

CHAPTER VIII

REGENERATION FROM BENEATH

A Down to Earth Matter

Human survival is a down to earth matter. That means getting into the earth not for preservation but for regeneration. Rather than digging holes in the ground for nuclear missiles or bomb shelters the human race will survival depends on the care of the social soil: community at the base.

God's people are called again and again to become pilgrims, to leave their established places and risk the adventure of settling new lands. I have suggested that this exodus may not be geographic, but rather "in place." It is a settled exodus rather than nomadic. The 19th Century expanded the horizons with sailing ship, steam locomotion and telegraph and the 20th Century accelerated exploration with microscope and telescope. High technology has taken the human race into every nook and cranny of the universe. We have roamed and ravaged. But now is the time for soil care, the earthy task of attending to our roots again.

There are ancient but hidden resources for guiding us on this exodus already implanted in our nature. People do not need to be instructed as much as encouraged to discover their natural gifts. We are creatures of the earth and we were created to live in harmony with it and with each other.¹ We were created for community. That is basic. When we rediscover our organic and intuitive capacities, we will realize the difference between wisdom and mere knowledge. There is much we already know and do not have to be taught. We do not have to tell our hearts how to beat. The yearning for human community is just as instinctive. Those are the "laws written on our hearts" (the Apostle Paul), the "orders of creation" (the Reformers) or "mandates" (Bonhoeffer). Doing instinctively what we must to survive may not be the noblest virtue, but it is adequate when nothing but survival finally motivates us to act. Paradoxically it forces us to do what higher moral wisdom invites us of our free will to do: to live interdependently or not live at all. The extremities of survival reveal the wrath of God as God's disguised grace (Luther). Hazel Henderson argues that ethics "is merely the acceptance of human interdependence. Morality in fact has, at last, become pragmatic."²

One of the things we overlook easily in criticizing North American society is that there are probably more seeds of citizen initiative and social pioneering in American soil than any place else in the world. One reason for this is that peoples from all over the world of diverse varieties have come to North America to plant their communities. In the rich soil with which the continent was endowed and in the free space of a democratic republic the gradual evolution of a new species developed. In contrast the revolution that took place in Russia in 1917 was a rapid transition from a feudal society to a socialist that happened so fast that the leadership model was not changed. It remained feudal. In North America the process has been slower but more effective. Basic changes require time and the careful preparation of the soil. Despite the damage from the exploitation and pollution of the soil there remain intriguing possibilities in North America. An observer team from Europe looking for models of appropriate technology had this to say:

In an economy which, above all else, has been built on the prodigal use and misuse of resources, it would be surprising if the need for a change in direction, towards a conserver society, were to pervade the national consciousness quickly and without resistance. What strikes an outside observer about the USA is the extent and variety of the groups and organizations that are already advocating this kind of change and are actively involved in making it happen.³

During the 1960's I was involved with others in attempting to mobilize citizen response to the social crises. The activities of those critical years eventually produced significant movements by the early 1970's. Though many of us were highly critical of the institutional church and its containment of lay initiative within the walls of the church, nonetheless when it came to mobilizing action groups the church proved to be the most effective human delivery system, far outstripping garden clubs, political parties, labor unions and veterans' associations. Perhaps that should not be surprising. We should have expected a greater response from the churches. Nonetheless it demonstrates the potential that is there in the religious community. I believe this is because the local congregation is close to the roots. If the base were to be given high priority the churches could make a tremendous contribution to society as a whole. Locating the church's major social impact at the base rather than at the top would be a reversal of the Constantine model. In contrast to the era of monarchies, including the Holy Roman Empire, the power of the church

in democratic societies lies less in what is said by the hierarchy than in the response of God's people at the base. John Taylor notes that:

It is not the political speeches of public figures in the church nor the scoldings of the social gospel that send Christians into the filth, but the quickening of compassion and the kindling of awareness by the Spirit of Jesus through the Scriptures, worship and fellowship of the church.⁴

Actually, this approach should relieve many church officials who recognize how often the church is not able to deliver the votes on issues on which the national body has taken a stand. Others who have never regarded political activity by organized religion as appropriate would no doubt also be relieved by such an approach. I am not suggesting that the institutional (secondary) church should avoid social issues, but that the church should recognize that her real power lies in its primary communities. The church at the base is freer to act quickly and to take greater risks. Furthermore, the church as a whole gains more credibility when action comes directly from the members own commitments. If such actions are to be (1) Gospel inspired responses and (2) involve risk and sacrifice it is essential that people own such decisions personally. The church's important role in regard to the social action of the people is more organic than organizational. The institutional church does not have to create the instruments for the public life of her members. There are already sufficient channels for people's social and political activity. Christians ought to work in, with and through them whenever possible. Someone has to make it their highest priority to build up the root systems that supply the resources for the social structures above ground. The church, I believe, for both theological and sociological reasons, is the most appropriate candidate for that task.

A Public Church

The Christian Churches in North America have understood their position in society as independent communities and not as an establishment of the state. What has been called "the wall of separation" between church and state in North America has made it difficult for direct engagement of organized religion in the affairs of the state and vice versa. But in the building of communities at the base of society the church has a unique and important role in the shaping of public life even if there are no formal connections to the state. Parker Palmer suggests that the church's role is "pre political".

At its most basic level, the public life involves strangers encountering each other with no political agenda at all. In fact, the public life is "pre-political." It is more basic than politics; it existed long before political institutions were developed and refined; and a healthy political process (at least, the process we call democracy) depends on the preexistence of a healthy public life. . . . Even if one believes that religion and politics don't mix, there is still strong reason to believe that Christians should concern themselves with public life. For the church preaches a vision of human unity which means very little if not acted out in the public realm. Surely that vision applies to more than family and friends. Surely it is a vision which claims more than the commonality of those who think and act and look alike. Surely that vision reaches out to include those who are alien, different, strange. If so, then the church *must* incarnate its vision in public, for there and only there is the stranger to be found.⁵

The early Christian communities had a radicalism ("rootedness") based on the Gospel and the powerful experience of the Spirit of God in their household gatherings. As an underground movement in a day of an absolute monarchy there was no possibility of direct citizen action to influence public policy. The early church had to use the only power at their disposal. They witnessed in their own communities to a new reality transforming their own lives and transforming the way they treated others. Though small the household churches worked like a leaven in the society of that time and with powerful effect.

During the Middle Ages, the Constantine solution of a formal and privileged relationship to the state prevailed. The church exercised tremendous political power but not in a way that was based on the radical claims of the Gospel. The generation of new life inspired by the Spirit was rarely the source of the church's power in the Holy Roman Empire. At best radical faith survived in movements on the fringe that the church tried to domesticate in monastic orders or else outright persecuted as heretics. The day of voluntary associations and democratic government was still far off.

Today there is the possibility that small groups, inspired by the Spirit, can take effective political action through the independence and personal action of the members. Movements have learned how to mobilize the energy of small groups. Often these groups are religiously motivated. Political campaigns have been launched in terms of issues

that have touched the convictions of church members. A great deal has been learned about involving a broad spectrum of participation on social issues that allows Christian communities to act directly out of their faith. In other words, there now exists another model for the involvement of people of faith in public life. And that is the Spirit led, politically active base community working through political systems, yet retaining its own alternative life style. This form of the church combines all three dimensions of one's faith commitment: public, corporate, and private (Church, Sect, and Mystic types in the formulation of Ernst Troeltsch)⁶. Present church structures cannot take direct political action because they have neither the consensus nor the public authority to do so. Neither do they have the necessity to do so if responsibility were to be taken by the base. In short, the Christian community at the base is a new/old phenomenon that can encompass the public, the corporate and the personal. It witnesses to a transcendent God over all human activity (the public role of the Church Type), to an incarnate God present in a particular place (the corporate role of the Sect Type) and to an empowering Spirit moving freely among the people inspiring them to radical action (the personal role of the Mystic Type). When the church works in society through the roots of its primary communities that it breaks through the fronts that fragment and frustrate secondary systems for in the soil diversity enriches the soil. The traditional, conservative, radical, pious, political, liberal, free, disciplined all have their place in an organic process. Such a model for the church's role in society is more than an alternative to Troeltsch's models. It is all of them together restored to a proper balance, to a trinity. Parker Palmer adds this observation about how the church's turning inward to its primary life can contribute to public health.

Persons concerned to revive the religious grounds of public life often look with nostalgia at times when religious symbols and meanings were prominent in America's public sphere. But the process of secularization has meant driving those symbols from the public realm into the confines of private life. Perhaps, instead of bemoaning this fact, we can capitalize upon it. Perhaps the revival of America's public life will be aided most by those who learn to go deeply within, those who (as Thomas Merton did) touch the heart of God within themselves, that heart in which they are related to all other selves. Perhaps it is from such inner journeying that some will emerge with new symbols and images which can be shared in public to help create the public. The inward turn of America's religious life is fatal to the public only if it does not go far enough. The inward search, if it goes deep, will touch the One who makes us one, a source of new power for the revival of public life.⁷

Ultimately the church is identified with no specific form. As pilgrims and strangers in the world God's people have no permanent home. They live "on the boundaries," a mobile band, flexible and responsive to the demands of discipleship. The small, primary group is better able to live on the frontier with its requisite adaptability than larger and more established forms.⁸

The early Christian communities though small worked like a leaven in the society of that time and with powerful effect. Might that not be the role the church could play in the modern world? But first we need to examine what forces shape public life today.

Citizen Formation

High school civics courses contain a great deal of information about how local and national governments function but very little about the formation of citizens. The formation of values and virtues for living in society is, of course, the domain of the base community. Here is another illustration of how institutions by law or custom give priority to the secondary system over the primary one. As one who has been calling for years for church members to respond to a wide range of social issues, I have come to realize that I had been making a huge assumption that people were ready and able to act. I had assumed the primary system was in a healthy state. Too few citizens, I discovered, had much experience or affirmation in community building. Many had no healthy primary experiences of community on which to draw. Therefore, rebuilding base communities became for me the first priority. To change the way we live with each other in "zones of intimacy" over which we do have some control is already to begin a major social revolution. Attending to the base communities is also essential for sustained participation in public life. William Kennedy calls these "communities of confidence":

In the long run action requires a strong community of support. Isolated individuals, or even small groups like the nuclear family, lack the power to sustain challenges toward or to resist threat or cooption from the larger forces at work on them. The key to the struggle for justice thus points to the forming and sustaining of communities of confidence, which in the action-reflection-intention process learn together how to put their strengths together against the common enemies. In that synergistic development of critical

consciousness and intentional action these communities gain a foretaste of the future, as in hope they discern in the "free space" of their movements the larger freedom and justice of all toward which they work.⁹

Citizens of the United States should have learned at least one thing from the people's revolution in their own history of 1776 if not from the social changes in the Soviet Union in 1991. No military or political victory is possible if the hearts of the people have not been won. And there is no way to gain the loyalty of the people only from the topside. Even when you control the communication and educational system, the louder you shout, the less you sell in the market place of public commitment. The reason that dictatorships and hierarchical systems are so threatened by self-forming groups is that such groups are clear evidence that the authorities do not control the spirit of the people. A healthy society depends on the small communities as the best training ground for citizens and as the best safeguard against totalitarianism. Freedom for the base does not lead, as Lenin taught, to the withering away of the state, but to the renewal of the state from beneath.

No more state than is indispensable, no less freedom than is allowable. And freedom, socially speaking, means above all freedom for community, a community free and independent of state compulsion. . . . An organic commonwealth . . . will never build itself up out of individuals but only out of small and even smaller communities: a nation is a community to the degree that it is a community of communities.¹⁰

The creation of "free social space" is the way secondary systems political or religious can practice "hospitality" toward the base and reap huge social benefits in return. Sarah Evans and Harry Boyte in their book, *Free Spaces*, make this point:

The historical and contemporary record calls for a new attentiveness to the life of rooted communities themselves, whose institutions are the foundation and wellspring for any sustained challenge to autocratic power. It is through the structures of community life, which sustain and reproduce a group's shared bonds of historical memory and culture, that an oppressed people begin to come to self-consciousness. Through their activity in new contexts, groups may acquire public skills, reinforce democratic values, and from new links between sub-communities into larger networks and organizations. And it is through such processes that a powerless people constitutes itself as a force for democratic transformation of the broader social structure and as a school for its own education in a democratic sensibility. Loss of organic connection to the communal sources of social movement can lead to the amorphous and rootless stridency of the late new left on the one hand, or to the bureaucratic stagnation apparent in many contemporary trade unions on the other. . . . Thus, such movements, and the free spaces at their heart, suggest the need for a basic reworking of conventional ideas about "public life" and "democracy." They call attention to that vast middle ground of communal activity, between private life and large-scale institutions, as the arenas in which notions of civic virtue and a sense of responsibility for the common good are nourished, and democracy is given living meaning. And they remind us, repeatedly, how ordinary people can discover who they are and take democratic initiatives, on their own terms¹¹

Free social space is necessary to preserve the people's heritage, to restore personal dignity, to provide direct political participation and to absorb many of the demands for human services that now overburden social agencies. Such social space is provided by families, religious groups, civic organizations, ethnic groups, neighborhoods and what Harry Boyte calls the "backyard".¹² Robert Heilbroner sees evidence that that is the direction we are now moving.

. . . toward the exploration of inner states of experience rather than the outer world of fact and material accomplishment. Tradition and ritual, the pillars of life in virtually all societies other than those of an industrial character, would probably once again assert their ancient claims as the guide to and solace for life. The struggle for individual achievement, especially for material ends, is likely to give way to the acceptance of communally organized and ordained roles.¹³

As base communities absorb the role of citizen formation and mobilization, economists will have to take out their calculators and make some drastic adjustments¹⁴. A new though actually ancient economic system will be discovered for which the economic theories, classical or modern, East or West, simply do not apply. This is the forgotten economy we have referred to earlier as "household Economics."¹⁵ The social costs of such a new economy as well as the social benefits will have to be recalculated. I have no doubt that in many areas the base will be far more efficient. In all the social costs were factored in then some present "efficient" sectors will be discovered

actually to be very inefficient. People are more effective when working in places with which they are acquainted and where they can see the results for themselves. To remain close to the base will be an important requisite for the new professionals in their role as resource brokers. For example, it has already been demonstrated in agriculture that smaller scaled farming is more efficient. The World Bank has recognized this fact and has shifted to small agricultural operations. The World Health Organization has done the same in concentrating on community level health delivery systems. Future leaders will need to be selected from within a local context where they know their territory and their people.

This is not the romanticism of seeking out the noble peasant. It is a hardheaded calculation that small farmers, working for goals and returns they understand, on land where they have security of tenure and with enough co-operative credit and services to enrich their labour, produce the world's highest returns per worker and often per acre. And basically it is upon this strategy of backing the small men . . . that the hopes of feeding most of mankind (sic) in the long term depend.¹⁶

I am not speaking of the "invisible hand" of the private enterprise system that looks to Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* for justification. I am arguing for what might be called "primary enterprise." (Actually Adam Smith was more famous in his time for another work, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*,¹⁷ which deals with household economy.) I am arguing that the household be viewed as a production center and not just as a consuming unit. Base communities are like renewable storage batteries. They are widely dispersed and not nearly as dangerous politically and health wise as centralized nuclear power plants. They are, argues Hazel Henderson, herself a seasoned grass roots advocate, "the best repositories of social and cultural flexibility during the decline now underway in many mature industrial countries and the coming contraction in its system of world trade."¹⁸ Scott Burns agrees:

America is going to be transformed by nothing more or less than the inevitable maturation and decline of the market economy. The instrument for this positive change will be the household - the family - revitalized as a powerful and relatively autonomous productive unit.¹⁹

A friend in the former German Democratic Republic explained once how things that are notoriously inefficient at the public enterprise level actually work in the human services field at the primary enterprise level. "It's simply the old barter system," he explained. "If you want anything fixed, you figure out what you have or can do in return for what you want. Some people who have nothing to barter are so desperate to get plumbing repaired, carpentry work done, appliances fixed, that they pay unbelievable sums." I saw homes plumbers and locksmiths in the GDR that would have looked like part of the landscape in the most exclusive mountain resort of Switzerland. Primary enterprise is probably the only system functioning well in those countries and it is totally unmanaged. Richard Cornuelle describes with a sense of awe the way the taxicab business operates in New York City. It is a wonderfully unmanaged but quite efficient operation. A driver is given the assignment to put sixty dollars a day (a 1960's figure) on the taximeter. How they do that is all left up to individual initiative. Cornuelle goes on to observe:

Businessmen like all of us, tend to get confused about the problems management exists to solve. The problem is not to get people to do what they are told, but to do what they are not told, or even what they can't be told.²⁰

I have sometimes entertained the fantasy that some day archaeologists will find another vase from the Qumran community where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. In it will be a fragment of the Beatitudes that will read, "Blessed are the deviants for they will get things done." What will happen to the economy when large numbers of people begin to do such "deviant" things as war tax resisters redirecting large amounts of money into public housing ventures or communities like one in Tennessee inviting pregnant women who are considering abortion to come to them for a free delivery of their child and continuing care of the child as long as necessary? What does that do to the debate on homelessness or abortion or what effect might that have on public policy? The point is that such imaginative, not to say humane, solutions cannot arise from secondary systems for such unprecedented behavior can come only from individuals willing to take the considerable risks upon themselves. Many such examples can be given, but unfortunately it seems to take a crisis to unleash such human services. However, we are in such a crisis now.

There are many restrictions on the primary sector today that have vastly curtailed this hidden economy of voluntary action that every society needs to survive. One of the crises that will force us to rely on the primary sector, but which tragically in the short run will create great hardship on the poor while benefiting the rich, is the cut back on

funds for social services. The unexpected benefit that could come out of that, however, just might be a new voluntarism: "If the state won't even when it should, we can". Ironically, that same reawakened voluntary strength has mobilized opposition to the administration on the military budget increases that contributed to the cutbacks in social services in the first place. Small groups pooling their resources and taking financial and personal risks to provide human services will in a crisis produce what the present economics cannot. Voluntarism provides a way of legally reducing one's financial contribution to a military budget while increasing and improving human services. This might be called "using judo on the IRS." Our son Paul, a long time member of the War Tax Resistance League, once invited an IRS official to be his luncheon guest in order in a quiet and friendly way to explain the reason why he was not paying part of his income tax.

The gradual shift to such a primary economy, while radically reordering values, need not be spectacular nor need it be violent. The primary economy, argues Scott Burns, "merely provides a separate economic structure and introduces a different economic process. It does not coerce, it does not depose. It merely *exists*. And grows."²¹

Free To Grow

"It is to your advantage that I go away" (John 16:7), Jesus said to the disciples at the point when they were beginning to wonder how they could survive without him. Yet they did after being empowered at Pentecost by the Spirit. They realized that if they did not act nobody else would. There were no clerics in the wings. When people take responsibility in their primary worlds powerful resources are unleashed. Rather than merely protesting against what is being done wrong by others, an exercise which only exhausts but does not regenerate, a more empowering response is "What can we do now?" The test of the power and commitment of a revolution is not what it is against but what it is for, its pro-active character. Does it know what constructive action to take and will it do it?

What the Christian is committed to do is always an indigenous decision and not an inherited one. Discipleship is, therefore, always a first generation affair. The shift from dependency to independency in the master/disciple, parent/child, husband/wife, lay/clergy, and student/teacher relationships requires the transfer of personal decision and accountability. That is often painful. As long as our worldview is a bi-polar one that only sees things in terms of opposites, then such shifts terminate relationships, trust, affection and intimacy. The wreckage of broken relationships and hopeless polarizations litters the landscape. But if our view is not dualistic but sees a third stage of interdependence beyond dependency and independency, then the shift need not be a traumatic either/or choice. The period of independence can then be understood as an interim, a transitional phase, and necessary for the mature acceptance of responsibility. This is always a risky matter for there are no guarantees. Many potential disciples will fall away. But the risk must be taken to reach interdependence: the mutual respect of a covenanted community. In a mobile and transient society it has been relatively easy to leave relationships in a polarized state by simply avoiding one another. The new exodus as noted earlier is "in place" and not geographic flight from responsibility.

Independence remains for many the final goal. It then becomes a terminal state. Perhaps that is because so few live in the kind of community that is comfortable with organic processes such as the transition from dependency to independency to interdependency. As a result our society experiences a pervasive loneliness. Without a healthy community at the base we lack the rites of transition to into mutuality. People who have not matured in primary life relationships are not adequately prepared to manage secondary ones. An unfinished or immature life still hung up on the dependency-independency polarity brings little healing and hope to the urgent tasks of human survival. Again we must begin with the base. That may appear too modest an approach but nothing basic is modest.

The base group is of enormous public significance because it provides the first steps into the larger world. By providing the free space for the sharing and shaping of people it provides an immeasurably important function for the wider society. It is in such intimate zones that we hear one another's stories and help each other connect those private journeys with public ones. Many of the old "story spaces" such as the train station, the local pub, village green, general store, and barbershop have disappeared while other social settings have grown so large that they are no longer able to evoke personal stories and connect them to the story of the larger community.

Church As Community

"We are waiting for a theophany about which we know nothing except its place, and that place is called community."²² In these few words Martin Buber puts the case for the base community as succinctly as possible. Although Christians tend to be specific about the place and time as an historical movement and person, the church

continues to be renewed from the post-Pentecost theophany: "where two or three are gathered." We meet God most intimately where we meet each other most intimately, in primary community. Today's search for community can be described as an exodus toward that encounter. In the post-Constantine or post-Industrial Age this exodus is more than "post" or away *from* some *thing*. It is movement *toward* some *one*. What it will be called later by future historians I do not know. But looking ahead to that era which I have called the Third Settlement, I believe it could be called the Age of Community. Community in the future will be global even while local. It will have to be pluralistic beyond anything our ancestors could have imagined. It will be equalitarian in a way about which our predecessors had only momentary glimpses. Even though we may be dragged or pushed into that future, it is important to see that it is a calling that is intimately connected to what it means to be the people of God and to live in the Kingdom (Sic!) of God.

A future re rooted in the base community need not be dreaded. Its challenge is a matter of vocation not provocation, of expectation rather than fear. The church as a called people travels freely and with hope. God's people are expectant pioneers exhilarated by the possibilities of what might be. Without that vision we will fail to see the possibilities that are now there in the frail embryos of the future. We need to know that the simplification of life style, the relinquishment of material wealth and reducing the scale enrich and improve the quality of life. Many of the base groups forming around the world are outside the institutional church but many of them are growing out of the same root system. These frail shoots of God's people may be destroyed, but the roots will remain. If allowed to grow and replicate, however, they hold great promise for church and society. To appreciate this we need to know the church from the inside out. Our ecclesiology (teachings concerning the nature of the church) must come from our own life in community and not from the prevailing cultural forms. Ecclesiology must be pre- as well as post-Constantine. It must come from the Body (of Christ) itself.²³ If these communities look strange in their patterns and practices that may only be because the existing forms of the church have become unnoticeable in a landscape where they look like everything else.

Christian communities do not need artificial soil in which to grow. Sometimes I think that our church institutions with their "language of Canaan" feel that is necessary. I wonder, for example, how a seminary can teach the Christian faith without being an itinerant community living the truth as Jesus' first seminary was. Bonhoeffer once said, "Theological reflection is possible only in connection with community. Individualizing is the basic failure of Protestant theology."²⁴ How many of us in the Christian church hold orthodox views while living in institutional idolatry. Is denominationalism the "unrelinquished word?" Any one of us who create institutions large or small has to beware of that wily heresy.

I was once involved in a research project that was attempting to formulate a normative theology of the church, a "prescribed ecclesiology," and discovered that the more fruitful approach was to use case studies. This was a shift from what the church "ought" to be to what the church "is." We discovered, a bit to our surprise, that what had been a dreary recital of old formulas turned into an exhilarating enterprise drawing us beyond a mere study about the church into a direct participation in the lively realities of flesh-and-blood people struggling to be the church in diverse settings. The concreteness, the living data, the particular character of a group in a particular place put a human face on the effort. The case studies shattered the ideal types frozen in dogma or preserved in ecclesiastical formaldehyde. They revealed the church as an organic process, by no means ideal. In the tradition of "realized ecclesiology" people dared to act "as if" they (ordained or not) were ministry, "as if" they were the church. Or you might call it "appropriate" ecclesiology like appropriate technology: forms and understandings of what it meant to be the church rooted in life of the people themselves.

Since the Spirit moves when and where she wills, details cannot be charted beforehand. The process is not as neat as some manager types would like. Living things never are. Not all seeds that are thrown out in nature's extravagant way of propagation take root. There are no guarantees. "Wait and see what comes up?" Gamaliel was wise in advising patience with the fledgling Christian movement. "They will be known only afterwards by their fruits" (Acts 5:34-39), he argued. Jesus suggests the same (Mat. 12:33) and when his disciples were worried about ecclesiastical consistency and reported to Jesus that others who were ministering in his name, Jesus told them to let the others be. The church, as Christ's body, has its own root system and springs up in ways that are often surprising both in the form as well as the place. The Spirit finds the cracks through which to grow.

I have attempted to describe something about the soil in which the church can best grow. What form the seeds eventually produce is part of the surprise and excitement. The growth of the church is not to be measured simply in small things getting bigger but in the production of more diverse and dispersed communities. That is growth in quality. Rosemary Haughton contends that

. . . . the Church grew, not as a larger and larger mass but as a multiplication of small "personal" units of a size capable of effective rapid interaction at every level. This pattern of development is expressed in the theology of the church, which is totally present as the Body of Christ in each gathered community. The "great" church is not the sum of these but their common incorporation in Christ.²⁵

Perhaps the church will become less and less visible as Christians locate their life as God's gathered people in primary groups acting directly in society. The supporting institutional church may become less noticeable, but the people may become more visible. This would be a reversal of roles. It will be the people that become more public. Although she does not use theological terms and is speaking about a wider phenomenon, Hazel Henderson does give us a portrayal of what less visible structures might "look" like:

These new organizations already exist, although they are metaphysical. They are often referred to as networks, and their participants describe themselves as "net workers." They have no headquarters, no leaders, and no chains of command. They are free form and self-organizing, composed of hundreds of autonomous, self-actualizing individuals who share a similar worldview and similar values . . . they are evanescent, ebbing and flowing around issues, ideas and knowledge.²⁶

Ecclesiology As Story

The approach to ecclesiology by case study is actually biblical. Much of the Bible is in the form of narrative, the story of God's people, good and bad, not as they ought to be but as they actually were. "Is-ness" and not "oughtness" is the character of biblical reality: "what 'is-ly' is" in the delightful phrase of John Baillie.²⁷ The script was not prescribed for God's people. The Bible is not about some theory that is being demonstrated. Rather the Scriptures are case studies of living communities struggling in particular times and situations to be God's people. All the efforts of higher criticism to strip away the patina of these particular circumstances bring us no nearer to an understanding of what Scripture was saying. It is not merely our reconstruction of what happened back then, but our living the same reality ourselves that brings deeper understandings. As people share the experiences of God's activities in their lives, others are empowered.

The Christian community grows through the sharing of story. As I have reflected about this, I realized that what has inspired me most about the church has been accounts of people here and there around the world that I have met or heard about demonstrating that God is a living reality in their midst. Intellectually stimulating books and studies on the nature of the church have been helpful to sort out these accounts, but the stories themselves rather than the critical analysis of them have touched me in ways that have led to action. Such stories have a replicating effect. Gamaliel was right, let them grow. Learn from the fruits for that is how God, the "ground of letting-being," allows the church to grow. Story-ecclesiology, of course, lacks the neat coherence of a carefully argued dogma. The stories of the church present a picture as bewildering as the unhampered growth of a forest. But the forest with its wild assortments of animal and plant life in glorious profusion is a more stable symbiotic system because of its diversity than the neat and trim, weed-free corn field. Church history is like the forest. We do not gain a better understanding of it if we try to tidy it up. "Coherence" is what is added to church history afterwards with 20/20 hindsight by scholars organizing into inert words and phrases what in living form denies cataloguing. Unfortunately the original actors are gone and can no longer initiate libel suits. So it is with theology. Theology is an "after the fact" affair. The living realities came first: the Exodus, the Resurrection, and Pentecost. Then came the efforts to retell the story. Unfortunately the efforts are more and more abstracted from the situation and the original actors. The juices get drained out and living organisms are consigned to neat rows of ponderous volumes intended to preserve the record. Like dead leaves still reflecting a faded beauty the remains may be as detailed as the real thing, only it isn't living any more. Stories have appeal because they are filled with surprises. Ecclesiological case studies are like that. In a distressing and refreshing way they do not fit the script. Let me share some stories that have been important to me. You can add your own.

I remember vividly a small group of Russian refugees in a German city on the Bodensee near the Swiss border whom I visited in 1949 while doing refugee work. They had turned a room in an old army barracks in which they lived into an Orthodox chapel brightly painted with folk art. Despite the shortage of living quarters, the chapel rated a higher priority. Their joy and celebration was infectious. Although I was the one who was supposed to bring them encouragement, it was I who was inspired and even given gifts by them out of their meager store of mementos from the old country.

The story of the Japanese couple Ruth and I met in Toyoto City is another surprising ecclesiological story. We had been warned that it is very difficult to get into Japanese homes, at least not beyond the threshold. Though we were complete strangers we found ourselves invited into the home of a couple who had for years taken orphans into their own household. To be without family ties in Japanese society is a desperate situation. The couple had given these orphans housing, jobs and even family status. They showed us a new guesthouse they were building next to their own. They saw their ministry as hospitality. There in formal Japan we found an openness that belied the stereotype of a closed family system.

I remember the story of a German soldier in prison in Siberia after World War II who was among those returned to the West. He and thousands of others appeared without advance notice at the border town of Friedland. Shortly after his return he came to a two-week clergy seminar in the conference center where Ruth and I were living. He said very little at first, but by the end of the two weeks he felt freed up enough to share the story of the "congregation" that had nourished and sustained him in Siberia. The "congregation" was a secret affair. The prisoners improvised as best they could with the sacraments and bits of Scripture and liturgy. His story was a powerful and exciting account. The clergy from West Germany listened with great attention for it was the first such account they had heard. One of the first questions afterwards was, "Given the great diversity of nationalities in that camp, what were the different religions in your group?" With a wry smile and a look that went far beyond the world of the audience the returnee said, "Under those circumstances it never occurred to us to ask."

Then there is the story of an Anglican couple, Mary and Murray Rogers, whom we met on a small mountain in Hong Kong. We had been told there was a tiny community just a few hundred yards up the road from the retreat-conference center where we were staying. When we hiked up there one morning we found them in the mud putting up a crude fence for their garden. They were obviously not skilled in such matters but were "muddling through" in good English style. They had been kicked out of Jerusalem by the officials for having hosted Jews and Arabs together in their little community there. Before that they had been in India for many years. The two of them together with a woman from Scotland and another woman from Switzerland were turning a garage into a place of hospitality and retreat. While there an Italian priest dropped in, sporting an American T-shirt. It occurred to me in that unusual setting that even high churches could be very low.

As I write these words I have on the desk a clipping sent from the states of a medical doctor who returned from a study group tour of Central America with a whole new view of the situation. He came back very critical of American intervention in Central America and began to speak out as did other members of the church sponsored group. The response of embarrassed church officials was predictable. They thought such statements should only be made by authorized officials. "If we're going to have strong social statements made, they're going to be made by persons elected by the church and given that responsibility." The response of the conservative doctor to the direct experience of injustice was not predictable. "Twenty-three people (went) benignly on a nice, gentle, church-sanctioned study with the idea that everybody would come back and speak eloquently on hunger," he said, in explaining why he came back committed to advocacy and to the issuing of a statement opposing U.S. intervention.²⁸

One could go on and on. There are so many stories to hear, but so few that are being heard. While we struggle with formulations about the church, the church itself is forming. The church is a living body and must be seen as such in any adequate ecclesiology. I believe that it is precisely there where the new life emerges from the roots breaking through the cracks that we come closest to her true nature. We get a better glimpse into the nature of God's kingdom when the church is stripped of pretension, complicated formulas and layers of institutional procedures. In such moments God's people find the freedom in themselves and their situation to be the church. By taking some risks in directions that may appear to be breaking tradition, they are actually finding the tradition again. T. S. Eliot says it well, "And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."²⁹

Such a rediscovery of the church is described in the following report from the Netherlands.

Nico Roozen has testified that, in the early 1970's Dutch BCC's (Basic Christian Communities) moved away from the Bible (which they had known only as it was filtered through the minds of priests) and the Eucharist (in their experience, merely a formal and ceremonial ritual) - determined to invest their time and energy in responding to God's claim for the establishment of justice. In a few years they were moving back to the Bible and Eucharist saying, "We do not even know what justice is without the Bible, and we are not nourished for the struggle without the Eucharist". Had they not moved away, rejecting what seemed to be formality and falsehood and following the truth as they saw it, they would never have gained such

conviction and such clear perception about the nature and place of the Bible and the sacraments in Christian living. The church may find it hard to accept this - following an apostolic calling may mean rejecting what has been believed to be central to faith. For how are Bible and sacraments to be alive, generation after generation, unless people go on journeys of discovery? How can you journey and stay where you are? Those who, failing to find ore-bearing rock in the traditional church, prospect elsewhere, show more concern for what the church ultimately stands for than those who stay and unthinkingly conform. Itchy feet may prove to be a sign of an apostolic calling.³⁰

Only One Messiah, Please!

In many cases where change has been attributed to a charismatic leader, the real reason had less to do with a personage than with the moment, the "critical mass" point. When the situation is ready then the one who triggers the movement is as much an instrument of the moment as its leader. Leaders have arisen from those who are sensitive to the ripeness of time and able to read the social seismograph. When Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of the bus in Montgomery on that famous day in 1955, her act coincided with the arrival at the critical mass point of enough blacks to trigger response. There had been plenty of "Rosas" before who have been arrested and punished for acting out publicly what was already believed by the masses.

Someone has suggested that a better pope would not make a better church. After Pope John XXIII that seems like a strange assertion, but the point intended, I believe, is to comfort the pope. The world has had one Messiah. That is quite enough. We do each other a great favor by not expecting anyone else except Christ to be the Messiah. The very manner in which many of us have protested and called for action from above has, I must admit, contributed to the Messianic complex. That is neither helpful for the top nor for the base. The professional class needs to be demessianized for their sake and others. The more fundamental problem is not how big systems are managed, but *how little ones are nourished*.

For nearly forty years I have been a strong advocate of the ministry of the laity but I wonder sometimes if the term "lay" has not been a poor choice. Some would be quick to note that laity are neither ministers in the institutional meaning of that word while others would contend that they are not lay in their own strategic roles. The term "ministry of the laity" has caused much defensiveness amongst beleaguered professionals. It would be wiser and more humane to seek the emancipation of both terms: "Lay" and "ministry". The selection and training of professionals need to be so structured that they are not burdened with Messianic expectations. Christ's yoke is light when it is carried by the whole body. That yoke is too heavy for any single member. On the other hand being a "lay" person is generally understood as referring to someone of lesser value that. Perhaps the term itself should be abandoned. My proposal is to turn things around and give priority to God's people in the soil and not in the lofty positions above it. Here I return to a theme dealt with in *Personal and Public* as well as in the earlier chapters of this text. The point has to do with something that I once thought was impossible: the reversal of large systems or what might be called institutional conversion. I now believe something like that can happen but only if it happens at both levels (lay and professional) in a way that is understood to be liberating for both.

Perhaps the clergy should be the invisible church. As the base assumes more and more of what has been heaped on the professional, there is the possibility of more freedom for the clergy to explore other options. There are some intriguing things that might happen to the top when initiative is taken by the base. With the pressures off the professional could be humanized. Professionals might start sharing laterally across their moats of specialty. They might spend more time talking with their primary partners: their family. (It is reported that the average couple in the U.S.A. communicates twenty minutes a week.) Or they might have more time for neighbors or even communing with God. In any case the gains on the side of more living and breathing space for all are alluring. It could be very good news for the management class to drop the pretenses so necessary for success in the secondary systems and simply be themselves in primary communities. One Messiah is enough, thank you!

Being responsible and present are important human qualities. Humans would not survive if parents or some responsible adult did not care for the infant. From the beginning to the end of life there are those upon whom we depend on being there: telephone operators, bus drivers, fire fighting personnel, insurance adjusters, police, ambulance drivers, mail carriers, janitors, insurance agents, etc. To be absent too soon or too much can be harmful. A generation of young people given too little parental presence have had a difficult time finding a healthy balance between limits and freedom. Relationships need presence. We need to invest time being with each other, sharing and growing together.

"Presence" does not necessarily mean "manage." There are profound ministries of presence by people who are simply "there." One's presence with a bereaving friend even when no word has been spoken is a significant ministry. The presence in the audience of the parent at the school concert is important. The presence at the wedding or birthday part of the friend is appreciated. The Little Sisters of the Poor, the Community of Grandchamp, the brothers of Taizé and others often move into a community quietly to form a little fraternity simply to be present - with the poor in Algiers, the refugees in the West Bank in Israel, the laboring classes in Paris. Their presence is a quiet but powerful one.

All of us can recall moments when the right person was present at the right time. It may have been a teacher, a counselor, a good friend, a parent, a pastor, a son or daughter. Without them we may not have made it. Certainly this is how the disciples felt about Jesus in their midst. He was their center. In a few instances when he was absent, things began to fall apart. They couldn't handle the tasks. They fell into argument. As opposition mounted and great uncertainties about the future confronted them, their sense of dependency on Christ's presence mounted. He was their leader, their spokesman, their Master. They were disciples. They were content to follow, as long as Jesus was there.

It must have come as a shock on that night already filled with ominous signs when Jesus said to the disciples in the upper Room, "It is to your advantage that I go away" (John 16:7). There was no way in their minds that they could see the advantage to them of Christ's absence. Part of their fear was that responsibility would be left with them. Not all disciples want to be anything more than followers. As long as the professionals are around to bear the responsibility, there is a certain comfort in the assumption that "somebody else will do it". Congregations call ministers to "be the church" for them. Periods without a resident clergy are uncomfortable but sometimes they have been the time of regeneration as the congregation is forced to rely on its own resources. When one is absent another can be present. But what the disciples did not recognize at that moment was that Jesus was only half through with their training. The first half had been modeling ministry through presence. Christ was present in their midst during the delicate steps of foundation, formation and formulation. He then taught them by his own actions as well as words the direction the rooted life should go - into the world as new shoots of life bursting into public spaces. He went to the poor and outcast who needed a presence. The disciples experienced firsthand the power of Christ's teaching and healing. They saw him reaching out to people in their needs. Christ was available. In their own little band they knew the strength that came by being present to others.

But Jesus was only half finished with their preparation when he spoke those startling words in the Upper Room. Now came the more difficult second half of their training. They had to learn what it meant to be God's servants in the absence of Christ. By leaving Jesus taught them that there is also a ministry of absence. There is a time when for the sake of the further maturation of the disciple, or the student, or the child, or the relationship, one must leave. That is always a painful point especially if the relationship has been a good one. For the disciples it involved the loss of one who called them "friend" and the further of Christ's death. But it also involved the stupendous experience of Christ's resurrection and subsequent appearances. But then followed the agony of the days between Ascension and Pentecost when there were no appearances. These were dark days when they were plagued with bewilderment, "What do we do now? Who is the church, where is the church, how is the church?" Only later, after Pentecost and the events that followed, did the deeper understanding of the church as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" and as the body of Christ, broken, distributed and dispersed in the world become clear to them. They were the church. Christ's absence . . . meant a new presence. "Where two or three. . ."

It seems to me that the education of professionals has usually ended halfway with the skills of being present. They are trained well in presence, but there is little training in absence. Absence is a harder task, but without it the professional is soon overburdened with having to be present all the time. Under these circumstances roots do not go deep enough into the soil nor do shoots go far enough out into the world. Professionals are not being more effective by being always present. They do not provide primary health care, or primary education, or primary religious life, or primary social services. It takes artistic skill to know when the right moment to be absent has arrived. Parents struggle with deciding when and how much freedom should be allowed. Independence always seems to come too soon for the parent, too slowly for the children. But unless it comes in some form a person does not grow up to be a responsible individual. When our five children were much younger, a few times we were absent for some days. On returning we would hear stories from the relatives or friends staying with them that would make us wonder if they were the same children. They had been different in our absence. They were more responsible than we apparently were ready to let them be. But the timing is important. Risks are always involved but at some point liberating absence is necessary.

As long as the institutional church is identified too exclusively as God's presence or God's agent God's people will find it difficult to know who they are and what they can do in society. "On their own" they know that they have to be the indigenous church. A do-it-yourself movement seems to be aborning in the area of religious faith. That could be healthy or unhealthy. I would like to translate that do-it-yourself a bit differently, however, more in the sense of the Swahili word, *Ujaama*. That word means something like "Do it yourself together."

In his book, *Private Power*, Axel Madsen argues that because of their superior efficiency, responsiveness to change, global outlook and access to finance, the multi-nationals (the global professionals) are our best hope for survival.³¹ For exactly the same reasons I would disagree with Madsen and would look in the opposite direction. The choice facing us today is between the "multi's" and the "mini's." Do we continue the course of trusting the secondary system (of which the multi-nationals are the ultimate expression) more and more to the point of final survival, or do we recognize that we have gone far enough, perhaps too far, in that direction and need to look at the base rather than at the top? I have argued that a decision for the base is not a rejection of the secondary, but the liberation of the secondary from doing what it is not able to do. The base contains the resources, often repressed and hidden, that must be employed for survival. Therefore, I believe the place to turn our attention now is exactly the reverse of what Madsen suggests.

I would like to suggest that at every graduation ceremony when professionals are at the threshold of their careers, the orchestra should play Haydn's "Departure Symphony". The musicians would gradually pack up their instruments and walk away one by one until no one is left. The last one might represent the sustaining (or maintenance) staff of the orchestra like the bass player. This would be a dramatic way of reminding newly hatched professionals that they should eventually leave the music with the people themselves. This can be done with beauty and dignity. That is ministry by relinquishment and it was the Messiah who taught us:

(Christ) is the center who is always in motion towards the periphery. . . . He affirms his centrality by giving it up. The Lord is supposed to be at the center. But he is now affirming his Lordship by being crucified. From the uttermost point of periphery he establishes his authority. This movement towards the periphery is called the love of God in Christ. In the periphery his authority and love meet. . . . Jesus asks his church to have a crucified mind rather than a crusading mind, a mind ready to accept humiliation in order to save others from humiliation.³²

There is a conspiracy abroad today that is unlike most in that it is neither evil nor imposed from the outside. The word "conspire," as Marilyn Ferguson reminds us, means to "breathe together." The conspiracy I have in mind is the conspiracy to "do it yourself together" and I mean also the secondary and primary together. This revolution is a healing one for it seeks breathing space for all the tissues of the social body. This revolution comes out of an ancient tradition, the basic one of learning to live together.

A Society Of Neighborhoods

"What we need is a neighborhood society". These words were spoken in 1991 by an official in the German government office for social welfare. The comment was prompted by the desperate need for caregivers in homes for the elderly. Modern medicine has made it possible for people to live longer, families are smaller, neighborhoods have declined, more and more of the population is crowded into urban areas, there are fewer young people and more elderly. The result is that there is a lack of people and money to care for the aged and the impaired. Human services once provided by the extended family or local neighborhood are no longer available to many people. Was the official's statement about a "neighborhood society" mere nostalgia or a realistic public goal?

Is it possible that parts of the neighborhood still exist but have become separated and need only be brought together again? Of course we cannot return to 17th Century village life but can we be creative enough to develop villages or neighborhoods in today's world? What might that look like and how might it happen? Who should do this? Central planners? Individual initiative? The private sector? Perhaps a combination of initiatives is needed but that it might be possible today is suggested by the following story shared with me at a conference on urban ministry in Chicago by a youth worker from Pittsburg.

In Pittsburg a program had been initiated by a church youth organization to work with congregations and school systems with high school dropouts. One of the biggest problems for young people was motivation. This was especially true for black students who were cynical of the value of formal education in a society in which they

remained second-class citizens. Volunteers were recruited to help with tutoring and counseling young people who had difficulty remaining in school. Finding volunteers was one of the continual challenges for this youth worker.

One day while riding a bus in Pittsburg, the director of the program noticed an older woman across the aisle from him who was weeping. He went over to her to see if he could help. He discovered that she was a Roman Catholic sister who had been teaching for many years but now had to retire because of age. She was deeply distressed because she loved teaching. She felt useless. She told the director of the youth program that there were other retired sisters like her who because of age or ill health had to retire and felt the same way as she did. When he told her of his program and the problem of finding people to work with high school dropouts, an idea was born. There was a reservoir of volunteers not only in the retirement home of this nun but also in similar homes of retired Catholic sisters in Pittsburg. Many had been teachers. While the health of many would not allow them to be tutors, they could at least adopt a student for whom they could pray each day.

And so there came to be a program in Pittsburg between a Protestant youth worker and a network of retired Catholic sisters. The sisters found a new vocation when they thought their old ones had terminated. The youth found the supportive friends they needed to encourage them. The impact on the students was remarkable. After all, if you have a nun praying for you by name each day, that's quite a motivating force. Isolated parts of a separated neighborhood were connected. Might it not be possible to make other connections and begin to realize something like a "neighborhood society"?

I wrote the above section while living in Sweden in 1982. During our stay in Sweden Ruth and I visited the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The contrast between the two church situations could not be more dramatic. In Sweden there is the state church, affluent, cozy and so entwined with the state that no one knows where one begins and the other ends. During the very days of writing these pages a debate was raging in the Church Council of Sweden and in the press over the hopeless impasse of a church whose leadership wants to move toward more separation and autonomy from the state but is saddled with a local parish structure made up of lay representatives paid to attend council meetings and reluctant to give up the income and control. Nobody seems to know how to extricate himself or herself from this situation. Many hope and pray for a breakthrough, but sadly there is little hope from church history that renewal comes through official action.

In the GDR, however, the church is poor, often fighting with the state for its meager "rights" under a totalitarian regime. It is dependent entirely on the contributions of the members and not on the guaranteed salary via the church tax collected by the state. While the Swedes, living in a democratic society with official support of the state don't know what to do, we were often told by the Germans, "We don't know how to use all the opportunities we have." While the Swedes debate divestiture, the Germans explore the challenges and "freedom" of forced divestiture. While the Swedish church authorities find it difficult to "authorize" alternative forms and even to permit lay initiatives, the Germans are forced to rely on alternative strategies (e.g. house circles) and lay initiative. The one church has too many privileges, the other few, if any. The one still remains locked in the legacy of the Constantine solution, while the other explores the unmapped territories beyond Constantine. A long stay in the Swedish situation left us pessimistic about the future of the church. A briefer visit to the GDR left us with hope and some working models. In Sweden things are hung up at the top and the only change may be eventual out migration at the base. In the GDR renewal is coming through small household groups at the base. It is clear which church is most relevant for the future. (Events less than ten years later have made this clear.) But both have a difficult future ahead. The future belongs to those who learn to live, voluntarily or forced, with relinquishment. When the temples become empty, then what? (Matt. 23:38).

What will ministry look like at the base? Can professionals learn to give away what they know? Can clergy allow others to take over the primary functions of ministry in the domestic setting? Can those with power speak less but listen more? Can they redefine their role within the agenda of the base and not impose their own? Can they set aside titles and privileges and find ways through the cracks of failures to live responsibly as the invisible church? Perhaps they can. But even if they cannot, they will have to. In the end I believe that the Swedish church and the GDR church will both find their futures in the base communities. And so must we all.

Story of A Baptism

We began this study of base Christian communities with the story of Louise Rock ("Tante Wieschen") and her part in the renewal of the village of Wethen. That illustration was deliberately chosen because the focus of this book has been on the implications of the base Christian community movement for so called "developed" nations where

primary systems have been neglected. As noted in earlier chapters much has been learned from the wide spread growth of communities at the base in poor countries, but it is not so clear what forms are appropriate for the more affluent society of North America. A final story, however, may suggest how the impasses being experienced in middle class societies can lead to the regeneration of community at the base.

This is the story of Mary and John, their two daughters and their extended families.³³ Mary and John had originally come to the ARC Retreat Community for a retreat with an AA group. John is an alcoholic and Mary has been active with Al-Anon. Their marriage nearly ended because of alcoholism. However, through AA they rebuilt their lives and discovered how important spirituality was to their relationship. A second daughter was born and they approached us at the retreat center with the request that we baptize the baby. We were impressed with the earnestness of their desire to share their religious faith with their children but explained that we were not a church in the formal sense. We were a worshipping, ecumenical household and retreat center which sought to work closely with congregations and other church institutions.

Mary and John had had some difficulties with their own congregations during their struggle with alcoholism and had turned to AA for their primary spiritual nurture. However, after some visits we helped them make contact with a congregation near their home where they felt accepted. Together with the pastor they planned a baptismal service at the ARC Retreat Center. A Sunday was chosen in August when there were no other guests. Mary and John and the two daughters came on Saturday for a time of quiet preparation before the event. The next day some forty family members and friends arrived.

Two issues had concerned Mary and John in planning the baptismal service. They were worried about the response of their families who were active church members and who might be uncomfortable with a baptism outside of the church building. The other concern was for some of their AA friends who would be uncomfortable in a religious service. But despite these fears they had moved ahead with their plans. Having prepared their own service they served as the hosts of the event that took place in the ARC living room.

After the guests had arrived and become acquainted over a cup of coffee, Mary and John welcomed their family and friends and asked people in the group to share their own stories of baptisms. One of the grandmothers began with a story of her childhood when she was awakened during the middle of a stormy winter night in a farmhouse in North Dakota and brought downstairs to witness the baptism of a dying infant brother. The family gathered in the seldom-used parlor and held their own service using the old family washbasin. The storm prevented any travel. The grandmother went on to explain what a powerful memory that had been in her life. When she was finished Mary's father told an almost identical story from his childhood. Later, Mary said it was the first time in her life that she had ever heard her father share that memory.

Next Mary and John held up their infant daughter who was wearing a beautiful baptismal gown and asked everyone in the room who had been baptized in that gown to stand up. Many people rose to their feet - little children, teenagers, middle-aged adults and older people. Finally one of the grandfathers rose slowly and with tears running down his cheeks said that this gown had been originally made for him by his mother.

The service then proceeded with the vows in which Mary and John committed themselves in their own words to both their daughters and to the task of raising them in the faith. John used the occasion to admit that he had failed in the past in sharing the parenting but wanted now to make a public statement of his intention to share the responsibilities. After the baptismal vows Mary and John turned to each other and restated their marriage vows again using their own words. In language that would have been too intimate for a public gathering, they spoke openly of their struggle to an audience that already knew that struggle and had shared it with them. (Later Mary and John acknowledged that they had been looking for an appropriate setting to make a public statement about their new relationship.)

The next part of the ceremony came from the audience. Family members and friends stood up to commit their support to Mary and John and the two children. One of the men from the AA group said in a choked voice, "John, I want to thank you for showing me today what it means to be a caring male in our society." A woman said, "I'm fifty five years old and I have never in my life witnessed a baptism." She then went on to thank Mary and John for inviting her to this special event. Another friend commented, "When you go public with your private convictions, that is power." Many others spoke all indicating how important the experience had been for them personally. They all pledged their on going support.

Finally, I stood up and said, "Mary and John, when you first raised the question of a baptismal service away from the church building you wondered if the institutional church would consider that inappropriate. Quite the contrary to your fears that is not what happened. I want to thank you for helping all of us here today get a little glimpse of what it was like in the early church to celebrate the presence of God in the setting of a primary community. Your courage in doing this has helped us all remember what has been forgotten and I promise to share your story wherever I can in the future."

And so I conclude with their story here because I believe it illustrates how the primary and secondary can work together for their mutual regeneration from hidden roots.

¹Cf. Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*, especially his concluding section on duty to the cosmos.

²Hazel Henderson, *Creating Alternative Futures*, p. 403.

³McRobie, *Op. Cit.*, p. 162.

⁴John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, p. 147.

⁵Parker Palmer, *A Company of Strangers*, p. 23. Cf. Richard Schaul, *Heralds of a New Reformation*. Cowan and Lee in *Dangerous Memories*. p. 3:25 argue:

A sustained movement of intentional Christian communities in America has an important role to play in our current cultural situation. If American individuals are to have the opportunity to live deeply out of the more communitarian biblical and republican world view and ethos, there must be places where the languages of those traditions loom large in their experience, places where those languages--and the world view and ethos which go with them--are being retrieved in a more primary form. Within American intentional Christian communities, the utilitarian and expressive forms of individualism which are inevitably part (and within limits, a graceful part) of being American can be challenged and brought into balance by way of an ongoing encounter with the dangerous communitarian memories and hopes of the biblical tradition.

⁶Going beyond Ernst Troeltsch's types of Church, Sect and Mystic would be quite in keeping with Troeltsch's own thoughts. "If the present social situation is to be mastered by Christian principles thoughts will be necessary which have not yet been thought and which will correspond to this new situation as the older forms correspond to the older situations. These thoughts will have to be drawn from the interior spontaneity of the Christian idea." Troeltsch quoted by Alan Ecclestone, *A Staircase for Silence*, p. 143.

⁷Parker Palmer, *A Company of Strangers*, p.

⁸This point is made by Ronald K. Orchard in *Servants of Life*, London: Conference for World Mission, British Council of Churches, 1979, p. 78:

Living at the boundary means that for the people of God there is no security to be had within space and time. To seek an empirical stronghold would be to retreat from the boundary, and the stronghold would prove to be an empirical prison. Any private ghetto for the people of God, whether sought in a flourishing congregation in a comfortable suburb, or in a "national" church, or in identification with "people power" or a people's movement, or in a "society," an association dedicated to this or that cause, or in a "religious" community, or elsewhere is bound to prove illusory, for all such "strongholds" tie the people of God to some form of social institution within time and space. Our only security is in the Person who embodies the realm beyond.

⁹William Kennedy, "Demands for a Church of the Poor in the Land of the Rich", *CCPD Documents*, No. 14 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, February, 1979).

¹⁰Frederick Herzog, *Justice Church*, Maryknoll, N.Y. Orbis Books, 1980, p. 114. This same idea is expressed in *Community*, No. 14, Spring, 1976, p. 2:

The numbers so far are tiny, the resources ludicrously small, but the symbolic value is potentially enormous. Which of the many experimental forms of community will endure remains to be seen. What matters is that the very existence of such communities means, "people can make lives for themselves, we don't have to wait for the dictators - little or big - we are human, therefore together, we can make a future fit for humans".

¹¹Sarah Evans and Harry Boyte, *Free Spaces* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 202-203.

¹²Harry Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.

¹³Heilbrunner, *The Human Prospect*, p. 141.

¹⁴In his critique of liberation theology, *Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, 1986). Michael Novak recognizes that neither the vision of liberation theologians nor his own of classical liberalism will inaugurate the Kingdom of God. But he makes the interesting observation that the most important challenge between them is not theological disagreements but economic ones. (p. 8).

¹⁵A neglected advocate of household economics is Ralph Bosodi. His writings include, *National Advertising vs Prosperity* (1923), *The Distribution Age*, (1951), *This Ugly Civilization* (1929), *Flight from the City* (1933), and *Prosperity and Security* (1938). Bosodi founded the School for Living in Suttern, N.Y. where household arts are taught.

¹⁶A quote from *The Economist in Sale, Human Scale*, p. 234.

¹⁷Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, New York: Augustus Kelly, 1966.

¹⁸Hazel Henderson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 385.

¹⁹Burns, *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

²⁰Cornuelle, *Op. Cit.*, p. 99

²¹Burns, *Op. Cit.* p. 48.

²²Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, New York: Collins Fortuna Books, 1961, p. 24.

²³Rozack, *Op. Cit.*, p. 91 comments on knowing something from the inside:

For to know nature and the body from the inside cannot be the sort of knowing that goes on within the precincts of the isolated, domineering head. It has little to do with accumulating more biological data. It is nothing that can be acquired by academic research. Rather, it is a knowledge that must come through the body and be accepted on the body's terms as a lesson not to be learned elsewhere or otherwise: an organic message, organically integrated.

²⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein*, cited in Duchrow, *Op. Cit.*, p. 391.

²⁵Haughton, *Op. Cit.*, p. 24

²⁶Henderson, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 234-235.

²⁷John Baille, *The Sense of the Presence of God*, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 32.

²⁸*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, May 10, 1982, pp. 1A, 11A.

²⁹T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1952, p. 145.

³⁰Margaret and Ian Fraser, *Wind & Fire: The Spirit reshapes the Church in basic Christian communities*, Dunblane: Basic Communities Resource Center, S.C.C., February, 1986.

³¹Axel Madsen, *Private Power*, New York: Morrow, 1981, p. 223.

³²Kosuke Koyama, quoted by Martin Conway, *Mid-Stream*, Vol. XX, No. 4, Oct., 1967, p. 211.

³³This story is also recorded in Nadia Christensen, *The ARC Story* (ARC Publications, 1988)