. The only freedom I fact we have is the freedom to choose with whom we wish to be in mimesis, whom we follow.

Time and again we do that. We have our heroes and heroines, whom we follow, whom we choose as our examples. They might do, in this manner, very much good and very much bad in our lives. Anyway, we can choose to follow somebody who is important for us.

Jesus is in the gospels shown to us as a man who is outside of the mimesis of desire and so outside of the consequence of it, being violent. He does not rival. Everybody can rival with him and in fact does, in an impious or in a very pious manner. Everybody can make a model-obstacle out of him, who has to be destroyed. But all of this is of our making. He does not rival. He does not build up. He stays a “dot”. We can choose to be in the mimesis with him, to follow him. Following him, taking him as our model, he brings us in a new possibility to live. A possibility in fact never thought of, about we only know “a glimpse” when we experience it, then overcome by a joy we never knew about. At last we can go, with him, through the eye of the needle, because we stop building up.

The joy is the joy of experiencing a wholly new freedom, the freedom from the rivalry we are constantly engaged in, taking away all our possibilities, making us full of anxiety and fears. It is the joy of seeing the world and its fullness, with its possibilities, in a new manner. In fact the world opens itself for us. It becomes a new world. Taking the decision to follow Jesus means to experience a new birth, a new beginning of life, amidst of all the old realities and experiences. Although of course, we once were born in the physical way, having our parents and our history, we are again born, into another reality, into another culture, following him. The culture of the non-desiring, of freedom.

4. The New Jerusalem as the end of the way

When we have chosen to follow Jesus, we have the curious experience that he is everywhere and always. That he is at the beginning and at the end. Although really human, which we recognize in the decision to follow him, which would be impossible if he was not really human, in the same time he does not belong to our culture as we do. He is not caught up in time and space as we are. We can meet him any time we look at him

and follow him, out of this culture into his, in which he is the founding reality, in which justice lives, because the desiring, the origin of all injustice is gone.

We can take the step into this reality, time and again, although in the same time we are held back in this world of the old culture. And we know that our life is a journey to him. He is around our reality of space and time. When we die, fall out of this reality, we only can find him.

We find him. Not only I. We find him together. We are together with him in a new community, a new “town”, a reality in which we all are free, without desires, anxieties, fears, responsibilities, all those aspects of life, which belong to culture. We are just “angels”. Of course in a sense this is dreaming. We don’t know anything about it. The old Christian community had its dreams about the heavenly New Jerusalem. That is this dream.

For the moment much more important: We know about this dream. We live our lives in the light of this dream. Our lives change with the light, which shines over it. The light of the kingdom of God, another word for this reality, changes our life and changes our death. Death, dying, is not any longer the end of the affair, it is arriving, after a long journey. An arriving, which is given.

We can’t do anything for this reality, for the new Jerusalem. We live in the light of it. It makes our days light, in every sense. It gives us the possibility to stick to our choice, to follow Jesus. It gives us the joy in anticipation.

5. Community

We can’t live alone. Our human life only takes shape when we are in the mimesis with each other, in the mimesis with our culture. In the temporal mimesis, doing “things” as they always were done, in the spatial mimesis, learning from and imitating each other.

When we choose to follow Jesus off course in the very moment we are not alone in our choice. He already is with us. And nevertheless he says himself that he is amidst of us when two or three are together in his name, wishing to follow him. He is always with us in the other, in every human being we meet.

And again, this culture, our manner of living together with all the others is overwhelming. The grooves in our being, from the mimetic learning-processes from our birth on are so deep, that time and again we follow them, forgetting about everything else. We are lost in the world, which means our culture, as soon as we are alone with our decisions. We have to be together, to have the possibility to be in the mimesis with each other on our way of following Jesus. If we are not going together we go astray time and again. We need each other. We need a community in the fellowship of Jesus.

6. A Christian community

It was outsiders, maybe opponents, who called the followers of Jesus for the first time Christians. Maybe the name was meant to deride them and that, just out of that reason the followers began to use the name for themselves. Anyway we still have very ambivalent feelings about the word, when we don't see the derision and don't take exactly that upon us.

A Christian communion is not a group of perfect people. They are exactly the same as all other people, with the same possibilities for the good and for the bad. Time and again, or even mostly, we do the same "bad" things other people do, at most with a worse conscience. Members of a Christian community know that they need each other stay on the Way, following Jesus. We remind each other of him, by following him, by encouraging each other, by telling, so eventually trying to bring each other back when we got lost in culture, this world. Members of a Christian community are as all other people. And they know about the other possibility to live. Now and then in their life they go the way, breaking through the self-understanding of culture, through the mirrors, through the chains of cause and effect. By following Jesus these "things" happen, just happen. And so there are new possibilities to live, there is freedom.

A Christian community is neither a group of strong-believing people. They know that they belong together. They know that they have a secret, in that sense that it is a secret for this world, being in the same time true reality. Maybe there are members of the community, maybe every member now and then does not believe so clearly, not knowing "exactly" who God is, who Jesus is. Knowing, maybe only with the body, not with the brains or even with the heart, that all in life is about true humanity, and that it is only to be found there, amidst of this curious bunch of people.

A community, in fact, is a group of people, traveling together, being together in the spatial and temporal mimesis with Jesus and with each other, and so giving each other to stay on the Way. To be, on a scale however small, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, a city, built on a hilltop.

7. The Christian Community in the World

The Christian Community is part of the world. In a sense only world, part of this, our culture. As far as it is not world, it is given to her, to members of her, in the meeting and following of Jesus. He can be met in each other, in every human being.

It is not the task of the community to fight for a better world. To fight, to do its utmost to build the New Jerusalem. By doing this it follows the ways of this world, our culture, and certainly will destroy itself as a community. It lives in the certainty that the new Jerusalem is and will be given. This certainty gives the openness in fact to see Jesus when he is before our eyes, when he shows up in our "neighbour".

The meeting with Jesus gives the freedom to go to the other. It renews our own life and, going to the other, it renews her/his life as well. The first is not without the second. If

the freedom, coming out of the meeting of Christ, does not have consequences for our lives and for that of others, however small they are, it is no freedom at all.

It is a big question if a Christian Community as such has to have strategies, long running plans and all these things we think about when we are pondering about what to do. Our life changes, we find the Way, we taste freedom, see a new world, out of the meeting of Jesus. From there on our way is another way, although again in this world. When we are a Community make strategies and so on, all too soon we are trapped in culture, trying to achieve, to have a result, a success. As soon as we do that, we are not a Christian Community any longer. We are a group of do-gooders. Those are not always bad people of course, but to be that is not our calling.

In fact as a Community we have to find, together, ways to be open to the meeting of Jesus, so doing, without making strategies, the unexpected, which changes life. When we try to do the unexpected straightaway, we might do very curious and eventually even very beautiful “things”, even eventually making others free. We ourselves in that case stay under the law, this time to do the unexpected. We stay slaves in culture. Only by following Jesus, he making us free, we just do the unexpected, for ourselves and (so) for others, freeing them and us out of the mechanisms of this world.

Of course, if this is true, it has to be worked out. For the life of the members of the community, for the life of the cell-groups, for the centre, the “place”. How to shape it, when we as a community wish to be together with youth (which is not the same as to do something for youth)? Many, many questions, wonderful ways of discoveries.

8. The Christian Community and the Churches

Without Christian Churches there hardly would be a Community like Corrymeela. In the Christian Churches the Bible, the Gospel, was read and given to the next generations. In the Churches Jesus was working through the ages. There is no possibility ever to know how the world, and how we would be without their existence.

Nevertheless the Churches in the same time are very much part of culture, with all the mechanisms belonging to it. With its ideologies, in the Church confessions and dogmatics, its laws its boundaries. As culture itself Churches scapegoated and scapegoat others, smite people out, even burnt them.

Christian communities are no better. The same people belonging to Churches belong to them. The difference is that a community, living in a time in which culture is disintegrating, in a sense begins again where new life once begun, in the old Christian Community, listening to the Gospel, living as far as it is given, the one-foldedness of the sisters and brothers of Jesus. The Community does not have to carry on the endless responsibilities of a Church and should never try to get such responsibilities. The Christian Community only is a living reality in its weakness, its poorness. Only out of the weakness come the new ways to live, for its members, for those belonging together in the Community, and so for others.

As such the members of the Community too are in their Churches. To bring to the congregation, eventually only by being there, the new life, the possibilities of new life,

found in the Community. Although the world is vastly changing and it might be that the Churches will disappear, there still is a big chance that the Churches will survive, long after the community disappeared again. That, the disappearance of the community as such, does not matter. There is no fruit without the seed dying on the earth. The fruit might still flower in the Churches, the Community being forgotten.