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Modern developments in Christian community living within the Church of England since 1945, with special reference to St. Julian's, Lee Abbey and the Pilsdon Community.

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ABSTRACT

In the six chapters of this thesis the concern is with the growth in England of non-monastic, Anglican-based communities, which have arisen since 1945. The meaning of the word 'Community', in both the general and Christian sense is examined, in the light of both the sociological and Biblical traditions. Essential also in this is the historical perspective, and so the developments in community living in the Anglican tradition since the Reformation are considered, including the revival of the religious life which began in the nineteenth century.

Three communities serve as particular illustrations of the type and variety of these developments. The first is St. Julian's, founded in 1941, with a particular concern for caring for missionaries on furlough, though the ministry has widened considerably in subsequent years. The second is Lee Abbey, a conference centre in North Devon which began as a community in 1945. Here some sixty people, lay and ordained, run holiday house parties and conferences geared to promoting evangelism and renewal in local Churches, or simply a time of refreshment and relaxation in a Christian atmosphere. Finally, the Pilsdon Community is examined, founded in 1958 as a 'therapeutic' community. Its aim is to minister to those in special need or difficulty, individuals whom society often rejects and discounts.

These three examples have been chosen because they have all been established for over twenty years and therefore some assessment of the work they have done and continue to do is possible.

In the last chapter, as well as looking briefly at other more recently established developments in Christian community living, an attempt has been made to assess the significance of all this for the Church at large and to show how the local Church can learn from the example and life of these communities.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY - ITS MEANING IN SOCIETY AND BIBLICAL TRADITION

Olive Wyon in her book Living Springs makes the point that the history of the Christian Church is one of decline and renewal. This is the context in which we must put the developments in community living which have taken place in this country since the Second World War, and which will be our concern in this thesis.

There are many at this time who ask such questions as, "Has the Church a future?", and "Can the Church survive?"; statements are made such as, "The Church is in decline", "The Church is unintelligible and irrelevant", and "The Church makes less and less impact on late twentieth century scientific man". It may well be that these statements contain an element of truth, particularly as far as certain traditional forms of Church life are understood, but at the same time, renewal is taking place in the Church throughout the world, and many different enterprises which both speak to the present situation and seek to be pointers to the Church of the future are to be found. To quote Olive Wyon again:

New life seems to be welling up from unseen springs.(1)

One way this is happening is in the search of the last three or four decades for a contemporary pattern of Christian living which involves some form of community life. Some of these endeavours have been on a large scale, some have been small; they have come into being for different reasons and in different ways, but nevertheless they are now a phenomenon to be reckoned with in society today.

This is a vast subject, because it is a world-wide movement; so of necessity, our study is very restricted, being confined to England, and to some of the developments which have taken place here. Throughout

we shall be asking a number of questions about the 'Community Movement'. How has this development of Christian community living come about? What are the people involved trying to achieve? Is it within the established churches and denominations? Is it divisive, or is it an indicator of the way in which the Church should be functioning now and in the future? We shall begin to examine these questions in this chapter as we look at some aspects of society today, and how much it is changes in society that has prompted this 'Community Movement'. We shall need to try to define community and to look briefly at the Biblical understanding of community, before moving on in the next chapter to look at earlier attitudes towards community living (and in particular attitudes to the monastic life), within the Reformed tradition. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 will be concerned with three specific communities which have emerged and developed in the period since 1945, and the final chapter will analyse the significance of this movement towards community living, both in relation to the communities discussed in detail, to the phenomenon in general and what all this has to say to the Church at large.

As the history of the Church is one of decline and renewal, significant religious movements in the past have always been in answer to a need at that time, e.g. from a Protestant point of view, the Reformation of the sixteenth century, or in the eighteenth century John Wesley and the founding of Methodism; also in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries we have the Evangelical Revival, and the Oxford Movement. Although the 'Community Movement' is not on the same scale as the movements mentioned above, what has happened in the last thirty-five years seems to have occurred, as before, in answer to a need within the established Church. We must first ask - "What is that need?", and to answer this we must put the 'Community Movement' in the wider

context of social change in the last hundred years, and in particular the period since 1945.

From the simple pattern of traditional rural communities, many people now live in a complex, mechanised, industrial society where there often appears to be little sense of community. Within all this, there is an element of paradox - people are becoming less self-sufficient and more dependent on others for their living, and yet there is less of a sense of belonging to a community of any kind. Though transport, communications and the mass media have brought people closer together, subjectively speaking they are more at a distance.

Everywhere where there has been industrial growth and urban development, there are isolated families, feelings of remoteness, insignificance and powerlessness, and:

> It has led to the isolation of the nuclear family, to the predominance of partial secondary contacts over deep personalised relationships.(2)

Or, to put it another way, we live in a mass society where relationships are essentially contractual, and as a result there can be little feeling of belonging, only a "phoney kind of togetherness", what Robert Merton has called "pseudo gemeinschaft". (We shall look at the use of this term Gemeinschaft in more detail shortly.) To quote a leading Christian commentator on this subject:

> Probably the greatest change that has happened to us in the west is that we no longer live in the security of small detached communities. In the Middle Ages the life of the great majority of people was lived in isolated self-contained communities - the manor, the village, the town, the nation, Christendom. The walls around these communities are all down.(3)

The changes in life which were so evident in the latter part of the nineteenth, and early part of the twentieth centuries, have accelerated even more in the years since the Second World War. Although there is a certain inevitability about change, and people expect it, nevertheless the natural reaction to it is fear. At one time there would have been an immediate turning to the Church, as something which was reliable and unchanging, as the source of moral and spiritual authority, but it seems to many that the Church has failed to be able to speak to people's deepest needs. Even though there is a certain disillusionment with the twin gods of the sixties "Science and Technology", the Church still does not seem to provide the answers people are looking for. T. R. Morton comments again:

> It is not surprising that many men and women want to find a more adequate way of life for themselves. It is not surprising that many loyal members of the Church are convinced that they must find new ways for the Church if they are to live as they ought to be living.(4)

However, is this historical view of the situation as outlined above too naive? Some sociologists and historians would say that this approach romanticises the idea of the old community and is not a totally accurate description of contemporary society. They ask how much real community there was in the pre-nineteenth century village. They argue that the village was not always an open, honest and trusting place - the sort of values people are looking for in "the search for community" today - but was often closed, rigid and suspicious. So this change in the pattern of life is not the only cause in the quest for community living. This is a part of it, but perhaps equally significant is the expectation nowadays of what our relationships in life should be. "Self-fulfilment", for example, was an unknown phrase in the nineteenth

century, but it is very commonly used today. The fact that we can now choose the community to which we belong, rather than as before, when a person was generally born into a community and stayed there until he died, also alters our understanding and expectations in relationships. It seems to me that the search for community, is not a question of supplying a simple answer to people's needs in the changing twentieth century urban society, but rather more to rediscover, or even recreate the meaning of the word community.

At this point, it would seem appropriate to define this word, and like most words which are over-used in common parlance, community is difficult to define, because even experts in the field differ widely on its meaning:

> Sociologists have used the word 'community' as loosely and ambiguously as anyone else. Over a decade ago, George A. Hilley examined ninety-four definitions of 'community', and came to the conclusion that beyond the concept that people are involved in community there is no complete agreement as to the nature of 'community'.(5)

Despite Hilley's conclusions we will try to define it, and it may help initially to see some of the ways in which it has been used both in English and German sociology - community being an essential part of both sociological traditions. There is a certain amount of confusion in German because the Germans have two words for community: Gemeinde, which meant the local community and Gemeinschaft - meaning community in general. The meanings of these two words have changed with the passage of time so that now their meanings are quite different. Gemeinschaft is fairly intangible, referring to a relationship of intimacy, depth and commitment. Gemeinde basically means neighbourhood and so has not changed in its meaning as much as Gemeinschaft. The basic issue which

we must be clear about here is the distinction between community in its local aspect and as a type of relationship.

Undoubtedly one of the leading authorities on this subject is Professor Robert Nisbet. He writes:

> The rediscovery of community is unquestionably the most distinctive development in nineteenth century social thought, a development which extends well beyond social theory to such areas as philosophy, history and theology to become indeed one of the major themes of imaginative writing in the century.(6)

This is true both for the German and the English sociological tradition.

Frederick Tonnies (1855-1936), who published his book Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft in 1887, was one of the leading contributors in this development, his work preceding any of the major works of Weber and Durkheim. Tonnies sought to draw the distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft both in society as a whole and also within groups in society. Gemeinschaft he saw as 'private, intimate, exclusive living together'; Gesellschaft however is to be recognised by the looseness and impersonality of social ties, and relations within it are specific and limited, an example of this within society being the contract.

Generalising from the situation in Europe at that time, Tonnies suggested that human society had developed through four stages:-

1. Unions of Gemeinschaft to -
2. Associations of Gemeinschaft.

   Associations of Gemeinschaft to -
3. Associations of Gesellschaft.

   Associations of Gesellschaft to -
4. Unions of Gesellschaft.

This is to say, he saw a gradual depersonalising and individualising of

life and of relations between people. Tonnies saw the family as the prototype of the union of Gemeinschaft. As the association of Gemeinschaft he saw as an example "communities of profession in the sense of craft, trade and beliefs". As 3 above he saw as the prototype the modern economic system - 'the rational mobilisation of a means to an end'. And in the union of Gesellschaft he saw the attempts to recapture some of the communal securities of an earlier period, but within the Gesellschaft corporation e.g. in the development of social security.

It is important to remember that Tonnies was speaking here about the 'ideal type'. According to his theory there were more of the Gemeinschaft type of relationships in the Middle Ages than in the centuries since the industrial revolution.

There have been a number of attacks on Tonnies' work since its publication in 1887, e.g. Ralf Dahrendorf, another German sociologist, was convinced that the Gemeinschaft type of relationship had never existed in any form. Other German sociologists have also contributed to an understanding of this word community and how it related to the Church, e.g. Herman Schmalenbach. He tried to bring together the theories of Weber, Tonnies and Troeltsch by saying that there were three sociological categories:

Bund - the communion.

Gemeinschaft - the community.

Gesellschaft - the association.

The element of communion in the Bund brings out at a deeper level the emotions, and so in a sense there is created a tension between communion and community, i.e.:

> It is the hidden reason why those who are very much part of a community distrust those others whose relations include the elements of communion.(7)

Communion is in contrast with community - unstable, fleeting and emotional. Schmalenbach also talks about society and when he does so, he presupposes the essential separateness of individuals so that:

> The spirit of society is inspired by the ethos of a cool reserve.[(8)]

It is his view that in various ways, the Churches make periodic attempts to recapture the attitudes and social relations of the communion, and the social consequence of this is often characterised by a "communistic ethic of love". Here Schmalenbach is similar to Weber, for Weber stresses that charisma must be routinised if it is to be preserved. Some of the important sociologists in England and America, who have studied 'community' are R. M. McIver, C. H. Cooley, Robert Redfield, Robert Nisbet and David Weisman. Their approaches were further refined by Talcott Parsons who elaborated what he called the 'five pattern variables', a set of alternative orientations to action which can be used to analyse both social units and societies. Although all the above use different terminology, they are saying much the same thing as Tonnies.

As a minimum definition most English sociologists would follow Talcott Parsons' definition in The Social System:

> A community is that collectivity, the members of which share a common territorial area as their base of operations for daily activities.[(9)]

i.e. a definite geographical dimension is involved, though there are some sociologists who would not accept the geographical basis as vital, and instead give priority to the psychological dimension.

A helpful definition which goes further than this 'minimum definition', is found in the New Catholic Encyclopaedia. There 'community' is understood as:

> A social unit whose members are (permanently) bound

> together by the common possession of vitally significant values or ends and by forms of love and responsibility based upon these.(10)

A third and certainly the most comprehensive definition for this thesis occurs again in Robert Nisbet's book The Sociological Tradition:

> By community we mean something that goes far beyond mere local community. The word as we find it in much nineteenth and twentieth century thought, encompasses all forms of relationship ehich are characterised by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion and continuity in time. Community is founded on man conceived in his wholeness, rather than one or another of his roles taken separately that he may hold in a social order . . . it achieves its fulfilment in a submergence of the individual will that is not possible in unions of mere convenience or rational assent. Community is a fusion of feeling and thought, of tradition and commitment, or membership and volition . . . its archetype is the family, and in almost every type of genuine community, the nomenclature of family is present.(11)

Many of the statements and ideas in this very comprehensive definition do in fact work out in the communities which form the main part of this thesis.

Having examined the word 'community' and a little of what it means in contemporary society and thought, and what has been the background to this understanding, I will draw this chapter to a close by studying the relation of all this to the Biblical concept of 'community'.

'Community' is central in the Christian tradition. This is made clear in the following comment:

> Man is a social creature and therefore any total spirituality, any way of spiritual life which truly fits man's nature, must necessarily include a corporate, social element.[12]

It was the belief in God the Creator, in whose image man is made, and who is ever at work in history, that is the basis of faith in the Bible. It is this belief that made the people of the Old Testament know God, in the call of Abraham, and who saw the proof of their faith in their deliverance out of Egypt. For them, God was the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt: God known in historic fact. This it was that bound them into a community, a society bound to each other and to God, by a Covenant that was their response to His great act of deliverance. As T. R. Morton writes in The Household of Faith:

> It was because of this that their life together as a people was of infinite importance. It was because God was the Lord who had led them out of Egypt that they had to find a new faithfulness in the use of their possessions. It was because of this that all who belonged to the community and even the stranger within the gates, were assured of their place.[13]

It is on the people of God, the old Israel and the new that the Bible places its primary emphasis, not on individuals as such. In a quite unique way, individual and community are held together without either being lost in concentration on the other. The individual finds his true life when he possesses a calling within the community. Some would disagree with this and say that Christ's teaching is directed at individuals. This is true, but the individual having come to some sort of decision, finds that there is a community waiting to receive him. Thus the Biblical picture in both the Old and New Testaments seems to be of some relation between the individual and the community in which

the true nature of both is revealed. Clearly this is very relevant to the earlier reference to 'community' in Robert Nisbet's definition: ". . . founded on man conceived in his wholeness . . . in submergence of the individual will that is not possible in unions of mere convenience or rational assent . . ."

When we move into the New Testament, we see that in the beginning, the Church was simply the society of those who believed that in Jesus Christ, and their fellowship in Him, God's promises were fulfilled, and His purposes were being worked out in the world. In the opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, what is most striking, is not so much the words they spoke, as the life they lived. It would seem that those first Christians lived the kind of life that the apostles had shared with Jesus when He was on earth. Then they had a common purse, and depended for their livelihood partly on their own work, and partly on the help of their friends. So now they continued to have all things in common. Then Jesus had healed people, so now they healed people in His name. He had broken bread with them and now they continued in the breaking of bread.

> And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.
>
> (Acts 2:43-47)

For the first Christians there was a new life, lived in the world, and

which affected the world - it was not just a commemoration or imitation of what had gone before when Jesus was on earth. At the heart of that life was this concept of koinonia, meaning fellowship, or in the verbal form, koinos, meaning shared or common. Again referring back to Nisbet's words on 'community', the life of those first Christians was characterised by a 'high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, and social cohesion . . . a fusion of feeling and thought, of tradition and commitment, of membership and volition'.

We also see something of this pattern of life in the early Church when we turn to Paul's letters in the New Testament. In Romans 16:5, he sends greetings to the Church in the home of Priscilla and Aquila at Rome. In Colossians 4:15 and Philemon 2, he greets the Church in the homes of Nymphas and Philemon. The homes of these Christians were probably those of the wealthier Christians, and their households would have been fairly large groups, including slaves and free servants, as well as members of the family. We know from Latin writers how much such a household was a social unit, so that when a household became Christian, it became the meeting place for a much larger group than simply the natural family unit. The group would be as large as the home could hold. This means that at Colossae there were two groups, who would not only meet for worship, but also for meals. They did not meet only on Sundays, but rather the house was a place of continual gathering all through the week. Travelling Christians would find there board and lodging, and in a real sense, the Church was the place of living: the centre of the daily life of all Christians of that place.

One of the most powerful effects of this shared life, was that the first Christians showed themselves as a community that ordered their life in all its aspects according to their faith, and not according to the prevailing customs of the world. (This we shall note in due course

in relation to the particular communities of our study). They did not accept the world's prevailing views on property. They were very concerned about the needs of others - whether they were sick, orphans, prisoners or fellow-Christians on their travels. This is nothing unique in itself, for in the pagan world of that time there were a number of charitable societies, but what was unique was the nature of the care - it was an expression of love. It arose out of a sense of real community, which had in it something that is reminiscent of the old Covenant for the Jewish community, to which we referred earlier. The first Christians in their life together, showed people a society where other values ruled other than the power of Rome, and this life spoke of a community where other things were more important than slavery, money and military power.

The early days in which the Church was a small group of people all more or less known to each other did not last long. Very soon it became a widely scattered society, whose members were not known to each other by personal acquaintance. The organisation of Church life became more elaborate, and the ministry developed. However, all this necessary development continued to be undergirded by their task of living together the new life that was in Christ. Theology, worship and ministry had to develop to help them to live that life and to express to other people their conviction that they were one family. called to live that life together.

Before drawing this chapter to a close, it is worth noting that Josephus, the Jewish historian, uses the word koinos to describe something of the community life of the Essenes, who were still in existence in New Testament times. They were a Jewish ascetic sect who probably originated in the second century B.C. and came to an end in the second century A.D. They grew up as a protest movement against the Greek influence on Jewish religion, against corrupt kings and against the

growing carelessness among Jewish people about keeping the law. It seems that some four thousand were involved in some form of community life at the time of the accounts of the Jerusalem Church in Acts. There are no Essene writings in existence, but only descriptions of their tenets and organisation given by Philo and Josephus. They rejected marriage and lived in semi-monastic communities, owning everything jointly. They rejected blood sacrifices, though they still revered the Torah and the Temple. According to Josephus, they were interested in the virtues of plants and stones. They possessed an elaborate angelology, were rigid predestinarians and attached great importance to predicting the future. Their way of life as well as being communal was also highly organised, involving a three-year novitiate and rules of obedience and secrecy. Although some have suggested that John the Baptist and even Jesus himself had Essene connections, this seems highly improbable, though it is obviously likely that they knew something of their way of life.

Some have seen a link between the community of Qumran and the Essene movement, but it is thought by many that any resemblance is merely superficial. The Essenes only admitted men to their communities, whereas there were women in the Qumran Community. As we have seen, the Essenes rejected blood sacrifices, whereas Qumran gave sacrifices some significance. The Essenes were pacifists, but the War Scroll from Qumran shows that they were far from being pacifists by intention. Scholars remain divided on making any positive identification of the two, and the proof is certainly not conclusive.

Another less well-known group at the beginning of the Christian era was the Therapeutae, which means literally 'physicians' or 'devotees', and who like the Essenes were ascetic. The Therapeutae mainly comprised a group of Egyptian Jewish ascetics. Again, Philo is the authority for their beliefs and practice, which we find in <u>De vita contemplativa</u>,

where they are contrasted with the Essenes who lived a more active life. Like the Essenes, they were severe in discipline, and abjured material possessions, living in seclusion near Alexandria. They devoted themselves to the allegorical study of the Old Testament, meeting together on the Sabbath, and during the great festival corresponding to Pentecost. Little more than that is known of them, but it is interesting that groups such as these should have been in existence at the same time as the Christian Church began to make its impact through its shared life.

We can see that although the actual word 'community' may not be found in the Old or New Testament, the concept of being part of the people of God, and the depth of that commitment is a very important Biblical theme. Along with the individual's response to God is:

> . . . the challenge to a man to commit himself and become a member of a social organism which God has brought into being and which now exists under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.(14)

It is clear too, that the various expectations of what community should mean, that we examined earlier in the chapter, are to quite an extent fulfilled, in the Biblical, and in particular the New Testament picture of the people of God. There the importance of the individual within a community is expressed; in that setting, there is growth in relation to God, and in inter-personal relationships. There is a sense of permanence in relationships too, which is something that is often felt to be lacking in our society today. The family is very much at the heart of Biblical thinking, but it is not the narrow twentieth century idea of the 'nuclear family' - it is rather the 'extended family' or 'household'. The Bible is concerned with man's wholeness, which he begins to discover in God and through his fellow-believers.

When we come to look at the various types of Christian community springing up today, we shall see that many would come back to the picture of the first Christians sharing their lives together. This is their inspiration - a fellowship of brotherly love expressed and established in the life of community. This is their concern - to proclaim and share that love in different ways with a needy world. Dr. Leo Alting von Geusau sees these new developments as:

> A cultural phenomenon taking place everywhere in today's world as a reaction to the heaviness, the inadequacy, and the anonymity of traditional structures, and in general the tendency towards a massive lumping together of human society.[15]

Thus the 'search for community' is at the same time something old and something new. Always it seems there has been a dissatisfaction, with 'things as they are', and the sense that the individual alone is powerless. Together, however, as the first Christians saw, the effect of a shared lifestyle can be very powerful:

> And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of land or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to each as any had need.
>
> (Acts 4:33-35)

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THE RELIGIOUS LIFE -
ITS ESTABLISHMENT, DECLINE AND RESURGENCE

In assessing the developments in community living since 1945, it must be shown how the Church of England has been able to recognise such developments as acceptable within her reformed tradition. The communities which are the subject of this study may at first sight appear to bear little resemblance in either structure or purpose to the nineteenth century resurgence of the 'religious life', but in fact it is only through an understanding of the historical perspective of monastic community living that we can fully appreciate them. Further, it is necessary to understand the attitudes towards community life in the period between the Reformation and the mid-nineteenth century to see whether people then felt that Protestantism and community living were irreconcilable.

It is somewhat ironical that one of the primary reasons for the rejection of monastic community living at the Reformation should have been the lowering of standards and corruption within the monasteries, when it was those same things which in part first drove men to lead ascetic hermit-type lives, and then to form themselves into religious communities. For the first three hundred years of the Church's existence, there was no separate Christian community living, but with the Edict of Milan in 313, the Church was officially recognised by the State, and its whole role in society and involvement in politics altered its ethos.

Before 313, there were periods when Christians suffered a good deal of persecution at the hands of some of the Emperors. The New Testament seems to prepare Christians for such persecution, and to prepare them for suffering and even martyrdom. Although Christians were concerned to be true to the teachings of Christ and Paul in respect of

those in authority:

> Nonetheless, they are a specific Community over against the world and their environment, and they are always prepared, so precarious is their peace and the toleration they may enjoy, to be deemed enemies and treated accordingly.(1)

The changes after 313 were not sudden, but the bonds between Christians made essential by the persecution the Church experienced, became looser when fear went, and when the Church became more concerned for wider responsibilities and new duties. The clergy in particular found themselves more and more involved in social and political matters. Again to quote von Campenhausen:

> The fact that the degree of civic participation and responsibility was at first very slight is due, as we have said, to the situation at the time, and was to change along with the social and political circumstances.(2)

Indeed, men like Ambrose and Gregory the Great came to their high office in the Church, through high office in the State. Furthermore, the ecclesiastical organisation became increasingly modelled on the civil administration, and parallel to it.

The effect on the Church as it became more 'established', caused some people to be acutely aware of the contrast between the teachings of Christ and the way of the world at that time, in that the Church seemed to be following the world rather than its Lord and Master, and thus its effectiveness was weakened, and its message compromised. This situation resulted in two things: some went to live a life of ascetic protest in the desert, and others went as missionaries to heathen lands. What, however, began as a retreat, ended in expansion, because the monastic movement which resulted out of this protest became one of the most remarkable and significant experiments in Christian living that the

world had seen. It began as this individualistic ascetic movement of hermits, and became an experience of corporate Christian living, and the main agent of the age in Christian mission. The centuries which followed Constantine, were the times of the Church's greatest expansion, until the missionary enterprise of the nineteenth century. From the beginning, there were different strands and emphases in this movement, but all were concerned to rediscover the kind of life that had been experienced in the earliest days of the Church. This was true for Basil and Benedict, the orders of the Celtic Church, and for all the reform movements which were to arise later.

The fact that monasticism became one of the bulwarks of the Church for over a thousand years, was due initially to the genius of St. Basil. He drew up the first fully comprehensive rule - a rule which became the norm for Eastern monasticism, and which formed the basis on which St. Benedict developed his rule for the West. There were four main principles in Benedict's rule, and it is interesting to see how not only have these principles affected subsequent monastic developments, but also they are to be found in the communities of our study. The first principle was that they existed for the praise of God - living a life where they could try seriously to obey the demands of Christ. The second principle, was that they were essentially a society for lay people, or rather for 'ordinary' Christians, for the rigid distinction between clerical and lay had not yet been drawn. It was the success of the movement, and the need of some corporate life for the clergy that soon made the combination of the monastic life with priesthood so common. In its origin, however, it was not a movement for the clergy. The third principle, was that the monastery was a community in which work had an important part to play. This work was necessary for a man's spiritual life as well as for the life of the community. The fourth principle,

was that the life of the monastery was based on a timetable. It was to a strict timetable which regulated work and meals and leisure that the main activity of this life - the worship of God - was tied.

As the monastic movement developed, it made significant contributions in a number of areas of life. One was in the field of learning, as the monasteries provided education. They also maintained and developed agriculture. But their main aim was their determination to preserve the life of the Church, and to spread the Christian faith. The monastic movement was the only means available at the time for securing the resources necessary for missionary work, and for maintaining its continuity. Without it, it is unlikely that Europe would have been evangelised. Britain owed its faith to two monastic movements - the Irish community at Iona, and the Roman mission at Canterbury in the sixth century. Only a minority were involved in monasticism, but the presence and example of the monasteries was a great help to people, setting an example of positive Christian living, and giving practical help in education and training.

When we come to the Middle Ages, the great revival in the spiritual life of the Church in the early part of that period, was due largely to the monasteries, and the influence of men like Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux. However, the rest of the history of that time, is very difficult to see clearly. There is so much to see, and it is so varied and in many ways conflicting. The concept of Christendom was a new reality, and people felt that they belonged to a new society rooted in the one faith. This in itself gave a sense of community, and a pattern of life. It was the monasteries of a previous age that made Christendom possible - they gave to people the conception of the religious life, which applied to everyone in society. By this time, in fact, the pattern of all the Church's life had been affected by the pattern of monastic life. Celibacy was

now a rule for all clergy; the worship of the Church became increasingly like that of the monastery, and in England, more and more parishes passed into the patronage of the monks, who regarded them as estates to maintain their religious life. Ordinary people began to get less and less help from the Church. There was no participation in worship, there were no hymns, and the services, as a whole, lacked dignity and reverence.

The Church's failure to adapt itself to new movements in society contributed considerably to the breakdown of Christendom. These new developments were in economic, political and cultural areas, and the Church largely ignored them. The monastic movement in particular, seemed to begin to lose the ideals for which it had stood in previous generations. Having begun as an essentially 'lay' movement, it had now become clericalised. It began as an experiment to recover the simplicity of life seen in the early Church, and ended by becoming a pioneer of capitalism, as the monasteries became part of the land-owning class. The thirteenth century, however, saw the emergence of a new type of 'religious' - the friar - particularly under the influence of St. Francis and St. Dominic:

> For what St. Francis desired was not a new religious Order nor any form of ecclesiastical organisation but the following of Christ - a new life which would shake off the encumbrances of tradition and organisation and property and learning, and recover an immediate personal contact with the divine source of eternal life, as revealed in the Gospel.(3)

Sadly, the Franciscan Order did not go on living up to Francis' original intention, but that is not to say that Francis himself failed. He saw his brotherhood as a body of men who simply did the Lord's work. He saw no need of an order. However, within a hundred years, the Franciscan Order was no different from any other in that it became well-known for its learning, and began to own property.

By the end of the Middle Ages, the Church was left without an effective pattern through which to express the Faith in a world which was changing rapidly. The Church had accepted a fatal new distinction which broke through the whole of life - the distinction between clerical and lay, between religious and secular. The Church could not be said to be living the life that was in Christ, when the organised Church lived detached on its own wealth. From the fourteenth century onwards, monastic life had gone into decline, and until the Counter Reformation, this was true for the whole of Europe.

It was the number and wealth of the monasteries that was the immediate cause of their suppression in England by Henry VIII. For him the monasteries were the most immediate and convenient source of some much needed income, as well as being a part of the whole mediaeval civilisation that was collapsing all around. And what happened in England was also happening on the Continent - the Reformation had come.

These reasons were the immediate cause of the suppression of monastic life in England. However, the antipathy to manasticism shown by the Reformers goes deeper than this.

They had three main reasons for rejecting monasticism: first of all, Luther's doctrine of 'justification by faith alone' cut at the roots of much of the theology of asceticism which had developed by then. Secondly, there was a failure on behalf of many of the Protestants to understand the essence of monasticism, and thirdly, the fact that in Germany humanism and religion became intermingled, led ultimately to the rejection of the monastic system by the Reformers.

In 1517 Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Church in Wittenberg, revealing what he felt about certain abuses within the Church. He challenged the Church to think again about the real meaning of penance, reminding them that God alone could forgive sins, and denying the Pope's power over purgatory.

The Reformers of the sixteenth century, and Wyclif before them, were basically hostile towards any form of the 'religious life', partly because they felt monasticism had no Scriptural warranty, nor was it evident in the earliest days of the Church, and also the vows of obedience and chastity, were thought to be contrary to the spirit and liberty of a Christian, and destructive of the idea so strong in Reformation thinking - the family.

Luther himself, being a member of the order of 'the hermits of St. Augustine', knew how far short of the original ideals contemporary monasticism had fallen. Justification by works, as shown by the existence of indulgences and the power of the papacy, had no place in the Christian gospel message as set forth in the New Testament. The idea too, that there were two possible types of Christian life - that of the layman, and that of the monk - was also unacceptable to Luther. He therefore felt that the problem of the corruption and bad state of the monasteries, could only be solved by abolishing them altogether, so far had they departed from their original ideal - that of living together in fellowship with one another for the glory of God. This was the general European background that made it possible for Henry VIII to suppress the monasteries, and thus end any monastic community life in this country for three centuries, though there continued to be a flourishing English monastic life in monasteries established on the continent.

The Reformation expressed itself in the destruction of images, and of everything that made a division between religious and secular - in the substitution of the Common Table for the altar; in the participation of all believers equally in the bread and wine; in the demand that the Bible and all worship be in the language of the people, in the preaching and teaching and in the enforcement of Christian ritual in the home

as well as in Church. Just as the founders of the monastic movement deliberately set up a new pattern of daily life in the monasteries, with its rigid timetable of daily prayer and work, so the Reformers equally deliberately laid down a pattern of daily family life, which they saw now as the basis of Christian living. Indeed, it was their belief that the Christian faith was concerned with the ordinary life of people, and their desire to make it find its centre in the family, that united the Reformers, so diverse otherwise in their theological opinions. And both - monks and Reformers alike - in concentration on their new experiment had to break with and deny what had gone before. Behind all these new developments, lay the great beliefs of the Reformation - the Sovereignity of God, Justification by faith, and the Priesthood of all believers.

The Reformers' attitudes to monasticism exerted great influence not only on their contemporaries, but have continued to influence the thinking of the majority of Protestants, both in this country and elsewhere. The ideals of poverty, chastity and obedience were at the heart of the Reformers' criticisms of the monastic life for to them this seemed to limit Christian freedom. Only in a state of spiritual liberty, brought about by faith in Christ could the vows be kept. If 'works' crept in, one was no longer under liberty.. It was thought at least theoretically possible to live an authentically evangelical monastic life with really free vows. Luther's attitude was clearly bound up with the essence of his conception of the major truths of the Christian religion.

We do not have much information from John Calvin on this subject, for unlike Luther, he had no personal experience of the monastic life. However, in The Institutes he touches on this question of vows. Indeed, Book 4, Chapter 13 is entitled "Vows and how everyone rashly taking them

has miserably entangled himself". Many monks attempted to justify their way of life by reference to the early Church, and especially to St. Augustine. Calvin, however, saw a distinct difference between the two. The regulations of the monastic life had become more important than the spirit. Worst of all for Calvin was the monk who believed that through the monastic life he could achieve a state of spiritual perfection. Nevertheless, it is still monasticism as represented in the mid sixteenth century that is being attacked, and not the basic principle of community life:

> Now about the last thing which Augustine says was in force among the ancient monks - that they applied themselves wholly to love, what need is there to show in words how completely foreign it is to this new profession? . . . all those who enter into the monastic community break with the Church . . . If this is not to break the communion of the Church, what is? . . . And to pursue the comparison which I have begun, and to finish it once for all, what resemblance in this respect do they have to the ancient monks? Even though they dwelt apart from others yet they had not a separate Church; . . .they were a part of the people.[4]

'They were part of the people', and the monks of the sixteenth century visibly were not. However, the most extreme position on the question of the religious orders was taken up by Zwingli, who rejected even the possibility of religious orders, on the basis that all Christians are brothers, and religious orders and separatist groups created division in the Church. More important for the subsequent attitudes to religious community living in England was Martin Bucer (1491-1551), who wrote his De Regno Christi at the request of Thomas Cranmer. While

he does not treat monasticism or the religious life explicitly, he sees celibacy and community living as a particular gift for some individuals, and above all as a matter of vocation and response to the call of God.

Thus the Reformers' position is clear - it was conceded that the 'religious life' was possible in theory, as long as it did not conflict with the central doctrines of the Christian faith as found in the New Testament. Commitment in terms of lifelong vows was not acceptable as it went against Christian liberty, and divided Christians into two categories. However no official doctrine on the religious life has ever been formulated and two 'loopholes' were left open. These were, firstly, that there could be a place within churches of the reformed tradition for communities, provided they were in accordance with the word of God, and were not in any way separate from the general Christian body. Secondly, Bucer had explicitly recognised the possibility of a Divine call to such a life, either temporary or permanent.

Despite these loopholes, and in particular the fact that the call to the service of God was something central to the spirit and ethos of Protestantism, there was no community life of any significance (with one notable exception to which we shall return), in England between the years 1540 and 1840. This was of course not true in the parts of Western Europe which remained Roman Catholic; there the monastic life flourished on a mediaeval scale. The only time in this country between the Reformation and the nineteenth century when it might have been possible for some sort of 'religious life' to appear, would have been in the first half of the seventeenth century. However, the opposition to monasticism to which the Puritans then gave the most violent expression, forbade anything but thoughts by a number of devotional writers on this matter. Among these were men like Lancelot Andrewes who could say:

Nor was it the King's intention to condemn the original

> foundations of monasticism, but rather the monks who have long since fallen away from that foundation.[5]

In 1654 Archbishop Bramhall expressed his feelings that as long as such communities were not too big, did not have life vows, or jeopardise the parochial system:

> I do not see why monasteries might not agree well enough with reformed devotion.[6]

Herbert Thorndike is perhaps most important in this connection, and in particular his book <u>Epilogue of the Tragedy of the Church of England</u> (1659). In this he expresses his belief that celibacy glorifies God and if monasteries are not essential to the Church, they are and can be a significant part of it. He has to admit that the lay monk is better than the ordinary layman, while neither of them are equal to the state of ordination. For him monastic life is:

> A perfection to Christianity, it is certainly a blot in the Reformation that we profess, that we are without it.[7]

He is the only Anglican theologian of the seventeenth century to see the monastic life as valuable in itself, apart from the opportunities that it provided to cultivate learning. To him it gave an example of freedom from this world that the whole Church ought to show. The fact that expression was given to any such ideas at all, indicates that for some the Anglican attitude to monasticism was by the seventeenth century different from that of the earlier Reformers.

Thus the idea of monastic or community life within the Church of the post Reformation period was not completely absent, though on the whole people were very suspicious of it. Of all the suggestions as to how such life could be reintroduced to the English Church, apart from communities restored during the reign of Mary, only one came to anything - the Little Gidding community - which came into being despite the general atmosphere of opposition and antagonism to the 'religious life'.

The story of Little Gidding is the story of Nicholas Ferrar - a man of extraordinary vision, and many abilities. Born in 1592 he had a brilliant academic career at Cambridge, following this with extensive travelling abroad, where he came into contact with some Benedictine monks at Padua, in Italy. On his return to this country, he became employed by the Virginia Company, and subsequently became involved in the political life of the country. In both these fields he distinguished himself and had he remained in them he could have become one of this country's leading statesmen. However, his life was to take a very different course, for in 1626 he and his family - his mother, his sister, his brother and sister-in-law, and their respective families, as well as some domestic servants - moved from their London house to the manor house of Little Gidding, some nine miles north-west of Huntingdon. He was not trying to imitate the monastic life of the pre-Reformation Church, as some accused him of doing. Rather he was simply seeking to live out within a family group setting, the New Testament principle of living together in fellowship, and for the service of others. He was not trying to set a precedent either, but believed that he and his family were being called by God to live out this particular way of life. He was a devout and loyal Anglican, despite the accusations of contemporary Puritans, his guides in life being the Bible, the Prayer Book, and Foxe's Book of Martyrs. In the daily offices that were recited, the Prayer Book was adhered to strictly, and they concentrated especially on the recitation of the Psalter. As A. L. Maycock comments:

> The real background, the primary significance of the life at Little Gidding was the steady rhythmic routine of prayers and worship, and concentrated effort provided in the daily rule of the household.(8)

The family rose at four o'clock in the summer and at five o'clock in the

winter. The main offices of the day, which took place in the little Church next to the manor house, were Morning Prayer at six o'clock, the Litany at ten o'clock and Evening Prayer at four o'clock. Once a month Holy Communion was celebrated on a Sunday by the Vicar of neighbouring Great Gidding. (As Nicholas was in Deacon's orders he was at liberty to lead all the daily offices, and despite repeated attempts to persuade him to take priest's orders, he declined, and preferred to remain as he was. This is but one example of his great humility, which shines through the account of his life.) In addition to these offices said in the Church, every hour of the day there was a fifteen minute service attended by those not engaged in any work. Following the example of the early Christians, a night vigil took place every night, which was led by different members of the community in turn, though Nicholas himself seems to have been there on most occasions.

With the exception of John Ferrar's wife, Bathsheba, everyone in the household seems to have entered fully and joyfully into the life of Little Gidding. It was not simply a number of people living together for their own edification, but they sought to serve the needs of others in the immediate area and beyond. The 'Little Academy' which they began had an educative role not only for the children of the community, but also children from the neighbourhood. In addition, a dispensary was run for people of the area suffering from any illness or disease. Others came to Little Gidding too for spiritual counsel and direction, for rest and refreshment, and Nicholas would receive anyone who came without question. So, the community were very much in touch with the world around. To quote again from A. L. Maycock:

> Nothing could be further from the reality than to think of the little community living in tranquil isolation, remote from worldly cares, and deriving from so desirable

a state of being, much of that serenity that characterised their lives. There was no facile ease of this kind at Gidding. On the contrary, it is important that we should realise how constant and how pressing were the demands of the outside world upon them, how sensitive they were to those demands and how enormous were the sacrifices that the continuance of their chosen way of life exacted from them. The peace that inhabited Little Gidding was the peace that no man can take away; its joy was the joy that this world cannot give.(9)

Little Gidding in no way conflicted with Reformation principles, and as such the community had the support of their Diocesan - Bishop Williams of Lincoln - even though he was a Puritan sympathiser. He could see the value and place of such a venture, and was confident of their loyalty to Protestantism. He visited Little Gidding at least four times during its life span of some twenty years. Another visitor on three known occasions, was King Charles I, the last occasion being when he was a fugitive fleeing from the Puritans in 1646, not long before the community was raided by the Parliamentary forces and the manor house and Church plundered. The importance of Little Gidding is then further highlighted by the attention paid to it by people of such high rank, who not only tolerated its existence, but gave it their support.

If it were not for John Ferrar, Nicholas' elder brother, we should probably know nothing of Little Gidding. However, he wrote Nicholas' life story in the period 1653-1654, Nicholas having died in 1637. The community carried on its usual mode of life until it was ransacked by the Parliamentary forces, having been labelled the 'Arminian Nunnery', and been subject to numerous vicious verbal attacks over the years, none of which contained any truth.

Thus in the space of twenty years a unique experiment in community life came and went. It did not inspire any imitators in subsequent years - that is until this century, when it is not so much a question of imitation, as following their example. But despite the fact that there were no other successful community ventures for a further two hundred years, the heritage of Little Gidding is of immense importance:

> In some sense Little Gidding may be regarded as the spiritual focus of all that was best and holiest in the Caroline Church. Its influence was the personal influence of Nicholas, and it was exerted through the bonds of his various friendships.(10)

There is something beautiful, something unusual about the quality of life at Little Gidding that has been a source of inspiration over the centuries. This has never been more true than today when a family-based community has been established there once more. T. S. Eliot writes in his 'Little Gidding':

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning.
> The end is where we start from . . .
> A people without history
> Is now redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
> Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails
> On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
> History is now and England.(11)

This represents so accurately the spirit of Little Gidding, a unique and yet such an important part of the revival of community life within the Anglican Church. And as A. M. Allchin writes:

> . . . the nineteenth century communities looked back on it as a sign that their type of life was not alien

to post-Reformation Anglicanism. The example of Little Gidding, and the authority of Andrewes, Thorndike, Taylor and Bramhall, were constantly cited by the Tractarians.(12)

After the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the climate of opinion with regard to communities changed somewhat, with the triumph of the 'High Church party'. A number of schemes were proposed for female communities, which ultimately came to nothing. Two editions of a book were published in 1694 and 1697 entitled A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, a plan by a Mrs. Astell for a community, partly religious, and partly having an educational function. It was only to avoid giving offence to the scrupulous and injudicious that she hesitated to use the term 'monastery'. Bishop Burnet opposed the idea, because he felt it smacked of popery and 'it would be reputed a nunnery', so after the 1697 edition of her book the proposals were turned down.

However, the notion of Protestant monasticism was obviously being discussed quite seriously and openly at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. This may have been partly due to the growth of the religious societies from 1680 onwards (e.g. S.P.G.) and also groups of people, and young men in particular, who had a common rule of prayer, communion and Christian action usually meeting once a week. They were particularly concerned with the public worship of the Church, which was rather lacking in colour and dynamism. In this they were very much in the same tradition as the nineteenth century advocates of the 'religious life'.

The eighteenth century itself saw only one significant attempt at reviving the monastic idea within Protestantism - the scheme proposed by Christopher Codrington, a West Indies business magnate. He thought up a scheme for a college of medical missionaries in Barbados, where

professors and scholars alike would be under three-fold vows. At this stage in the history of the Church such a project was almost inevitably doomed to failure, and in the end, the Society for the Propogation of the Gospel took care of the project, without any ideas of vows or living the 'religious life'. There was no further significant development in this area in the eighteenth century for this was above all the age of the Wesleys and the Evangelical revival. Some have tried to find traces of the 'religious life' in the Non Jurors and the Methodists, and indeed, the original Oxford Methodists did enjoy some sort of common life, but Wesley's conversion and other subsequent events took the movement in a different direction. This is not to say, however, that some of the ideas of the Methodists were not similar to those of the ninteenth century advocates of the 'religious life'. The longing for Christian holiness, the desire to preach the gospel to the poor, the practice of frequent communion - all these are common to both. Nevertheless the Methodists never thought of groups of people living together in a permanent way, and therefore their ideas and teachings fall far short of any community life.

The overall feeling then of this period 1540 to 1840, was largely one of either opposition or apathy to anything remotely resembling community life. Yet, as we have seen, throughout these three hundred years there were always groups of people who believed that there was a place for religious communities within the Anglican framework like Little Gidding and the tentative proposal put forward at the end of the eighteenth century. These groups of people were all significant for the developments in the nineteenth century.

The revival of community life on a comparatively large scale in the Church of England became possible in the nineteenth century when it had not been in the previous three hundred years. A number of different factors are involved here.

Regular reading of Morning and Evening Prayer, together with books of devotion like Bishop Andrewes' book Preces Privatae, helped to prepare people's minds for a return to monastic life. Secondly, there was a revival of interest in Gothic architecture, and novels like Scott's The Monastery, encouraged an interest in the monastic life of the past. Thirdly, the study of ecclesiastical history aroused an interest in three great periods of monasticism - patristic and mediaeval times, and the orders of seventeenth century France. Fourthly, the Methodist revival, which had exposed a good deal of apathy in the Church of England, awakened a desire among Anglicans for reform both in life and liturgy within the Church. Finally, there was a longing for a return to holiness. There was no sudden influx of communities on to the English scene. Development was in fact very slow, as those responsible for this revival were in the minority for many years, and the revival of the religious life was only one part of a remarkable work done by these Tractarians or Anglo-Catholics as they came to be called. These men were the leaders of the Oxford Movement, which began in 1833, men who believed in the essential identity of the Church of England with the 'Catholic' Church, and who had an immense longing for holiness. The 'Oxford Movement' was both doctrinal and practical, for this Christian holiness of which they spoke must be founded on truth. Theirs was:

> A belief in the identity of the Church of England with the Catholic Church of earlier ages and a determination to reaffirm this identity, and secondly a belief in and longing for holiness, for a holiness which they believed Catholicism alone could produce.(13)

They looked as we have said to the early Fathers, mediaeval monasticism, and the orders of seventeenth century France, for guidelines in their spirituality, and so it can be understood that within the scope of their

work they would seek to reintroduce the monastic life within the Church of England.

It is important too to consider the social aspect of the Oxford Movement, for there were many areas of need which the Church of the day was failing to meet, and it seemed logical that groups of women who in the early years of the century had devoted their lives to works of 'mercy and charity' should evolve into religious orders, given the more open-minded climate of opinion that was emerging. Many, from the 1830s onwards felt that the Evangelical Revival and Methodism had concentrated too much on individual salvation and individual needs, and that this was only part of what the Church represented. Thus, the Tractarians saw their ideas as an attempt to restore the 'fulness of the Church', these, together with the Evangelical Revival in the previous century, made possible this monastic revival. As Bishop Walter Frere said some years later:

> The Evangelical movement gave the spirit and the Catholic movement the form of the revival.(14)

From 1833 onwards R. H. Froude had had ideas of reviving the monastic system, specifically to work in large towns, where so far the Church had made little impact, and E. B. Pusey too had similar ideas of a college of unmarried priests serving an urban area. R. H. Froude writes:

> It has lately come into my head that the present state of things in England makes an opening for reviving the monastic system. I think of putting the view forward under the title of 'Project for reviving religion in great towns'.(15)

By the late 1830s Newman was beginning to evolve his 'Littlemore scheme', a quasi-monastic community, though this never came to anything permanent due largely to Newman's increasing uncertainty about his place

within the Church of England. In fact, the early suggestions and ideas concerning community life, display some uncertainty, as to how best to go about them. On Trinity Sunday, 1841 a lady called Marion Hughes took three vows privately before Pusey, and this move committed Pusey to continue his plans for a sisterhood. From this time on correspondence on this subject ensued between himself and Keble as they sought to see how best to incorporate monasticism into the Anglican Church.

The first actual community came into being in 1845 at Park Village West near Regent's Park in London. This venture was sponsored by Lord John Manners as a memorial to Robert Southey, who had earlier expressed the belief that the work done by such groups of people living together on the continent was invaluable for the life of the Church. Unfortunately, the community did not live up to its expectations, and five years later, in 1850, the order broke up. Also in 1845, Dr. Pusey had founded a small community of women, which became a branch house of 'The Society of the Most Holy Trinity' at Devonport in 1854. This venture was much more successful. Such developments did not go unopposed for still not everyone within the Church of England sympathised with the aims and ideals of this new interest in monasticism. Thus, in his pamphlet Miss Seldon and the Sisters of Mercy, the Rev. James Spurrell, Vicar of Shelford, in Devon, accused the Devonport sisterhood of 'un-Protestant activities', and criticised their rule of obedience. Dr. Phillpotts, then Bishop of Exeter, resigned as Visitor of the community, being somewhat alarmed by these attacks, although he still expressed admiration for the sisters' work. However, most criticisms were not as violent or extreme as those of Spurrell; any suspicions were probably due simply to Protestant pressures within the Church, and we see that from the 1850s onwards the community revival gradually began to make its impact on the Church of England.

Communities for men were slower to appear than those for women, the first permanent one being the Society of St. John the Evangelist, Cowley, founded in March 1866 by R M Benson. The community had its origin in 1865, among a small group which included Mr. Charles Wood, later the second Viscount Halifax, and R. M. Benson, then Vicar of Cowley. Benson, a Tractarian, was a remarkable man with a compelling and saintly personality. The object of the Society was:

> to seek the sanctification to which God in his mercy calls us, and in doing so to seek, as far as God may permit, to be instrumental in bringing others to be partakers of the same sanctification.(16)

As well as their work based in Oxford, the 'Cowley Fathers' have done much work in the United States of America and Canada, and also been involved in missionary work in India and Africa.

This community embodied the ideal of Froude and Pusey, as it began as a result of a number of experiments of priests living together. Some communities founded in the mid-nineteenth century did not last but none-theless the fact that people were prepared to experiment in communal living, under the Anglican discipline was, if nothing else, a sign of enterprise within the Victorian Church. There is not space here to dis-cuss in detail all the communities which have sprung up since 1866, nor is it within the scope of this thesis, but there are two communities which seem to have influenced the post-1945 'lay community' developments more than most - the Community of the Resurrection and the Society of St. Francis.

The Community of the Resurrection initially owed its existence to the social conscience of a group of clergy, of whom the outstanding member was Charles Gore. He had become the first warden of Pusey House in November 1883, and soon after, founded the Society of the Resurrection.

This had its origins in a link between the Brotherhood of the Epiphany in Calcutta, and the clergy of Pusey House. The two groups were to be united by a common rule of life and intercession. The basic aim was to give fellowship to priests at home or abroad who intended to remain celibate. From the first, however, it was hoped that a definite religious community would develop out of the Society. The members elected Gore as their first Superior, and the oversight of this venture occupied a lot of his time.

A further important development, was the founding in 1889 of the Oxford branch of the Christian Social Union. Charles Gore and Henry Scott Holland were elected vice-presidents of the central society. Gore was one of the most active members and influential leaders in this, as they sought to apply the truths and principles of Christianity to the particular social and economic problems of the day. Later in that same year, there were further developments towards starting a definite religious order. Gore met with certain members of the Society of the Resurrection, and from the first, they were concerned to emphasise not so much the rule, as the community spirit of the brotherhood:

> They aimed as far as concerned the individual lives of members, at encouraging a reproduction of the primitive standards recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, with the necessary adaptation to modern circumstances, rather than at any more distinctive ideal of asceticism.(17)

While Gore was paying a visit to Calcutta, the foundation of the Community was taken a step further by William Carter and James Nash, two members of the Society of the Resurrection, being guests for a period at Cowley. This helped to clarify their objectives, convincing them that the ideal for which they were seeking was different from that of the Cowley Fathers, e.g. there should be a democratic spirit in the community, rather than

the rule of an autocratic superior. Their Superior, when elected was simply senior among the brethren, important decisions being taken by a meeting of the full chapter.

The Community of the Resurrection came into being with six men, including Gore and Walter Frere making their profession at Pusey House in July 1892:

> Their venture was a fresh experiment to meet modern needs . . . Their community was to be a brotherhood, not just a collection of holy and disciplined individuals, and that fact sounds the keynote of their purpose. They were celibate priests who desired to combine together to reproduce the life of the first Christians, continuing steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers, and saying that none of the things which each possessed was his own, but having all things in common.(18)

Their life was characterised from the beginning, by a simple austerity, liberty of opinion, and that democracy of government to which we have already referred. The life-long vows were taken to a rule rather than to a Superior. Gore was the first 'Senior', and under his guidance, the Community moved from Pusey House first of all to Radley, then to Westminster, and finally to Mirfield to a mansion built by a wealthy mill-owner in a valley between Dewsbury and Huddersfield in industrial West Yorkshire.

> It was sufficiently retired to secure peace, and in the heart of an industrial area it could provide work and attract novices. The numbers steadily grew. So long as Gore remained Superior, a wide variety of occupations continued to engage the members.(19)

Gore was not to remain Superior for long, for not long after the move to Mirfield (1898), he became Bishop of Worcester, and was succeeded as Superior by Walter Frere, who was himself appointed Bishop of Truro in 1922. The Community of the Resurrection has been and continues to be involved in many different areas of ministry - preaching, teaching, leading retreats and training men for the Anglican Ministry at the adjoining College of the Resurrection. Since 1903, they have also been actively involved in missionary and teaching work in South Africa and Rhodesia, and from the beginning of this century have been prominent in all kinds of contact with the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox and the Scandinavian Churches. As well as Gore and Frere, several other members of the Community have become Bishops, so that the influence on the Church of this venture has been considerable.

One can observe a similar flexibility and similarity in purpose in the Anglican Society of St. Francis founded in the early part of the twentieth century. Interest in St. Francis and the Franciscan movement was spreading rapidly by 1900. J. R. H. Moorman comments:

> Out of all this interest and enthusiasm, three things emerged - a flood of popular literature about St. Francis and the friars, a thorough investigation of Franciscan history, and a desire to found in the Church of England something similar to the Order of Friars Minor as it had been in the days of St. Francis himself.[20]

The person really responsible for starting the Anglican Franciscan movement was James Adderley, who in the latter years of the nineteenth century was Vicar of a poor district of East London. With two others, one a priest and the other a layman, he began to follow and live out as far as possible the principles of St. Francis. They called themselves, 'The Society of the Divine Compassion', and their aim was from a common

life of poverty, chastity and obedience to bring both spiritual and material help to those among whom they lived. Meanwhile, enthusiasm for Franciscan principles was increasing all the time, and in 1923 a young priest in Peckham, George Potter, turned his parsonage into a home for a small community of friars and homeless boys. This became known as the 'Brotherhood of the Holy Cross'. Both these experiments took place in the context of the parochial ministry, and form the background to the work of a man, later known as Brother Giles, who felt a vocation to minister to the many tramps and wayfarers in Britain at that time, leading him to leave London and begin this work, initially without any official support.

He concentrated his activities in Dorset, and in the autumn of 1921 the Earl of Sandwich, who owned some property in Dorset, offered him a country house and some land to form a base for his operations. By Christmas 1921, there were three community members and sixteen wayfarer guests at the House at Hilfield, Cerne Abbas, in the heart of Dorset. The numbers of 'brothers' involved in this work gradually increased over the years, though it was some time before they became officially recognised as a community. Their aim was simply to seek and share the poverty of Christ, to move amongst people living by compulsion a life of poverty, and to illustrate to them the love of Jesus Christ. This was a simple and yet profound aim, and one which they have kept before them in the subsequent years of their history.

By 1931 it was felt necessary that a rather more permanent structure be created for the Society of St. Francis, and in that year the Bishop of Salisbury received the vows of the first brothers. The succeeding years proved to be very busy ones for the Community, particularly with the high level of unemployment of that time. There were increased numbers of men wandering the roads of Britain with no money, no job and no purpose

in life. The brothers simply accepted and ministered to any with whom they came into contact, loving them as Christ had commanded, and in true succession to the spirit of the fourteenth century Franciscan friars, to whom also they looked for inspiration.

Life at Cerne Abbas then had three particular aspects. Firstly, there was the regular worship common to all monastic orders - the saying of the offices, prayer and meditation. Secondly, the Community provided a refuge for the homeless, and thirdly, it provided a base for the mission to the men on the roads. Brother Douglas, (who had formerly been Chaplain at Worcester College, Oxford), did a lot to develop the work at Cerne Abbas - his approach to the work being essentially practical. His ideal was, that in every town there should be a hostel for the homeless, and a home in every county of England. He was instrumental in setting up homes for the homeless in Cornwall, Sussex and Hertfordshire, as well as in Wales and Scotland. The numbers in the Community remained small for some time, and the person who was responsible for expansion in this way was Father Algy Robertson, who, having been Vicar of St. Ives near Huntingdon, came to Cerne Abbas, and

> turned a loosely-knit brotherhood into a religious order.(21)

In 1934, the Society of St. Francis was born, and Algy Robertson became the leader of the Community.

Their work was further extended during the Second World War when the brothers at Hilfield were asked to take charge of a Remand home for boys at nearby Hooke. They have had charge of it ever since, and subsequently have extended their work in different spheres all over this country and abroad. It is significant that the Society of St. Francis is currently the fastest growing Anglican religious order. There are over a hundred professed friars and fifty novices and they have a waiting

list of recruits. One of the reasons for this would seem to be the adaptability and flexibility of their community life. The thrust of their work is directed less now towards men on the road, and more towards rehabilitation work with alcololics, ex-prisoners and drug addicts. There are also certain women's orders related to the Society of St. Francis - the Community of St. Clare at Freeland near Oxford, the Community of St. Francis at South Petherton in Somerset, and the Franciscan Servants of Jesus and Mary at Crediton, Devon.

The Franciscans have always been involved in mission work and education and should any new and different challenge present itself to them there is little doubt that provided it was within their overall aim and ideals they would take it up. To quote from the Minister General of the Franciscans in their Jubilee Year:

> Let us be brave enough to throw away the preconceived ideas and prejudices which limit us, and let us welcome the insecurity which makes our only security to be God.[22]

Nothing could state more clearly than this the spirit of the Society of St. Francis.

The Franciscans have had close links with two of the communities of our study - Lee Abbey and Pilsdon - the former through the person of the late Jack Winslow, the first Chaplain of Lee Abbey, who earlier this century founded a society on Franciscan lines in India. He was in regular contact with Brother Douglas, the first Guardian of the SSF, and a further link came later, through Algy Robertson, who was with Winslow in India. There can be little doubt that Winslow's Indian experiences had considerable bearing on the beginnings of the Lee Abbey Community in 1946. As for Pilsdon, the fact that it is situated no more than twenty miles from the home of the Franciscans and has such

similar aims in its ministry, has meant that Percy Smith and his co-founders of Pilsdon have looked to the Franciscans, among others, for guidance. In the years since Pilsdon's foundation the two communities have maintained close links, often coming into contact with the same people.

Of necessity, this historical survey has been brief, for this is not the chief concern of this thesis. Nevertheless, it should help clarify and put into perspective the attitudes of various groups within the Protestant and Anglican traditions over the centuries to the idea of 'community', and whether the two are in fact compatible. Such a survey is necessary too for an understanding of why a resurgence was possible in the nineteenth century on such an unprecedented scale.

Some changes in the nineteenth century came in reaction to the narrowness of Methodism and the Evangelical Revival. But certain great leaders of the nineteenth century Oxford movement, e.g. Newman and Wilberforce, came from Evangelical backgrounds, though they felt that Christianity covered a much wider span than this. A phrase which recurs so often in their works - the 'fulness of the Church' - is what they sought to restore. Undoubtedly too, the whole cultural climate of Europe was changing at this time, and this contributed significantly to the resurgence of the religious life. Just as in the time of Henry VIII the abolition of the monasteries was but one example of the decaying mediaeval civilisation, so now the revival of this way of life was part of the new Romanticism.

There are still some today, who like many of the more Evangelical Anglicans of the nineteenth century, cannot accept the idea of community within the Reformed tradition. Yet none of the communities in this chapter reveal traits of being intentionally divisive or sectarian - one of the earlier objections to monastic life. Further, Luther fairly

positively, and Calvin, more reluctantly, recognised that it was at least possible in theory to live together in community, provided this did not conflict with the central doctrines of the New Testament, in particular justification by faith. At last, however, a more general assent has emerged, to the fact of people living together for the purpose of living in fellowship with one another in the service of God, in order to serve a needy world. As Bucer said in the sixteenth century, and as Kierkegaard and Harnack declared in the nineteenth, some have a vocation to this way of life and they should be allowed the freedom to pursue it.

Community living is now not only accepted but by and large, welcomed and recognised as making an extremely important contribution to the Church. Most contemporary examples of community living, have, like their predecessors, arisen to meet a particular need; Lee Abbey, as a centre for spiritual renewal, lay training and evangelism; Pilsdon, as a 'therapeutic' community and St. Julian's as a place of rest and refreshment for missionaries on furlough, and other Christian workers. Also, however, the value of community living for its own sake, as an example to the whole Church of what koinonia means, is being recognised.

We now turn to examine these three 'lay' communitities in detail, to see how the ideals of 'living together' in fellowship, are worked out in practice, for these three show in different ways some of the best aspects of contemporary Christian community life in all its variety and fulness.

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CHAPTER 2

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ST. JULIAN'S COMMUNITY

St. Julian's is a small women's community, with sixteen members, which since 1950 has been situated in a country house near Coolham, in Sussex. It is one of the growing number of communities which have emerged in Europe and the United States since the Second World War. These places have come into being for different reasons, and in different ways; St. Julian's first sought to meet the need for a place of rest and quiet for missionaries on 'furlough', and other Christian workers in need of a break from their usual tasks.

The Community had its origins in 1943 at Barns Green, Sussex, under the inspiration and guidance of Florence Allshorn, who had been a Church Missionary Society missionary in Uganda between the two wars. Immediately before the St. Julian's experiment began, Florence Allshorn, together with three other women, had supervised a 'Guest House' at Oakenrough, near Haslemere, which was a haven for many during the war years. The life of Florence Allshorn, (hereafter referred to as 'Florence', the name by which she was known in the Community), is necessary to an understanding of her life and experience prior to St. Julian's, to an appreciation of what she saw was the function of her community and its present situation.

Florence was born on 19 December, 1887, in Yorkshire, and was left an orphan at the age of three. From the beginning she displayed a great independence of spirit, together with a keen interest in the arts (particularly poetry), and nature - an interest which she never lost over the years. In 1913 an event occurred which was to prove the turning-point of her life - her meeting with Dr. Herbert Gresford-Jones, then Archdeacon of Sheffield. He was a help to her in a number of ways, and through him she became deeply involved with the pastoral ministry

of the Cathedral. She spent time with factory girls in the area, visited in the Cathedral parish and local hospitals, and promoted interest in missionary work. By 1920 she was feeling a calling to the mission field, and in that same year Bishop Willis of Uganda visited Sheffield, and this convinced her of the area in which she should serve. At the same time the Gresford-Jones' offered themselves for missionary service in Uganda.

Thus it was, that later that year, these three and a number of others left for Uganda. Florence was sent to an area then known as Iganga, where two problems immediately presented themselves. One was the terrible climate of the area; and the second and more difficult of the two was the temperament of the senior missionary already present there. Not only was she difficult to live with, but her temper proved to be a barrier to the missionary work. It was under these circumstances that Florence says that she slowly began to learn the real meaning of Christian love. Through reading the 13th chapter of Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians every day for a year she found herself able to cope with the situation, and found too that her attitude to life and other people slowly changed, and became an adventure in learning to love. It was thus that in an almost miraculous way the atmosphere and relationship between the two missionaries began to change, and joy and peace pervaded the whole area of their work.

Florence stayed there for three years but was then compelled to return to England having been struck down with tuberculosis. After a long illness, during which her life was in jeopardy on a number of occasions, she eventually made a remarkable recovery, helped by a stay in a sanatorium in Switzerland. It was after this that she had her first experience of community life, when she decided that she needed a period for reflection, and for this purpose went to Storrington on the South Downs. Here an enterprising woman who owned some land there had started

a community-type venture using a number of huts in which an assorted collection of people lived - generally people who had been badly treated by life. Florence joined this group and during her stay talked at length with many of them. She learnt of their hopes and fears, and shared with them some of the joy of the Christian life which she knew. Many of the 'hut dwellers' questioned her about her religious views, and some were positively against what she believed. Nevertheless, she threw herself fully into the life of this 'community' and both learnt from, and was able to give a lot to, the experiment. She wrote of the place in later life:

> We just try to be quite humble and friendly with them, and give them a warm, simple, happy time here. Our huts are always ready for them to drop in and talk over anything, or just come without talking. It is what tired, muddled people, weary people want, more than anything.(1)

(There is a similarity between this community and the present-day venture at Pilsdon.)

After about a year at this place, in 1928 Florence was asked to become warden of St. Andrew's Hostel in London - a Church Missionary Society training college for women missionaries. The transition from the 'hut-community' at Storrington to St. Andrews was no easy one. 'From great unconventionality to narrow orthodoxy', is how Dr. Oldham has described it. Florence did have some considerable difficulties at first with the CMS authorities. On her arrival at the Hostel she found the place grim and foreboding, lacking any colour or spark of imagination. Florence wanted to develop the cultural life of the College, bringing out the personalities of the trainee missionaries, ideas unheard of in such circles. However, she gradually won the confidence of most of the members of the Society. She worked very hard during this period,

particularly after St. Andrew's was combined with Kennaway Hall in 1934, and she was appointed Principal of the whole institution. She had only one Housemother, and the occasional visiting lecturer to help her out, and all the time she was fighting a battle with her health. Nevertheless, despite her busy life, she always found time to enjoy herself and relax, alongside the students, for she was concerned first to be their friend, and only second their Principal. It is a great tribute to her that she was always willing to learn from her students; in fact she once said that no student had passed through her hands who had not taught her something.

As was clear later at St. Julian's, Florence was always concerned to be moving forward in whatever work she was engaged. In 1938, the Training College moved to Foxbury in Chiselhurst. Here there was a larger house in beautiful surroundings, and Florence was able to have more staff to assist her, and so a fuller training programme was made possible. The atmosphere seems to have changed in the years in which she had been in charge of the Training College. From being rather austere and narrow in outlook it became alive and exciting, indeed the 'adventure' to which Florence so often referred. However, the stay at Foxbury proved to be a short one, for on the outbreak of war in 1939 CMS moved their headquarters there, and Florence went, with a reduced number of students, to Selly Oak College in Birmingham. It was during this period that she felt she should be moving on again - this time into a different sort of sphere. After a year at Selly Oak, Florence resigned the Principalship of the College and, most reluctantly, the CMS Authorities accepted her decision.

Throughout the twelve years in which she was concerned with the training of missionaries, and from her own experiences in Uganda, Florence became more and more aware of the limitations of this initial period. Although guidance in the life of prayer, both corporate and private, and

Bible Study, were important, she felt that something was still missing in the nature of this preparation. Florence herself had returned from Uganda in search of peace and quiet and she felt that she was not alone in this. It seemed that she needed further guidance about her 'spiritual adventure', particularly as it related to missionary work. She needed also to face the spiritual failing which the missionary work might well have revealed. It was not good enough simply to expect young missionaries to know everything, and need no further help. This need is perhaps most clearly expressed in a statement from three young missionaries, quoted by J. H. Oldham in Florence Allshorn:

> The general idea of the first tour seemed to be idealism or the doing of a job well, with little or no realisation that being in another country and labelled at long last 'missionary' was not in itself sufficient to make one a missionary. The farewell meetings, the goodbyes of friends, and the garlanded welcome ahead, all help to give importance and make self the centre of the picture. Disillusionment on arrival, pressure of overwork, lack of time, ignorance of language, climate, and tiredness, as well as difficult relationship with colleagues produced confusion and the desire for escape. Some escaped outwardly into social life, into contacts with government officials and other interests, whilst others escaped inwardly into a world of unreality. All knew they were failing, the difference being that some blamed themselves, some grew hard, aggressive and reserved, others tired and complacent, and yet others bewildered and lost. Whatever the tendency had been in England, it became exaggerated during the first term abroad.

> None of the three of us were ready for a second tour without more training. We were saved from a too easy self-satisfaction with what we had done in the job itself by some small spark of the Divine, mercifully put into us in training.(2)

This fairly well sums up the seriousness of the situation, and to Florence further spiritual training was the most urgent need - not increased academic knowledge as some had suggested. Nor should the whole furlough be spent in addressing a succession of meetings on the subject of missionary work. Spiritual renewal must be the prime consideration, and Florence saw that this extended beyond her own particular concern to the Church at large. She was aware of the lack of real fellowship, and even real commitment to discipleship, in most Churches. In the months after she moved to Selly Oak, Florence felt that others were thinking along similar lines to herself - of a community where there would be opportunity to tackle some of these issues in an atmosphere apart from the usual sphere of operations, whether at home or abroad. Perhaps such a venture could even be at least a partial answer to the problem of difficult relationships, which the world so badly needed.

> What Florence wanted was a lighthouse in which the light of Christ and the joy of Christian fellowship would become visible, so that Christians would once more be reminded of their goal in life. The pathos of the modern age is that the light of Christ cannot be discerned in the institutions of the Church.(3)
>
> In our day, obedience to the second commandment has found perhaps its chief expression in humanitarian movements - in the desire to serve rather than to love and understand. We have become excellent social servants,

> Christian organisers, doctors, nurses, teachers, but we have lost the essential spring of 'fellowship one with another'. People outside Christianity look at our little Christian groups, our parish Churches, our Christian schools, colleges, societies, and fail to see them shining out like light in dark places.(4)

This indicated quite clearly the vision of Florence - she was not simply concerned with the missionary situation, but with the needs of the whole Church.

Having resigned the Principalship of Selly Oak, Florence, and another friend from there, asked a third person to join them in thinking about, and seeking to put into practice, this venture. They met to discuss plans and formulate ideas. Much was discarded in the early stages as either impossible or unsuitable, but gradually the three women became sure of where God was leading them. The search for accommodation began early in 1940, but it was not until 1941 that a place was found - Oakenrough in Haslemere. This was to be the first place of the experiment. (It is interesting to note that the house which, with the help of some friends, they purchased, had been left in an old lady's will for a purpose very near to that which Florence Allshorn and her friends had in mind). A further member for the community joined and the four of them moved in over Easter 1941.

The house, which was in beautiful surroundings, consisted of five bedrooms, five outside 'cells', and half a cottage; a library, a small chapel, and a good kitchen, in addition to the usual 'reception' rooms. From the beginning the community kept animals, partly because they wanted to be self-supporting as far as possible, but mainly because Florence believed that animals, along with the appreciation of the rest of God's creation, helped one to relax, and gave a sense of peace.

Visitors soon began to come to Oakenrough in large numbers. Most of them were tired people from England in need of a rest. This was largely due to the war, which prevented many missionaries from coming home, and taking advantage of the venture. Thus one of the main purposes for which St. Julian's had come into existence was not realised immediately. Nevertheless, it was a helpful period, when the members of the newly formed community had a chance to get to know each other within the setting of community life. All four of them found that there were certain problems common to all, the chief one being the lack of discipline. They spoke about the need for 'fellowship', but found that it was in no sense being put into practice. Something had to happen to bridge this divide between thought and action in order for a real community experience to be possible. They began to realise that before real fellowship can be experienced, defences and barriers of, and between, selves, must be removed.

It was in personal relationships that the greatest difficulties were found at first. It became clear that it was not simply a matter of being resigned to another person in a community if they are a source of annoyance. Rather it needs a positive acceptance of that person. Thus honesty was a top priority from the beginning in the community.

> It is only as you know yourself moving forward a little, or climbing upward, that you dare face yourself as you are, and you can open out what you were without fear. I think we would say that what we thought we were was a very different picture from what we found ourselves to be. We had a really ghastly amount of self-centredness among us, pride enough to stiffen everything that was gentle and good for years, as well as lesser soul-sickness. The scene as it revealed itself to me

> was not so much that of a group of people possessing un-Christlike qualities as of an arena in which devilish things in us fought against the things in us that were good and sane and sweet . . . we went through some dreadful destructive moments. We sometimes longed to chuck it and run. But we didn't, and we found ourselves learning things as we went along.(5)

The second important thing that the Community realised in these early stages, was that they constantly needed a greater vision in what they were doing. A venture such as building up a community required one to be constantly looking forward. It was necessary to remain faithful to the original vision, but it must not stop there. If this did not happen the Community realised they would become inward-looking and thus fail in their essential purpose. The impelling motive for this, in the early stages, was the sense of 'learning in deep experience', constantly learning more about the other, and what it means to live in community. They had to face, and indeed answer, the question, 'Is community essential for the Christian life, or is it merely an "added extra"'? What they found was that fellowship is <u>not</u> simply a consequence of living together, but that it is an integral part of Christian living. It is probably the failure to understand this that has made Christian fellowship so much less than it should be.

Although these first few steps in the Community venture at Oakenrough had proved to be a valuable experience, increasingly guests and visitors were having to be turned away because the premises were too small; so the search began for another house. With the help of some friends of the Community the purchase of a house at Barns Green in Sussex was made possible, and by August 1943 the Community were installed in their new surroundings. They wondered how the place would be furnished, as it was

much larger than the previous house; but people were very generous in supplying furniture as well as other necessities for the Community. It was at this stage that the Community became known as 'St. Julian's' - the reason being that he was an old Sussex saint, noted for his hospitality.

One thing, however, seemed to be missing at Barns Green as the Community became involved in the work there - lack of provision for children. One could hardly expect missionaries on furlough who had families, to leave them behind and come to St. Julian's on their own. This need was supplied when the next door farm came up for sale and the Community bought the house with money left to them in a recent legacy. The first visitors (a missionary and his family) came to the house, which was known as 'White Turret' in 1946. It was also about this time that the numbers in the Community rose from four to twelve, and at the same time a minimum of one year's 'probation' was introduced before becoming a full member of the Community.

As the war drew to a close, more missionaries were able to come home, and after such a long period abroad many were in desperate need of a rest. Thus St. Julian's began to achieve one of its prime objects - this period of renewal while at home. But the Community decided they must do something more. What was necessary was the opportunity for further training and discussion on important matters of Christian living, as had been in the minds of the Community from the beginning. As a result many conferences were held at Barns Green between the years 1946 and 1949.

Towards the end of 1949 the Community again felt that they should be moving on, as Barns Green in turn had become too small for their needs. A large property became available at Coolham, also in Sussex. The price at first seemed prohibitive - £50,000 - comprising two farm houses,

thirteen cottages, over two hundred acres of land and a lake. By this time a Board of Trustees had oversight of the finances of St. Julian's, and at one of their meetings they decided to go ahead in faith and offer £50,000, which sum was accepted. After a number of legal difficulties, and long dealings with solicitors, the contract was signed.

The Community moved to Coolham on 19th January, 1950. Here they were able to accommodate many more guests, which was particularly useful for conferences doing a lot of group work. The farm, which had been purchased in 1945 to provide better food for the guests, now moved to Coolham, which gave scope for development, and had better premises too. A number of people came to St. Julian's specifically to help in the farm work - students, missionaries, businessmen, farmers and others. Florence, with her great love for nature and especially animals, saw the farm almost in terms of a parable - as a Christian training ground, and a constant reminder that we are utterly dependent on God for everything. Only God can make the fruit grow once we have planted the seed. We are called to co-operate with God in his plans and purposes for us. Florence wrote this as an expression of her thinking on such things:

> It is a place where people must forget themselves for the sake of what is alive and needs faithful and constant attention.
>
> If we learn as a farm to see thought and act as one, we come to realise that in spiritual work too, there must be a faithful beginning and ending. We find here the explanation why many begin the Christian life so well and then suffer arrest of growth or fall into decline. Obedience to an objective demand is the only hope for the farm as it is the only hope for our life with God and His demands.[6]

As ever Florence has a message not only for the Community, but one which extends to the whole Church.

Only a few months after the Community had moved to Coolham they had to face a major readjustment as a result of Florence's death. This naturally came as a great shock to them, though she had never enjoyed perfect health and had been on the brink of death on more than one occasion. Despite the sense of sadness at the loss of the one who was the founder of the Community, there was however a sense of triumph and victory, in the knowledge that she was now in the nearer presence of God; though she was not physically present with them, yet spiritually they were still one. Nevertheless, the Community had to re-appraise its role and think out how they were to continue. Although a community in the real sense of the word had come into being over the previous ten years, it was still characterised very largely by Florence's personality and dynamism, and many wondered whether the Community would survive her death. So it was that in the summer of 1950 readjustments began to be made. Nothing drastic was done, and the importance of Florence's personality lived on, but there was still the sense of 'moving forward' about which Florence had had so much to say during her lifetime.

The period from 1950 to the present day has been one of consolidation rather than expansion. As with all the communities in our study, they have not planned too far into the future, but have maintained an attitude of expectancy, responding to the different demands as they come. Guests have continued to come in large numbers: about a thousand a year. A characteristic of recent years had been the enormous variety of people that have come to St. Julian's. Whereas in the period 1946 to 1950 by far the majority of the guests were missionaries or full-time Christian workers, since then there have been people from all walks of life, both within the Church and in totally secular occupations. All the denominations are represented, and for some, St. Julian's has become a 'spiritual life-line'. (Here we find a close parallel with the Pilsdon Community

and Lee Abbey, though operating in a different sphere. Guests return again and again to Pilsdon for help and guidance; and people return to Lee Abbey year after year for holiday and spiritual refreshment). Nowadays, at St. Julian's agnostics and atheists are to be found, staying there for a variety of reasons - sometimes looking for some greater purpose to their lives, and sometimes simply coming for a period of peace and silence.

What sort of activities are there for the guests, apart from simply providing a place for relaxation? There are quite a number of weekend groups who study particular aspects of the Christian life. These have become increasingly popular over the years, as has the 'Reading week', which is a regular fixture in the year's programme. Once a quarter the 'Sunday afternoon gathering' takes place. At these, various well-known speakers give a talk on their particular subject (not necessarily a religious one), and this is followed by discussion. This tends to be an occasion for people in the surrounding area to come and benefit from what St. Julian's has to offer.

The Community has remained more or less autonomous over the years, though it is still an Anglican foundation, and the Community is largely Anglican in membership. It now has a Board of Directors to replace the Trustees spoken of earlier, and these handle any big decisions that are likely to affect the Community in any serious way. Most of the day to day decisions are made by the members of the Community. As at the inception of the Community, all the members are single women. The reason for this is that the nature of the work seems to make it, if not compulsory, then desirable to be single.

There are no life vows as such, but rather membership of the Community is seen in terms of a long-term commitment, the working out of which will vary with each individual member of the Community, bearing

in mind the need for continuity and stability in the Community as a whole. It is not always easy to know whether someone who asks to join would be suitable, so the would-be-member comes to the Community for six months and works alongside other members of the Community. If the Community and the person believe it to be right to go on, then she becomes a probationer for about a year, after a service of dedication. This period is the testing of the vocation, and although the individual is a part of the Community, she has no responsibilities for policy-making, and is not a member of the inner councils. If, after that probationary period, the person stays, then she becomes a full member, after a second service of dedication, involving a promise of obedience to the Community and its way of life.

Here we see a continuation of the idea of freedom and responsibility which was so characteristic of Florence's approach. It can be seen too, in the pattern of devotional life which the Community follows. Morning and Evening prayers are said daily, and Holy Communion is celebrated on Sundays when there is a Priest among the guests. Although it is part of the accepted discipline that Community members should be there, there are no further rules for prayer or Bible study. Margaret Potts comments thus:

> A definite rule for all the Community can fetter people and drive them to the unreality of outward observance which can destroy the work of the Spirit.(7)

St. Julian's is very much a working Community, the lives of the members being full and busy with domestic work and administration, work in the garden, and of course caring for the guests and being available to them. Two or three hours each week are given over to study, and discussion on questions of policy and programme planning. Here too, at the meeting of the whole Community, problems of all kinds are sorted out.

With all the many demands of their lifestyle, the need for relaxation and time off is essential, and each member of the Community has a day off each week as well as part of Sunday.

> Like all vocations to community life, membership of the St. Julian's Community asks of us all that we have in the way of spiritual resources. All of us at one time or another have wanted to give up. Why have we not done so? We have more positively been held by something we saw and valued, a worthwhile vision of our common purpose.(8)

In earlier days the farm meant that the Community were largely self-supporting in that way, but in the course of time it became too large to manage, and in 1955 the farm was sold, and with the money realised new buildings were erected. (This also meant that four people were set free to go to East Africa). There are now three main sources of income: fees for board and lodging are paid by the guests; the profits from the annual bazaar and articles made and sold in the Community; the help given by the 'Friends of St. Julian's' who pay an annual subscription, and also, of course, support the work by prayer. With the inflation of recent years there have been some financial difficulties, and more recently the house at Fairacres has been closed, but the Community have never despaired about this, but rather have seen it as a new challenge to faith.

There was overseas expansion six years after Florence's death in 1956, in the form of a 'branch house' in Kenya. The idea stemmed originally from a plea from the then Bishop of Mombasa for a place where all races and faiths could meet, where prejudices could be broken down, and there could be a learning one from another in an atmosphere of reconciliation and peace. It was at the end of 1955 that a house was found at Limuru, some seventeen miles from Nairobi, and thanks to generous

giving and loans, the house was bought, and in October 1956 four members of the Community left Coolham for Kenya.

Little did they know the storm of protest that was to arise over this idea of a multi-racial centre which was anathema to the white population of Kenya. For eight months the controversy raged, with the Community members being asked on more than one occasion to leave the country, but in the end it became clear that there were no legal grounds on which the sale of land to the Community could be prohibited. In June 1957 the situation was finally resolved, and since then the Community has become well-established. Africans, Asians and Europeans have met together there, and the work has extended to Nairobi itself where one of the Community members had a flat for a time. What the future holds is of course not known in that politically turbulent continent, but there is no doubt of the valuable contribution that the Kenya house has made towards racial harmony and understanding. In addition, many missionaries from the different societies working in that part of the world have visited the house, and have found there something of the peace that is distinctive of the 'mother house' in Sussex. Close links are kept between the two houses, and not surprisingly people who have visited the Kenya house, often spend some time at Coolham, when they are back in England.

We have already seen that Florence was concerned not only to provide a place for tired missionaries but also saw the venture as part of the renewal of the Church at large, and it is out of this dual vision that St. Julian's was born, and continues to function. She was a remarkable woman, who made this Community her lifetime's vocation.

> She did not spend her life in the service of
> the outcasts of society, though they at once
> became her friends when they crossed her
> path . . . Her distinctive vocation was

> to show that the ordinary relations of daily life offer a field for the heroic practice of Christian love. In the range and depth of her understanding of what this means and in her relentless pursuit of conformity to Christ's standards she was to a large extent a path-finder . . . In no form of society will there cease to be need for the manifestation of love with which Florence Allshorn was primarily concerned. The relations of persons are, and will always continue to be, the stuff and substance of a truly human life.(9)

This understanding of love was central to all her thinking, and central in all her dealings with others. It found expression not only in relationships with others, but also was at the heart of her theology. For Florence the two were in fact inseparable - thought is only of value if it leads to action. She was not a great theologian, but nevertheless wrote relevantly and profoundly. Her theology is characterised by an Evangelical Catholicity in that she stressed the doctrine of free grace within the tradition of the whole Church. She wrote:

> We have to repent of our blindness, our lukewarmness, and our disobedience and turn back to the central truth of Christ as Lord and Saviour; an ethical system will not save us here, nor a timid sentimentalism, nor an excited emotional return or a dilettante mysticism.(10)

This statement shows that the spirituality of St. Julian's is not easy to define as being a member of the Community is seen more as a vocation to a way of life than as submission to a particular rule. Florence wanted the Church to take a much more positive stand on all issues, to speak with conviction rather than apology, and this she sought to put into practice at St. Julian's. She saw the purpose of St. Julian's as

one of direct attack on the evil that besets many Christians, believing that the venture could become an opportunity to become 'more real'. She felt that the chief enemy of faith was mediocrity, and recognised this in herself and those around her and that contemplation was one means of drawing closer to God that the Church seemed to have forgotten, though this contemplation must never be seen as an end in itself, but must always lead to service.

An aspect of the person of Florence Allshorn that has always been important for the vitality of the Community's life is the fact that she found the Christian faith exciting, not something dull to be endured. Certainly she spoke in terms of 'self-denial', which might appear rather negative, but she spoke too of 'self-fulfilment'. In fact she described her religion as 'a song, as against everlasting absorption in sin'. Along with this attitude goes that of life as an adventure, in search of truth and beauty. These two facets of her character have continued to permeate the Community even to the present time. However, perhaps the most important and continuing aspect of her life for the Community is the fact that her writings continually remind the reader of the need for total and complete dependence on God, for everything, however great or small:

> We are suffering terribly from a kind of Christian insipidity; suffering too from a Christianity which is merely conversion, merely service, when the goal set before us is perfection and we dare not let any life settle on a less true foundation than that high calling of which St. Paul was so aware.[11]

This reminder of our need of God, this antidote to Christian self-satisfaction is one that is valid for all time. To realise this was for Florence a mark of sanctification, leading in turn to an increased sensitivity to others and their needs. She comes back to this time after

time, in terms of community living. For Florence 'friendship' was not simply the relation of two people to each other; rather, it is rooted in a deeper reality, which is two people with their eyes fixed on God's will and purpose and with hearts open to His love. It was realising this that made it possible for the Community to survive those early days at Oakenrough and has given St. Julian's its continuing place in the life of the Church, reminding it of this need for real honesty and humility, one with another. But this never comes easily, as this quotation from Dr. Oldham makes clear:

> One would have supposed that living in Community would have been in comparison with some tasks relatively easy. The atmosphere in which visitors to St. Julian's found themselves was one of peace, happiness, and quiet efficiency. But the reign of harmony and calm which visitors found so restful was not a natural beauty on which they had chanced to light, but a hardly won creative achievement.(12)

Here is one very obvious lesson which all the communities in this study have to teach the Church - the need of effort in terms of self-sacrifice and self-giving, and also the rewards it can bring.

We have spoken of the 'writings' of Florence Allshorn but how important are they for the Community? Are her thoughts studied in a 'pious vaccuum', or have they real significance for the way the Community is developing now? They are not, and never have been seen as in any way legalistic or normative, and this is undoubtedly how Florence would have wanted it to be. The Community is being true to its founder, who believed that it was always necessary to be open to the guidance and truth given by the Holy Spirit. In fact, over the years, Dietrich Bonhoeffer has been almost as important an influence on the Community as Florence Allshorn.

There are many similarities in the writings of these two people on the subject of 'community living' as the following quotation shows:

> In confession the breakthrough to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is the more destructive will be the power of sin over him and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation . . . The sin must be brought into the light. The unexpressed must be spoken and acknowledged . . . It is a hard struggle until the sin is openly admitted. But God breaks gates of brass and bars of iron.(Ps 107:16)[13]

This touches on the same sort of aspects of community life - openness, frankness, vulnerability - which were so central to the thought of Florence herself.

Other theologians who have had an influence on the Community and whose writings have been studied in detail, are John MacMurray, Paul Tillich, Teilhard de Chardin, and in earlier days Dr. J. H. Oldham (Florence's biographer) and Bishop George Bell of Chichester. Latterly the contributions of H. A. Williams (now a member of the Community of the Resurrection) and Bishop John Robinson, in their search for religious truth and reality have been greatly appreciated. The Community has been encouraged not to be afraid to look at unfamiliar and sometimes even disturbing points of view, and to see them as a challenge, and not as something which undermines their faith.

In addition, Florence's love of, and concern for, the arts in general is still evident in the Community. The poetry of T. S. Eliot, Edwin Muir and Kathleen Raine and Wilfred Owen, and the music of Benjamin Britten, have been other influences and means of communication

which have helped the Community to look at their belief from new standpoints and in new ways.

The Community's thinking has also been influenced by other communities, both in this country and elsewhere. In England, Lee Abbey and the Community of the Resurrection have made an impact on St. Julian's. Abroad, the Community has links with the 'sisters of Pomeyrol', a community of Reformed nuns. This contact with other communities and with the writings and influence of people who have had no close contact with St. Julian's, has meant that there has been real progress within the Community. It has not simply looked back to its founder for inspiration and guidance, but as she would have wished, these things have also been sought elsewhere.

As with all the communities in this study one question in particular comes to mind - has it succeeded in doing what it set out to do? St. Julian's should certainly not be seen simply in terms of the personal achievement of one woman, Florence Allshorn. This would be to go against everything she set out to do. She was a remarkable woman, and of that there can be no doubt, but her importance is to be seen in terms of the relevance of her vision to the needs of the time. In thinking about St. Julian's one must always keep in mind the dual vision of a community which could provide a place for retreat, and yet which was a 'lighthouse' shining out into a dark world.

Men and women, young and old alike, of every shade of belief or none, seem to find freedom at St. Julian's:

> This leads us to the conviction that there is a validity about such an approach to life which seems to be recognised, perhaps often subconsciously, by those who visit us.(14)

There is no blue-print for future developments at the Community, for their aim is to be sensitive to the particular times in which they are

living. In all aspects of their life they have been and will continue to be supported by their governing bodies in England and Kenya.

It is a measure of Florence's insight that when Haslemere House opened in 1941, the aim was to provide a place of reflection, recreation and withdrawal from a war-torn world; such needs have grown over the years, and if anything are more urgent today.

Florence's supreme gift, was in 'seeing' in terms of the world, the meaning and depth of relationships. St. Julian's is more than a retreat house - though no one would deny the importance of this - it has been and is a 'living, loving, lively community' where God is at the centre of everything. It is a place where the values of love and humility can be displayed. Paul Tillich has something to say on this subject, which seems appropriate to the situation at St. Julian's:

> Ours is a society which tries with all its means, unconsciously and sometimes even consciously, to standardize everything by means of public communication which every moment fills the very air we breathe. So here participation is very easy. In fact, it is so easy that in order to communicate the Gospel, we need non-participation. Ministers need withdrawal and retirement from these influences bearing in upon them every minute. This perhaps is the most difficult task. Ministers belong to those who participate and have only weak weapons to resist this participation.(15)

St. Julian's has provided this opportunity for retreat, but in order that renewal may come about, not for the sake of retreat in itself. And it has been that lighthouse where, unlike so much in the Church, the light and love of Christ are visible.

Where love rules a community it is possible for people

> to be genuinely open with one another in the generosity of mutual confidence. Is not this perhaps the very thing in which our modern Churches are most lacking?(16)

It is this 'hard-earned love' that is present at St. Julian's; this is fellowship, not mere sociability one with another, and is to this that St. Julian's directs the attention of the whole Church. As Florence Allshorn declares:

> It is only as individuals and small groups acquire a new outlook and attitude and as these spread silently and imperceptibly from one to another in ever-widening circles that forces are set in motion that can bring about a real renewal . . . Some of us will have to enter upon a vow of dedication to the eternal truth which is as complete and irrevocable as was the vow of the monks in the Middle Ages. Little groups of utterly dedicated lives knowing each other in fellowship with the divine, to live in the world, but not wholly of the world. Religion has become dulled and cooled and flooded with the secular; it must be lit and fired and flooded with the eternal. They must be ready to go the second half - obedient, sensitive and selfless. Such groups could revive the Christian witness and shake the country-side.(17)

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CHAPTER 3

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THE LEE ABBEY COMMUNITY

Among the new patterns of community life that have emerged within the Church of England since 1945, is the Lee Abbey Community, situated near the small town of Lynton, on the North Devon coast. Now one of the most established and well-known of the 'lay' communities in this country, it arose from a concern on the part of a small group for greater spiritual depth in the life of the Church, and a desire to find a meaningful way of communicating the Gospel to a twentieth century world that has, for the most part, little time for the Church in any conventional form.

Influenced by the restlessness of six years of war, and by the publication of the Archbishops' Report, Towards the Conversion of England, a handful of men centred in Rochester met daily to pray for revival in the Church of England. Theirs was a vision of a Church of England centre (for ecumenical thinking was not yet so far advanced) that could become a 'spiritual power house' for the Church, a place where new life and new faith could be found.

To most people at that time such ideas were revolutionary despite the fact that in the nineteenth century Bishop Westcott had spoken of the urgent need for a non-monastic type of Christian community. This comment was in no sense meant as a condemnation or criticism of the revival of the 'religious life' which had begun in the English Church in the mid-nineteenth century, but rather he felt that there was room also for:

> dedicated Christians, who without any thoughts of life vows, were prepared to live together in a simple communal life for the furtherance of some branch of the Church's work.(1)

From the beginning Lee Abbey has seen itself in this way - a non-monastic community within the Church of England, comprised not simply of single men and women, but also including whole families among its members. Such was the vision and such were the aims that a number of Christians shared during the last years of the Second World War.

Immediately before the Community took over the house and grounds it had been used as a Preparatory school, evacuated there for the period of the war years. Before that, in the 1920s and 1930s it had been a hotel. But why Lee Abbey? This seems to have been a name given to replace the earlier name of 'Lee Manor', due largely to the Victorian interest in antiques and ruins, the latter being the state that the place was in by the mid-nineteenth century. It has been suggested that in pre-Reformation days there was a 'daughter house' to the Cistercian monastery at Forde Abbey in Dorset on the site of the present Lee Abbey, but this seems to owe more to romantic speculation than historical fact.

The oldest part of the house that remains now is seventeenth century, and the rest is nineteenth century, as rebuilt by the purchaser of the house at that time, one 'Squire Bailey'. To the disappointment of the visitor, expecting to see an ancient monument, even the towers at the gateway, which at first sight make the place very 'abbey-like' are a nineteenth century creation. The property remained in the Bailey family until 1921, when the Estate was sold in various lots.

This then is the background to the purchase of Lee Abbey on behalf of the Community by an independent body of trustees, a body that had grown out of the small group mentioned before. None of these trustees, it must be added, was rich, nor was there any rich patron to sponsor the proceedings. Throughout, the purchase was a venture of faith, with the conviction on the part of those involved, that God was calling them to Lee Abbey, and that if they placed their trust in Him, and sought His

will, He would make the way plain for them. A sum of £28,000 was needed to purchase the property, and equip it suitably. One of the trustees involved received a timely legacy of £6,000 and he loaned this to form the basis of the mortgage. The trustees were also fortunate to number among them one experienced businessman, and in the initial stages of purchase he worked out all the financial implications of the venture.

News of the proposed purchase of Lee Abbey for the use of a Christian community soon spread, and many people all over the country began envisaging what could be achieved at such a centre, and they supported it with gifts of money, furniture and in many other ways. A lot of rebuilding had to be done before the Community could move in, and also clearing operations in the gardens, and the forested areas of the Estate. This was achieved through the help of a band of volunteers, who, beginning in the autumn of 1945 worked through the winter to get the place ready for the Community members, and for the programme of 'house parties' (of which more later), scheduled to begin in the summer of 1946. So it was that on the 6th June 1946, the Bishop of Exeter was able to come and formally dedicate the house and grounds to the 'work of God and the service of His Church'. At the time some people felt that the trustees were being rather foolish and idealistic in thinking that the Community they envisaged would really work out in a realistic and satisfactory way; but as Jack Winslow writes in 1956:

> The ten years since have proved that it is good to gamble on the strength of a divine assurance.(2)

Having successfully completed the purchase of Lee Abbey a matter of supreme importance was the gathering together of people to make up the Community. Again to quote from the Lee Abbey Story:

> The more directly spiritual side of the work, coupled with the central administration, seemed to require at least

three men - a Warden, Sub-warden and Chaplain. A considerable domestic staff was needed for house and pantry and kitchen in order to cater for the one hundred and thirty guests whom we were able to accommodate. The secretarial and financial side of the work would demand an adequate office staff. If the extensive estate, the farm and the fruit, vegetable and flower gardens, were to be properly cared for and developed, these also would require a large body of workers, with an Estate Manager to co-ordinate all the outside activities. In addition, maintenance and repairs, the felling and sawing of trees for firewood; the care of the electrical plant, water supply and drainage; carpentry, building, painting, plumbing; all these meant extra hands. To find so large a body of helpers would be no light task.[3]

Finding the numbers, however, was not all that was involved, for the members of the Community needed to be people in full sympathy with the aims and ideas of Lee Abbey. However, the necessary and right people presented themselves as potential members of the Community, and at no time since has there been a shortage of people willing to join the Community for varying lengths of time. Of the sort of people that make up the Community - more later.

Traditionally, community life within the Church of England was felt to be the preserve of the Anglo-Catholics, and where the monastic orders are concerned, as we have seen, this is wholly true. Lee Abbey's 'orientation', however, is both 'catholic' and 'evangelical'. It is evangelical in that a saving knowledge of Christ through His death on the cross is preached - albeit not always in traditional terms - and

catholic in that there is an attempt to appreciate the total tradition of the Church, including that of the pre-Reformation era. This has been one of Lee Abbey's strongest points, in that it has not owed allegiance to any particular group within the Church of England. At the beginning it may have been more specifically 'evangelical' in approach and outlook; what is far more significant, however, is Lee Abbey's success in combining a real commitment to evangelism with a concern for the whole idea of 'life in community' and even the contemplative life. All this arises from the ideals of the first small group of people - the renewal of the Church of England and a strengthening of the Church as a whole.

Lee Abbey then, sees itself above all as a centre for spiritual renewal within the Church, and to this end the programme of house parties, holiday conferences and retreats is organised. The 'House Party' idea is now a familiar one to most people, but it was not nearly so well-known in the late 1940s. It came from the Oxford Group movement of the 1930s, and the first Warden of Lee Abbey, Roger de Pemberton, had been closely involved with the House Party aspect of the Oxford Group's work. His experience in this sphere was invaluable at the start of Lee Abbey. The Lee Abbey version of the House Party basically consists of a week of holiday grounded in Christian fellowship and worship. It is in the different House Parties that Lee Abbey lives up to and works out its aims and ideals.

While no two House Parties are ever the same, certain things are common to all of them. In the summer months there are opportunities to indulge in physical exercise, e.g. walking in the beautiful surrounding countryside, swimming in Lee Bay, or playing tennis. Or there are opportunities to go on organised coach trips further afield, e.g. into neighbouring Somerset. In the evenings there is sometimes dancing, a musical or dramatic presentation given by the Community, or an impromptu

concert put on by the guests themselves. All these things are voluntary, though for the most part guests avail themselves of the different activities. How then, it might well be asked, does Lee Abbey differ from any refreshment of mind and spirit as well as body within a loving Christian fellowship? Again it is a voluntary thing, but during the mornings of most House Parties there is a talk, given either by a visiting speaker, or one of the resident community, and this is often followed by discussion, either on the talk, or other issues of importance to the guests.

We have spoken about the guests, but what sort of people are they that come to Lee Abbey? This is an almost impossible question to answer as the variety is enormous and defies any sort of neat classification. Many come from long distances, and come year after year. A large number come as Christians, of all ages, and nowadays, from all denominations, looking to share in that fellowship for which Lee Abbey is now so well-known. Others come, having heard from a friend about the Community, and they want to experience it for themselves. All who come, whether committed Christians or not, enjoy opportunities of friendship and fellowship in a way for the most part not found elsewhere. They find this too not only in the services, evening epilogues and other 'special occasions' of the week, but wherever they go - on walks, in the dining room, on the beach, or talking informally in the lounge. In human terms it is impossible to say how this comes to be, but it emphasises so clearly how important a place is Lee Abbey in the spiritual renewal of the Church, for often within this free and open atmosphere, new faith is found, or a faith which has dwindled is revived.

No two House Parties are the same. Some weeks are set aside for 'Family House Parties'; more 'specialised' are the clergy schools, when clergy from a particular area or Diocese come together for a week to receive teaching, share in discussion and have fellowship together.

There is also an annual ordinands conference, giving ordinands from the different Theological Colleges, (Free Church as well as Anglican), a chance to share ideas and enjoy stimulating talks and discussions, away from the pressures of their particular academic environment. Other typical titles for House Parties are: 'Worship come alive', 'With the Holy Spirit' - a Whitsuntide House Party, 'Praying and Living', 'A Simpler Lifestyle'. All these and many others show that what goes on at Lee Abbey is closely related to living out the Christian life in the world. Examples of more recent new ideas include the visit of a party of Japanese children, in 1970 and 1971, and a House Party given over to studying and exploring the field of 'The Gospel and the Arts'. The emphasis and the people many change at each House Party, but always at the heart is the Christian Gospel, communicated in a way relevant to the twentieth century. There is a constant concern for the people present, and their personal lives.

An important part of the yearly programme are the student working parties, of which there are usually at least three a year, during the Easter vacation. Here, students from Universities and Colleges throughout the country work during the mornings - either on the estate, or in the house - and have the rest of the day free. They pay only half fees, and thus can afford to combine a holiday with academic work. This working party is often followed by a 'Sixth-form Conference', which has become increasingly popular over the years. Here, 'Communism', 'Christianity and Science', sexual problems, and other important issues to teenagers, are discussed. Much informal discussion takes place, and many young people who have perhaps found intellectual difficulties with Christianity, or problems with the idea of the 'Church', find for the first time, in the Lee Abbey Community, the meaning of faith, and a large number have come to faith as a result of one of these conferences. Naturally, the Community

feel that this communication of the Gospel to young people is one of the most important parts of their work.

During all the House Parties and conferences, the Community carry out their job of running Lee Abbey in all its different aspects. To give them a break and to give an opportunity for catching up on major structural repairs the house shuts down for a month in the autumn and for two weeks in the spring. This also gives a quiet period to the Community before the big Christmas and Easter House Parties descend on Lee Abbey. There is about these festival times a note of joy and triumph which it is difficult to describe. Some words of Jack Winslow, however, may help to describe the effect of a year's programme:

> It is a wonderful thing to look back over such a year at Lee Abbey. A great stream of humanity has passed through our gates; men and women of all ages and conditions of life, and from many lands; a cross-section of human society. They have come with their families, with their friends, or singly. They have come with all their varied hopes and needs, their problems and perplexities, their fears and anxieties, their doubts and their sins. Others have come in the serenity of an assured faith, with the happy expectation of future blessings.(4)

These words could apply equally well to the Lee Abbey 'Youth Camp', which we must look at before leaving this subject of the guests and the programme. The Youth Camp takes place during August each year and caters for young people from the age of sixteen. Though organised from the House it operates entirely separately from what goes on there, in the field overlooking Lee Bay. As with the House Parties, a wide variety of young people come to the Youth Camp, and many respond to the Christian message for the first time, as they hear it put over in a new way, in

the very informal surroundings of camp life. Many lasting friendships also begin here, and year after year familiar faces can be seen. A number 'graduate'from being campers to become assistants to the leader, who is currently the lay Chaplain of the Community.

In recent years the influence of the 'Charismatic movement' has been felt in the Youth Camp. This movement of the Holy Spirit is especially strong wherever there are keen young Christians, and although there has been some criticism of the phenomenon, at Lee Abbey it has deepened and enlivened faith, both in the campers, and the leaders. All over the country youth clubs and fellowships can be found who have derived great spiritual blessing from the Youth Camp, and it seems that 'Charismatic renewal' will continue to play an important part in the Lee Abbey programme.

Jack Winslow has this to say about the effect of a visit to Lee Abbey - whether the Community itself or the Youth Camp:

> If you want outward evidence of what the days at Lee Abbey can effect, look at the faces of the departing guests on any Saturday morning. A week or a fortnight before most of them had come here for the first time, wondering what they would find. Now, as they take their leave and reluctantly board the waiting coaches, there is a new light in many eyes; a look of security and peace in place of worry and strain; and a wealth of happy friendship between people who only a week before had met for the first time.(5)

Much of this is due to the warmth and friendship of the Community members - a warmth and friendship that is the result of a deep understanding of the meaning of Christian fellowship.

As with the guests, so with the Community - it is impossible to put them into any detailed categories. At any one time, they differ greatly

in age, social background, educational attainments, and temperament. This , however, is the beauty of true Christian community - that there is room for everyone, willing to play their part, however small or meagre that part might appear to be. Ordinands, waiting to go to Theological College, can be found among the members; so too can young men and women taking a break between school and university or college, or before starting their particular career. There are men and women who feel the need, for whatever reason, to take time off from their particular occupation, and will benefit in a variety of ways from some time spent at Lee Abbey. Often, too, one finds foreign students among the members of the Community. Many of these have heard of the Community through the International Students' Club in London, which is another branch of Lee Abbey's work. In recent years a number of ex-nuns have joined the Community - people who feel a vocation to living in community, but who can no longer accept what they feel to be the restrictions of the traditional 'religious life' and so seek for it in another form. Within all this, some people are drawn by the type of work in which the Community is involved; others by 'community living' in itself, and others again who are seeking an environment where they find they have some real identity and significance with other people.

It has been said that it is not easy to become a member of the Lee Abbey Community, but it is easy to leave. We have already seen that there has never been a shortage of applications to join the Community, and this has never been more true than at the present time, with the great interest that is being shown in community living. A number of people have to be turned down - either because of unsuitability or because there is no vacancy. No formal qualifications are required to join the Community but rather attention is paid to the character of the people involved. Above all they must be 'convinced Christians', and

in sympathy with the aims and ideals of Lee Abbey. More specifically, on acceptance into the Community the person is required to assent to certain basic commitments:

To accept Christ as Master, and seek to follow Him.

To take time for daily prayer and Bible study.

To attend the weekly Community meeting.

To attend 'Community prayers' each morning in the Chapel.

A general loyalty to the aims and work of the Community.

On the whole individuals are free to work out in their own way a personal rule of life.

A person becomes a full member of the Community after a 'novitiate' usually lasting about three months. This applies equally to the Warden, Chaplains and other 'specialised' posts within the Community. There are no further rules whatever, e.g. on smoking or drinking. However, since Community members (again including the Warden and Chaplains) receive only pocket money, most in fact do not spend it on such luxuries. Furthermore, there is a stress at Lee Abbey, also found in other lay communities, on using all resources in the best possible way. This applies equally to time and talents as much as to money.

In contrast to the older 'traditional' religious communities there are no life, or even long-term vows taken at Lee Abbey. Most people, in fact, are there for comparatively short periods - a few months, to two or three years. However, for the sake of the stability of the Community there is always a core of people who stay for some years. The Warden, for example, is appointed on a five-yearly basis, as are the Lady Warden, the Estate Manager and Chaplains. There are, too, a number of 'ordinary' Community members who choose to commit themselves for a number of years; this proves very valuable to the life of the Community.

It sometimes causes surprise to guests at Lee Abbey that a number of the Community are married. While marriage is still the exception rather than the rule in the Community there are always a small number of married couples. In some cases they are married on arrival; in others they have met as members of the Community and are allowed to stay on after marriage. With more than sixty people of both sexes living at close quarters, relationships can, and do, develop with great rapidity. Sometimes this presents problems, and if two Community members wish to get married and remain in the Community, in order to 'test' this new vocation, (for this is how marriage is seen), one is required to leave the place for a short period. This may seem harsh, but from past experience it has proved to be a necessary precaution. It is sometimes not possible for a couple once married to remain in the Community, simply because of the lack of married accommodation. At present there is room for six married couples with children, this figure including the Warden and Chaplains. Special financial allowances are made for married couples with children so that the children in no way suffer from being part of the Community. The presence of married people and their children greatly enhances the 'family atmosphere' of Lee Abbey. As Donald Bloesch has said:

> Lee Abbey is now the largest mixed Community in Europe, and one of its chief strengths is its variety, flexibility and mobility.(6)

(It would be true to say that the Community of Celebration is now larger in number than Lee Abbey but this Community has different sections to it in different parts of the country as opposed to being resident in one location).

It is probably this area of relationships in general that provides the hardest 'test' for the Community member. To quote from the Community

rule, being part of the Community requires 'complete honesty and love towards one another in a willingness to be known for what we are without pose or unreality; to take and to give constructive criticism; and to say concerning others only what we should be prepared to say if love and wisdom required it'. There is no doubt that at Lee Abbey, as at the other Communities, one does find a degree of honesty, and real love, not often found in the Church. There are, of course, times when relationships break down, but this can never last because there is an overall desire within the Community for reconciliation. Before resurrection there has to be death, and a relationship could well be all the more genuine as a result of having been first 'broken'. The challenging and enriching nature of the life at Lee Abbey is one of the main factors in helping a person to know the full meaning of 'personhood' and 'fulfilment'. All this is only possible, however, when what goes on is 'grounded in love'. Without this love community life would be impossible, and this may serve as a pointer as to why there is often a lack of real fellowship within the Church at large.

Some modern advocates of community life are such because they are tired of the structures, administration and committees which seem to be the lot of most of the established Churches. Such people would be in one sense disappointed with Lee Abbey, for though as we have seen that freedom and flexibility characterise much of the Community's life, yet there is quite a detailed structure to the place, and a good deal of administrative work to be done within it. The Community runs at four levels. First it is a registered company and recognised as a charitable trust, the Trustees meeting as often as necessary to discuss official business. Second, the 'governing body' or as it is known the 'Lee Abbey Council', whose Chairman is at present the Bishop of Stockport, exercises effective authority in Lee Abbey affairs. Membership of this body

consists of the Trustees, the Warden, the Lady Warden, the senior of the two Chaplains, a number of Community members, and various other clergy and lay people. Their job is to deal with any major policy issue, appoint the Warden, Chaplains, and other members of the Community with special responsibilities, e.g. the Estate Manager. As a rule they meet three times a year. Third, there is the Management Committee, which exercises general supervision over the house and estate, sanctions items of expenditure and looks after the day to day running of the place. Fourth, eight of the more senior members of the Community form the 'Chapter' and meet weekly. They help in recruiting new members for the Community, share planning House Parties, the preparation of literature and other essential things. Their meetings are often long, but there is plenty of time in them for thought and prayer. Herein perhaps lies a major reason for the existence of these various levels of operation (including of course the weekly Community meeting, when every member can voice his or her opinion on any issue). At all levels is the desire to find the will of God in any decisions.

As John V. Taylor says:

> The link between prayer and guidance . . . does not consist simply in God's response to man's requests to be shown the right way. Too often the 'Veni Creator' or prayer for guidance with which we like to open our religious conferences and committees scarcely rises above the level of harmless magic or a breaking of the Christians' colours. The night of prayer which preceded Jesus' selection of the twelve apostles was focused, we must surely believe, upon the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory of God, rather than on any short list of candidates. It was communion and submission and adoration, renewing and clarifying the human

> body and mind of Christ, which led, quite incidentally, to that sure knowledge of the next step he had to take in doing his Father's will.(7)

And from the Lee Abbey Story:

> The prayerful seeking of divine guidance, rather than planning by human wisdom, is fundamental to all the work. In this, once again, the value of team work is discovered. For there is always greater assurance that the will of God will be ascertained by a body of Christians waiting upon Him together with one intent, than by any single individual, however inspired. Believing this, we seldom in our deliberations submit anything to the arbitrament of a majority vote, but prefer to seek prayerfully for a common mind, even at the cost of some delay. Experience has shown, time and again, that when some task is undertaken with a united conviction that it is according to the purpose of God, its success is assured. The obstacles in the path are removed, and the needs supplied.(8)

It is this kind of theology of the Holy Spirit to which the whole Church is committed, which is found in the person of Jesus, and in the New Testament Church. But it is so often lacking in the majority of Churches today. Here again, there is a lesson to be learnt from places like Lee Abbey, for what better expression of community could be desired than a common seeking of the will of God? For Lee Abbey this submission to God's guidance is particularly true in matters of finance. The Community is completely self-supporting; over half the income comes from guests' fees, and the rest from the generosity of individuals and groups concerned with the work of Lee Abbey. In fact, well under half the guests pay the full fees, because of the concessions offered to students,

missionaries on leave, clergy and their children. It has been a rule in the Community from the beginning that they should never broadcast appeals for funds, but rather, since this is primarily an adventure of faith, they should wait on God and trust that He would lead them to the right course of action.

This is not to say that there have been no anxious moments in the years since the Community was formed. At the very beginning, a £28,000 mortgage was no small sum to be paid off. This, however, was cleared remarkably quickly, through the generosity of friends. It is remarkable to note too, that within ten years of the Community's taking over Lee Abbey the final burden of the initial outlay had been cleared. In those ten years over £40,000 was received in gifts alone, and this helped not only to pay off the outstanding debts, but also helped meet any new expenditure. In a sense this response to the Community's needs was a token and sign of God's blessing on the work of Lee Abbey. There is obviously a continued need for such giving, as all the time improvements are being made to the premises. A new residential block was built in the mid-1960s, and more recently still new kitchens have been constructed, (much of the work being done by the Community themselves) to meet the needs of the ever-increasing numbers of guests; this in addition to all the routine maintenance of a large house and Estate.

A great deal of help, both financial, and in other ways, has been received over the years, from the body of people known as the 'Lee Abbey friends'. From the beginning there have been a number of visitors to Lee Abbey who have wanted to keep in touch with the Community and its work. So it was that the 'Friends of Lee Abbey' came into existence - the equivalent perhaps of a 'third order' found in the traditional religious communities. To begin with this was a fairly loosely organised group of people, with no particular 'conditions' or requirements stated,

but over the years, numbers increased and it seemed necessary to define more clearly the nature and purpose of this body, three things being felt to be essential. Firstly, 'Friends' must be, like the Community, 'fully committed to Christ and ready to obey His commands'. Secondly, 'they must be prepared to win others for Christ through the witness of their lives and personal testimony'. And thirdly, 'they should be prepared to pray regularly for the work of Lee Abbey, and for revival in the Church'. Coupled with this was the decision to change the name from 'Friends of Lee Abbey', to 'Lee Abbey Friends'. This might seem a rather pedantic change, but it is quite significant. The original name implied that the primary concern of these people was Lee Abbey, rather than Lee Abbey's contribution to the Church. This went against the basic reasons for Lee Abbey's existence - to serve others and not to exist for its own sake. So the people who were 'Friends', should first and foremost be ready to serve Christ in the wider fellowship of the Church, otherwise the danger might arise that Lee Abbey came to be seen as some new sect, withdrawing people from allegiance to their Church, whatever and wherever that might be. Thus, the name was changed, emphasising quite clearly that they are:

Friends of Christ (and of one another in Christ),
linked with Lee Abbey.(9)

In addition to this change of name, it was decided to have a service of admission of Lee Abbey Friends at the end of each House Party, and it was quickly found that this helped deepen the meaning and quality of the Fellowship.

There were other people who like the 'Friends' were concerned to maintain contact with the Community, but who did not feel able to make the Friends' commitment and for these the 'Associates of Lee Abbey' was created.

The number of Friends is now well over 10,000, mostly living in England, but also found in many other parts of the world. Friends'

occupations vary as much as their locality - some are engaged in full-time Christian work; others are in secular employment, seeking to live out their Christian lives within that sphere, and often playing a significant part in the life of their local Church. Their contribution both to Lee Abbey and the wider Church is impossible to measure but there can be little doubt of its significance.

In 1961 the Chapter of Friends was held at Lee Abbey to enable the Council, Community and Friends to see the direction for the future developing work. Five hundred men and women met for a week of prayer and discussion, and as a direct result of this week the Lee Abbey International Students Club in London was opened in 1964. Three separate hotels in the South Kensington area were purchased for just under £250,000, which could provide accommodation for 180 students. In 1967 two further houses were bought, one providing much needed accommodation for married students. This has raised the student number to about 220 approximately 80% of whom come from overseas and the rest are from the United Kingdom. The British Council provided more than half the capital involved, the rest coming from Lee Abbey Friends and people with a particular concern for this new venture. To quote from Lee Abbey - a Venture of Faith:

> The Club is run on the same basis, and with the same aims as Lee Abbey itself, though the methods and means of approach are obviously very different. The members of the Community who are responsible for the work find themselves constantly involved in inter-race, inter-faith and inter-denominational discussion. There are about thirty members of the Community in London, including the Warden and two families with young children. Great help is given by half-a-dozen Associate members of the Community who live in the Club, and do their normal jobs

outside. In their spare time they give themselves unstintingly to the work of the Club as do a large number of Lee Abbey Friends and members of local Churches who come to help in the evenings.(10)

The Club is under the same Council as Lee Abbey itself, but is given a necessary amount of autonomy in decision-asking, and the day-to-day running of the place. A number of people have been concerned that in recent years the life and work of the Club has been growing away from Lee Abbey itself, and that perhaps it ought to become an entirely separate body. However, this is not a majority opinion, and many feel that it is an important and valuable extension of the work in Devon, and also if it were to become separate, this would put an end to the interchange of personnel between the two centres, which, though not great in number, is nonetheless felt to be valuable.

We now come to the point of assessing the work and significance of Lee Abbey, particularly in its contribution to the wider Church. Some points have already been made on this subject, and these must now be elaborated further.

We begin with the theological orientation of the Community. The fact that the Community has never aligned itself with any party within the Church is one of great significance. In the last twenty-five years there has been an increasing 'coming together' of Catholic and Evangelical and a greater willingness to learn from the other, rather than to criticise from a distance. There are some who have felt that their particular positions were being compromised as a result - and Lee Abbey has not been without its critics in this sphere. There are those, too, who feel the evangelical thrust of the Community has been lost as a result of such openness to other traditions but there are far more who feel that much has been gained by such contacts and dialogue. Very recently, the present

Warden, the Rev, John Perry, organised a Conference entitled 'Rebuilding the Church together', with well-known speakers from both the Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical wings of the Church. Anyone criticising Lee Abbey for such developments fails to realise that one of the fundamental principles behind the venture was and is 'a greater spiritual depth in the life of the Church', and in order to further this it is essential to appreciate and learn the meaning both of 'evangelical pietism and catholic mysticism'. The main thrust of Lee Abbey however, is still 'Evangelical', in the best non-party sense of the word, but the 'Catholic' side is never far away, influenced both by traditional English and other spirituality. (The contents of the library bear this out very well.) The work of Little Gidding, as at Pilsdon, is highly regarded as an example of community living. Also, relations have been cultivated with The Mirfield Fathers, the Franciscans and other religious orders and lay communities. Add to this links with the University and Colleges Christian Fellowship and other similar groups, and some idea of the attempt to appreciate all traditions in the Church is clearly seen.

No account of Lee Abbey and its function and role in the Church would be complete without reference to Jack Winslow, author of The Lee Abbey Story, and numerous other devotional and spiritual works. He has often been referred to as the 'Lee Abbey theologian'. Having received most of his training under high churchmen he worked for many years in India, alongside two of the men who were largely responsible for the revival of the Franciscan order within the Church of England. Later he came under the influence of the Oxford Group, (as did Roger de Pemberton, the first Warden of Lee Abbey), and this period added, as it were, the strong Evangelical side to his theology. In a way this combination of theological ideas is a good example of what Lee Abbey stands for. In the Community itself there is no conflict between people of different

'persuasions', including both Anglicans and Free Church people. Conversion is talked about, and preached, alongside a strong sacramental emphasis. Free prayer and liturgical prayer are held together without any apparent conflict:

> We might say that the Lee Abbey Community is characterised by a world-affirming asceticism since victorious Christian living is linked with rigorous self-discipline - The dominant eschatological note is 'realised eschatology', the abundant life is believed to be in the here and now.(11)

But is this 'abundant life' spoken of above, false and unreal? This is an accusation made in some quarters both within and outside the Church, not only about Lee Abbey, but about any attempt at 'community living'. Is it escapism, representing a refusal to face things as they really are? Such a viewpoint betrays a picture of community life that is totally unrelated to the facts as seen at Lee Abbey. It is sometimes said that it is easier to be a Christian in a religious community. In one sense this can of course be true, but, experience has shown that people who have spent some time in the Community are often better equipped to live out their lives as Christians in the 'ordinary' world. Lee Abbey is not seeking to withdraw people from the world; it is very much 'in the world', constantly coming into contact with people and their joys and sorrows, either within the Community itself, or in the guests who come week by week. It is no easy life because of the amount of work that the Community have to do. Most of them do a minimum of forty-eight hours a week, with one-and-a-half days off per week. However, it is not uncommon for someone to spend extra time working in a different 'department' if they are especially busy. But although the work is hard and sometimes strenuous, it is rewarding, mainly because it is always seen in terms of teamwork, rather than an individual doing a particular

job, without reference to anyone else. This, together with the 'family atmosphere' of Lee Abbey, all goes towards the building up of community life so central to its purpose.

The third main contribution of Lee Abbey to the Church, is the renewal of life in the parishes and people with whom it comes in contact. It is not easy to make any assessment of this but it is possible to try. Apart from the benefits, spiritual and otherwise, that a person can receive through a stay at Lee Abbey, the Community themselves go out from Lee Abbey to work in parishes and churches all over the country. Sometimes teams run 'training weekends' in the Christian faith for up to thirty people; in other cases they may lead a parish weekend for a larger number of people. At least twice a year larger teams go from Lee Abbey into a parish for ten days for a full-scale mission. In addition to the time spent in the mission, this requires considerable preparation and follow-up. These contacts with clergy and parishes are vital to those central aims to which we have referred - greater spiritual depth in the life of the Church, and the communication of the Christian message to contemporary society. Many clergy seem to be rather confused as to their role both within the Church, and in the wider society. Such a visit from a number of keen Christians usually led by the Warden or one of the Chaplains can often bring back a lost vision of what can be achieved. Or an over-worked clergyman has sometimes become spiritually 'stale' and lacking in deep Christian fellowship. A visit to or from Lee Abbey can often help here.

There is much talk today about 'lay participation' in the Church, and Lee Abbey, in its life and witness, is a living example of what can be achieved. So often, it seems, people can come to understand what 'lay participation' is all about as a result of a visit to or contact with Lee Abbey. They catch something of the vision of what is possible if

they are prepared to surrender themselves to God in the work of extending His Kingdom.

> Hundreds of those who have found a quickening of their faith at Lee Abbey during the past decade have brought fresh inspiration and life into their churches on their return . . . While Lee Abbey continues to be a spiritual power-house at the heart of the work we can see in prospect an ever-growing army of men and women going forth revitalised, trained and equipped for service, continually winning fresh recruits for Christ.(12)

Not only this, but contact with Lee Abbey helps in an awareness of people as a whole; that no one should ever be taken for granted; that the Christian message can speak to the most unlikely people. In short, 'vision' is at the heart of the example which Lee Abbey sets; that 'with God all things are possible'.

When Lee Abbey first began, the idea was of a centre for the purpose of evangelism and lay training, and calling themselves a 'Community'.

> Today the emphasis has changed. The value of community life in its own right has been recognised, and the fact that this witness is most effectively made by a Community which is consciously aware of its own identity.(13)

Community life for its own sake is now much more highly thought of in many circles. But if this was all there was to Lee Abbey then it would run the risk of becoming introverted and possibly cease to exist. There is really nothing new in the message that is presented at Lee Abbey, and yet it seems to make an impact where so many churches and Christian organisations seem to be on the decline. It is enough to say that Lee Abbey is one of the many new manifestations of the Spirit abroad today, and is ignored or passed by only at peril. It forms a significant part

of the recovery of New Testament Christianity that so many are searching for at the present time, and it seems it will long continue to play its part in the renewal of the Church and the preaching of the Christian message to a needy world.

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CHAPTER 4

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THE PILSDON COMMUNITY

In the Bulletin Community, published by 'One for Christian Renewal', can be found an account of the development of the current Community movement, both in this country and abroad. In addition to the two Communities we have looked at so far, recent developments include the women's Community at Witney, the Brotherhood at the old Wesley Manse, Notting Hill, and the group at Ringsfield Hall, Suffolk - all beginning to get under way and make their contribution to the life of the Church. One of the more recently founded and yet well-established communities is that of Pilsdon, situated in the heart of Dorset, there providing both a place of quiet and retreat, and more importantly a place of rehabilitation.

The origins of Pilsdon can be traced back as far as 1950, though the actual Community did not come into being until 1958. Percy and Gaynor Smith, on leave from Hong Kong, where they were working in the Anglican Church, read A. L. Maycock's account of the Community at Little Gidding set up in 1625 by Nicholas Ferrar. This unique story, has, as we have seen, intrigued many in the subsequent three centuries; they have been fascinated by the fact that a successful and brilliant business-man and Member of Parliament, should have given up all wordly ambition to bury himself in the country, and found this small family community.

This story of Little Gidding remained vivid in the minds of the Smiths, and when they returned to England in 1954 they wanted somehow to use this seventeenth century experiment as the basis of something similar suited to twentieth century needs. There were few non-monastic communities in existence in England at that time, so they were treading new ground and acting in faith. Percy Smith was appointed Rector of

Hawkchurch, in Devon, some six miles from Pilsdon in that same year. The vision of a Community remained, and four years later in 1958 it began to be realised when the Manor House and grounds at Pilsdon came up for sale. Here was a place like Little Gidding where the Christian faith could be lived out in community, a place that could give to people who needed it a breathing space, in the rush and turmoil of twentieth century urban life. (It was strange too that even the church at Pilsdon bore an extraordinary resemblance to that at Little Gidding.) How the money could be raised was as yet unsolved, but in the conviction that they were doing God's will, on 16th October, 1958 the Manor House, a few acres of land, and a small cottage, were bought for £5,000.

Percy Smith wrote a letter in October 1958, stating what he felt to be the ideals and objectives of the Community at that time:

> It is at Pilsdon that we are planning a small community of men and women, accepting voluntarily what many might call poverty, and dedicated to the ideals of the Gospel and the original Little Gidding - a life of simplicity cast within the framework of the ordered loveliness of the Anglican liturgy.
>
> In the twelve years of my ministry I have constantly been made aware of the number of people who feel unwanted and hide a loneliness that few suspect. We shall attempt to offer unconditional friendship to all who come, however defeated and broken and near the end of their tether they may be, accepting people as they are and then, by sharing in the life and work and worship of the Community, for weekends or longer, we hope that healing will take place. We hope too that barriers of class and race will be broken down, as men and women work and worship in complete equality.

> The educated will learn not to feel superior to the uneducated, and the man who works with his hands will feel on the same level as the man who works with his head, and the colour of one's skin will not matter at all. Students of all nationalities will be welcome, and during the summer children from industrial cities will spend holidays at Pilsdon. Men and women suffering from over-strain will find in the Community a temporary retreat from the claims and clamours of ordinary life. Above all, we hope there will always be visitors who come for no other reason than to share in the life of a twentieth century Little Gidding.
>
> . . . We should like to think that over the years these words from an inscription on the lamp that guides patients up the river to Albert Schweitzer's hospital in Africa may be true in some measure of what we at Pilsdon are striving after: 'Here at all times of the day and night, is light and help and human kindness.'(1)

Work began immediately on getting the house into some sort of order. It was a Jacobean Manor house, and was generally fairly sound. Much help came in this work from many different quarters - from Hawkchurch and the neighbouring towns and villages, from a number of theological students and of course from those who made up the Community in those early days. Apart from such working parties came many gifts of furniture, bedding, crockery, and numerous cheques, notes and postal orders. It was remarkable that such a large house could be furnished from the homes of men and women, most of whom lived within a radius of ten miles. This made the Community certain of one thing - that because of the over-whelming trust and faith shown in the venture they had to try harder than ever to live both responsibly and simply.

The first pioneering stage was over by the end of 1958; the house was simply but adequately furnished and made habitable; the garden had been dug over and planted; hedges had been cut, and work was beginning on the orchards and greenhouse. In addition, some of the outbuildings had to be prepared for conversion into living quarters for the Community and their guests. The Smiths actually moved into Pilsdon in January 1959, but already there were two Community members living there - one had been a teacher and the other was a first-class cook who had for some time been looking for an opportunity to live out her life in a community. From the beginning too, one of the ideals outlined in the letter above, was achieved - two students, one an Indian and the other an Italian, came to stay with the Community and helped in many ways to further its work.

By February 1959 there were twelve people living at Pilsdon, and four more actually joined the Community during that year - one was a trained engineer recently retired, another an Oxford graduate in English, who had also had some experience of farming, and the third had done a considerable amount of work with students in London. The fourth person to come and join the Community in 1959 was probably the most remarkable of all, for he was a spastic who originally came simply for a short rest, and yet proved himself so invaluable that he was asked if he would care to stay and join the Community. This he did, and from that time on has exercised a great influence on all who have stayed there. He is a man willing to turn his hand to anything, and has succeeded in a most extraordinary way in coping with a great disability. There were no further additions to the permanent members of the Community until 1966, and from then until the early 1970s the membership remained unchanged. Many ask the reason for this policy when other developments in community life have had very flexible rules of membership, with people who

are nevertheless full Community members, e.g. at Lee Abbey. It was felt, however, that with Pilsdon existing for a somewhat different purpose, a different rule of commitment was required. Many of the people who came to Pilsdon were in need of stability and security, and with too many changes in the Community, this stability could not be achieved. There are no actual vows as such, but rather what is described as a 'long term commitment' - thus virtually all the original members of the Community are still there. Many have asked to join the Community, particularly from among those who have stayed there over the years, but this has not been seen to be suitable in the vast majority of cases.

Although there are no actual vows, in many ways the life at Pilsdon contains the spirit of monasticism in its ideal. Poverty is practised, in that members of the Community receive no salary or wages, and they share all goods in common with each other and the guests. As for obedience, the Community meet together regularly to discuss and pray about a variety of issues concerning the life of the Community, and decisions are made democratically. However, it is felt necessary that one person should have the final authority and the overall responsibility - that person being Percy Smith himself.

Percy and Gaynor Smith are at the time of writing the only 'permanent' members of the Community who are married, but there are no rules forbidding members of the Community to marry, nor excluding people from membership. Flexibility is required in such matters, and in the true Pilsdon tradition each situation would be faced as it arose.

In general it seems that communities which have an ordered overall structure, usually adhere to a similar line of religious discipline. Pilsdon, a Community with a 'traditional' type of organisation has a rhythm of worship which closely resembles that of the traditional monastic pattern.

From the beginning the aim of a 'life of simplicity cast within the framework of the ordered loveliness of the Anglican liturgy' means that the worship has formed the framework around which the rest of the day fits. The pattern is usually: Matins and Holy Communion at 7.30 a.m., breakfast at 8.00 a.m., household chores until 9.30 a.m., intercessions at 1.00 p.m., lunch at 1.15 p.m., tea at 4.30 p.m., Evensong at 6.30 p.m., supper at 7.00 p.m., and finally Compline at 9.15 p.m. There are two important differences, however, between this and the more traditional monastic pattern: the services are very informal and fairly short, and they are in no sense compulsory. The Community are there as often as possible, for they see the meeting together for worship as the mainspring for all that happens at Pilsdon. Though the house is now firmly established, the Community is still seen as a venture of faith, and thus a sense of dependence on God is acknowledged. The services are generally led by Percy Smith, and though at first, some may find it unnerving to find him coming in straight from milking the cows, to leading the intercessions, this only serves to strengthen the emphasis at Pilsdon that all work done there is God's work, whether it be in the Chapel or in the field, or in the kitchens. It is the monastic 'Opus Dei' being put into practice.

The pattern of worship at weekends, particularly on Sundays is slightly different. At the beginning of this chapter it was noted that one of the extraordinary similarities between Pilsdon and the seventeenth century Little Gidding was the little Church that lay just outside the grounds of the Manor House. This in fact comes into its own at weekends, for it still serves as a Parish Church, as well as being a reasonable sized building in which the Community and friends can meet for larger occasions of worship. The Church has in fact been largely restored by the Community since they have been in operation, and it is now a

delightfully open and light building. There are usually two services on a Sunday - Holy Communion at 8.00 a.m. and Evensong at 6.30 p.m. The Church is always packed for this service, with friends from all over the neighbourhood as well as people staying at the House, and local residents. There is a joyous note about this service, the singing of which is usually led by a group of singers made up of guests at the House, trained by Gaynor Smith. Obviously, with much coming and going the number of singers varies enormously, but apart from anything else, it seems to be of some therapeutic value to have some of the guests joining in this activity. As with everything at Pilsdon, no-one is forced to be part of this worship if they do not wish to be. If one of the aims of the Community was unconditional friendship, demanding nothing in return, then this is certainly something that has been achieved.

To quote again from a letter written from the Community in October 1960, when the Community was just two years old:

> We have come to realise also that prayer is not time taken off from work, nor is work an interruption in a life of prayer, but work finds inspiration in prayer and prayer finds expression in work. Thus the rhythm is established of ordered work and worship from the bell for Matins until Compline last thing at night, reminding us that we get most out of life and give most to life if what we do is orderly, in contrast to our natural temptation to do things only when we feel like it and to help one another when we feel like it. Again and again we fail in our resolutions. On the other hand, resolutions are no good unless we are prepared to find them broken and to renew them every day.[2]

We have looked in some detail at the lives of the permanent members of the Community, but they only form a third of the structure, the other

two thirds being the guests, and the visitors. While all are accounted equal at Pilsdon, there is a need to distinguish the categories of guest and visitor. The guest is the person who comes to Pilsdon in some situation of difficulty, or needing to take a break from his or her everyday life. These people stay for varying periods of time, anything from a few days to several months, and even more in some cases. The visitors are people who for varying reasons come to share in the life of a twentieth century Little Gidding. To quote from a letter written at Christmas, 1962:

> We often wish you could all be our guests for at least one meal . . . You would look round and wonder who was who, and if you hazarded a guess you would almost certainly be wrong! - and in that lies our success. At Pilsdon a man's past is dead. For God's sake, let it die.(3)

This is the principle on which Pilsdon is run, and it is up to a guest himself whether he chooses to reveal his past to the other people at Pilsdon. For the most part there is a great openness among the people staying there at any one time - this is all part of the fundamental principle of acceptance which characterises the Community. However, what sort of people find their way to Pilsdon? Is there any particular social grouping found there which is dominant? These and other such questions must occupy our attention now.

The background characteristics of the guests vary enormously and it is impossible to give any sort of statistical answer to this question. However, although it is true that a person's past is not enquired into, nevertheless it is possible to see that certain groups of guests associate together, especially in their leisure time. This is not to say that there are actual class barriers, but that for example the ex-Army officer perhaps does not always find it easy to mix with the student. However, it is noticeable that the longer a person stays there, the easier he finds

it to overcome such barriers. Certainly, in the work they are given to do, no distinction is made as to background - unless a person has a particular talent that can be made use of in the Community. So, to continue our example of the ex-Army officer, he will as likely be found digging the gardens, or helping in the preparation of a meal, as reading in the library. The Community believe that no work is too mean for anyone to tackle, and in quite a number of cases it is an inability to keep a job for one reason or another that causes a person to come to Pilsdon in the first place.

What then are the problems of the people who come to Pilsdon? Certain areas of need and difficulty are clearly represented. There are the people known as 'gentlemen of the road', men who have either no family or specific commitment in life; there are people who have been in some kind of trouble with the Police, and who have in consequence been rejected by their family and/or society at large. Many of these have turned to alcohol as a way of escape, and thus their problem is increased. Often these people hear about Pilsdon from someone else who has stayed there, and they come either hoping for a permanent solution to their problem, whatever form that may take, or perhaps more frequently, for an oasis, a breathing space in the wilderness of their lives. They make their way to Pilsdon, and if there is room, and if they are prepared to play a part, however small, in the Community, then they will be made welcome. A factor that sometimes prevents those with alcoholic difficulties from coming to Pilsdon is the condition that while they are there they do not consume any alcohol. This 'rule' extends over the rest of the Community also, though other guests are allowed to go out of the premises if they wish to drink alcohol. Naturally this 'rule' is broken when a person who has a craving for drink can hold out no longer, but if it is discovered, a serious warning is given and if it continues to happen the

person is asked to leave. In some ways this may seem rather harsh but experience has proved it to be necessary. Also, if a person is asked to leave and they reappear some time later, they will not necessarily be refused a place at Pilsdon; in fact people with alcohol problems are among the most numerous to return.

One of the great problems of this present age is that of drug addiction in its many and varied forms. At Pilsdon a number of addicts and ex-addicts can often be found. As is the case with alcohol, so with drugs, if a person wishes to come to Pilsdon they have to be prepared to give up the habit; if a person's past is to be counted as dead, then this real break must be made. In some cases it is insisted that a person gives up drugs even before they get there. Again, like the alcoholics, if the drug addict were to get hold of some drugs while there, the effects could be disastrous on the Community as a whole. Of course, as with so many problems, the underlying reason for drug addiction often takes a good deal of finding out, but in the accepting atmosphere of Pilsdon they are at least given a chance to begin this process.

Other needs among the guests found at Pilsdon include people who have sexual difficulties. Some have been in trouble with the Police, others have simply been rejected because they do not conform to the 'norm'. Percy Smith stresses with great vigour the fact that a definition of normality is very difficult to find and in many cases, a measure of understanding and Christian love is often all that is needed. Pilsdon has now acquired such a good reputation with the authorities, that often they will automatically get in contact with Pilsdon if it is thought to be the right place for a particular person with such a need.

These are examples of the more 'obvious' and 'society-rejecting' kind of difficulties found in people staying at Pilsdon. Many people come, however, who have not actually committed any kind of crime, or have

not been rejected by society; these are the people who simply cannot cope with life. They may be the victims of broken marriages, or have had a nervous breakdown, or have been bereaved, and are unable to adjust accordingly and face the future. A solution to their difficulties may be harder to achieve than in some of the other cases. One might even find some there who are afraid of people, the recluses of this world, who because of this cannot find a job, or anyone with whom to be friends. Gently but firmly these people are encouraged to play their part in the life of the Community, making their own particular contribution, and hopefully being enabled to see that they are able to make a contribution to society as a whole. This point is well-illustrated from a letter written from Pilsdon in October 1959, but which still applies now:

> There is always plenty of work to do, and all the work is part of each person's contribution to the Community. No-one is paid for it, none of it is done solely for profit and it is this sense of giving to the Community that plays such an important part in our lives. There are many whose loyalty to any Community has been spoilt, either by a poor start in life, or by doing something which turns the face of society against them. Yet such people still have the right to be accepted.
>
> We all find that work if it is to be continuous and persevering requires a disciplined obedience, so that there is also a strict and firm side to the Community life as well as 'light and help and human kindness', and this some find hard to take.[4]

All this seems to show that the visitor's impression of Pilsdon being simply a way of temporary escape for people with problems, and for the Community an ideal way of life is quickly dispelled, as they see the

tensions and frustrations, as well as the joys of the Community. It is impossible with such a variety of people there that there should not be tensions. At Pilsdon it is impossible not to begin to face up to one-self. Many in fact leave after a very short period of time, for it is reckoned that a person will know within about three days if he can stand the openness and honesty of life there. The visitor too who comes to Pilsdon either as a student or a person wanting a breathing space between jobs, or the clergyman who comes for a holiday or a break from parish life, will find that he too has to face up to himself and accept that he too is a 'prodigal' in his own particular way. It is impossible to be a spectator at Pilsdon and really understand what is going on there. The person who is prepared to get to know and work with the guests, even though he may only stay there a few days, will find a great sense of fulfilment.

We have looked at a number of the people and the kinds of problems that are found at Pilsdon, and though their outward characteristics and circumstances may be vastly different, underneath they are all in the same position, feeling in their different ways a sense of frustration at the way the world has treated them, feeling unable to cope with life as it has affected them. There is perhaps one exception in this, however, and this is in those people who have formerly been members of a Religious Order of Community, who come to Pilsdon. As we have already noted there is a crisis of vocation in some orders at the present time. A significant number of such people have come to Pilsdon. They come either because having been in a Community for some years, they are rather at a loss as to what to do, or how to go about starting life again in the 'outside world'. Or, as in some recent cases, they are looking for some kind of way of living in community without the restrictions that they feel the Religious Order has placed on them. This is particularly so in the case

of one person who was not only a member of a Religious Order, but the Reverend Mother. She had been in the Community for more than twenty years and for most of that time had found fulfilment in her particular role which was looking after elderly people, and doing a certain amount of administrative work in the Community. She began to feel that the work she was doing could be done equally well, if not better, without some of the restrictions of the order. She saw the value of community life, but also saw some of the falseness of it in the order, and to her regret some of the corruption that was present. All this came to a head when she was elected Reverend Mother - against her wishes. She was not in a position to refuse, the only alternative being to leave the order. She was persuaded to take the post for a trial period, but after about eighteen months, she saw that for her own sake and the sake of the order she would have to abandon her vows and leave the Community. After so many years this was a very difficult decision to make, but if she was to be honest with herself, it had to be made. A friend had told her about Pilsdon some time before, and as she had been there herself it seemed to be a suitable place to go. Naturally, the emotional strain was great and she was unwell for some time, but in due course she recovered and it seemed right that she should become a full member of the Community, where she now is responsible for much of the administration. There have been others who have wanted to follow in her footsteps, and their suitability as members of the Community has been considered, but so far no-one else in that situation has been accepted on a permanent basis. In a number of such cases it appears that the person is simply wanting the support of a community, and if this is so their contribution is likely to be limited. Perhaps the answer for those people leaving Religious Orders, but still wanting some kind of community life, will lie in a new scheme of temporary membership which Pilsdon are considering.

Having looked at the kind of people that make up Pilsdon, we ought to look briefly at other aspects of the work done there. As was indicated above there is no distinction in the work in which people are involved. Apart from the routine work involved in running the house and gardens, such activities as carpentry, pottery, making nets, baking items to be sold in a nearby market and making music, are open to all who wish to be involved in them. Again, following the trend of so many of the new communities, Pilsdon in no way exists for its own sake, but makes a contribution to the life of the area as a whole. The pottery work is a comparatively new development, but the standard of workmanship is improving all the time, and articles are sold to the many people who come to Pilsdon whether for a few days, or just on a day trip. This is a very important side to the work of the Community, for the people involved can see the results of their work, and perhaps through that begin to see the contribution they have to make in the world at large. In making music, Gaynor Smith has taken her choir all over the area, and many people have been given pleasure by the 'Pilsdon Singers'.

In one sense it would be easy to say that Pilsdon was a 'success story' in that people are helped, sometimes permanently and sometimes at least temporarily, also a success in that a number of very different people making up the Community manage and have managed to live together seeking to do God's will for over twenty years. This, however, is to take a very superficial view of what Pilsdon is and seeks to do. Another letter from the Community has this to say:

> Are you succeeding? This is a question often asked, and is not easily defined - "we touch but the fringes of His ways". We make many mistakes. We have our full quota of sins, 'pride, hatred, envy, malice and all uncharitableness', yet it is right to be here, trying to say 'yes' to the will of God.(5)

This answer might not satisfy the statistician, trying to evaluate the percentage of people who derive help from Pilsdon, but it seems it is the only honest answer that can be given. To do the will of God in a given situation is a demanding objective, but it is certainly what is attempted. Also, what interests many people about Pilsdon is in fact of little interest to those who actually live there. We looked earlier at the sort of people that find their way to Pilsdon, but it has to be realised that these 'labels' are very limited in what they say about a person. So often only the outside of a person is seen, and what is important, is that meeting at a deeper level, in the sharing in the 'inside' of another person's life - when the defences are down and vulnerability creeps in. It is this kind of honesty, so absent from life today, that Pilsdon can help bring out in a person. It is something the Church at large needs to learn more about - how to care for those who have lost their way in the maze of modern life, those who suffer from tension of one kind and another, those who are frustrated in a seemingly fruitless search for significance. At Pilsdon a person counts. This is, if one is needed, a good enough reason for its existence, indeed its 'success'.

Does the life at Pilsdon, however, build up a false sense of security in a person, only to be shattered when they once more return to their particular way of life? Like other similar ventures, it has been accused of being too supportive and protective. Obviously it is difficult for the Community to keep a balance in this, and mistakes are made. There is no easy solution and the Community are always willing to admit an element of failure. From another letter comes this comment:

> Failure comes when a man leaves Pilsdon to face once more loneliness and the feeling, however mistaken, of not being wanted or accepted anywhere. Our failure is that we

> unwittingly create too great self-confidence by inviting a man to share in a life here that is full and free, only to see him when he leaves after a few weeks, struggling once again in the deep and knowing that he cannot swim.[6]

Nevertheless, it is still a fact that many who are defeated and broken in the outside world are able to cope with themselves and the demands made on them, through being at Pilsdon. Part of the reason for this must be that life at Pilsdon is structured and orderly - everything has its appointed hour; in addition this structured life is set within the context of a great deal of space, where people can work at their own speed without the pressures of a conveyor belt or particular targets to be achieved. It is interesting that people do accept willingly what there is to be done, and offer to do work without being asked. This is probably due in large measure to the example set by the Community themselves.

Pilsdon, like Little Gidding, was the idea of one man and his family. Most communities, formed at the present time, are likewise the idea of one person, or perhaps a small group of people. Pilsdon can perhaps be criticised on this, in that although it began as one man's idea, it ought not now, after a number of years, be so dependent on that one man. It is noticeable that Pilsdon takes on quite a different atmosphere when Percy Smith is not present. He himself admits that Pilsdon probably has become too dependent on him. Of course this raises too the question of what will happen when he dies or is no longer able to play his part in the Community. His only answer is that his thoughts are not so far ahead, and that his most important concern must be for the present. The answer may perhaps lie in getting another married priest there, who can take some of his work, and also prepare the Community for any changes in the future. He is not, however, prepared even to give the Community that sort of length of existence. Again we see the thinking about a

community as meeting particular needs at a particular time. If Pilsdon is no longer able to meet such needs, then it will cease to exist, and it will have done its job. This last point is very important, and shows how much the newer developments in community life differ from the more traditional ones, where such flexibility is generally impossible.

In conclusion, it seems appropriate to quote from another Pilsdon publication (1972):

> Pilsdon _is_ a religious Community in the deepest sense, concerned primarily with discovering the will of God, and trying to do it. Not everyone who lives here is an Anglican, but we are concerned to build up a creative life, where people are bound together in a relationship of work and voluntary prayer.
>
> Whether or not community life at Pilsdon is substantially helping men and women to cope with the outside work when they leave is a moot point, and certainly it is very questionable whether this should ever be regarded as a criterion of success. There are some who have left Pilsdon and are finding their feet in ordinary jobs. This is particularly true when these jobs are nearby, and they can return to Pilsdon at weekends. But for others Pilsdon is above all else a place of return, when humanly speaking they have again been unable to cope with the demands and pressures and the loneliness of ordinary life. Yet if there are some who cannot cope with the outside world, there are others who can never cope with life in community. In this setting 'a raw nerve is exposed', and people living at close quarters have to accept the truth about themselves and others, which for some is unacceptable. Thus,

paradoxically, to some life in community seems an escape from the realities of life, whilst to those committed to it, it is the very reverse.(7)

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CHAPTER 5

(1) Percy and Gaynor Smith, Towards Life Together - Letters from Community (Lyme Regis Printing Company, 1963) pp. 1, 2.

(2) Ibid, p. 22.

(3) Ibid, p. 33.

(4) Ibid, p. 12.

(5) Ibid, p. 33.

(6) Ibid, p. 33.

(7) Canon C. P. Smith, Pilsdon (Creed, Bridport 1972) pp. 6, 7.

THE WAY AHEAD

We have looked at the background to the development of non-monastic Christian community living, and at the three communities of this study; we move now to some assessment of these developments and what they are saying to the Church at large. In the end, this 'Community movement' over the last thirty-five years, appears to be a sign that the Spirit of God is brooding over the chaotic waters of this present age, bringing to individuals and small groups within the Church help where there has been a sense of failure, and confidence where there has been despair or a crisis of identity and purpose.

We have considered three communities which could be said by now to be 'well-established', and which have in their different ways made a great contribution to the life of the Church. There are of course many others, some small, others large, some apparently significant, others appearing to make very little contribution to the Church as a whole. David Clark in his book Basic Communities(1) lists over one hundred and seventy 'basic communities and networks'. These range from the kind of communities of our study, to much more loosely-knit groups. Some are explicitly Christian, while others more like agencies for social and political change, with a Christian basis. Many are too new to make any realistic assessment at this stage, but it is worth mentioning some of the ventures which have come to our notice, and which bear some relationship to the three with which we have been particularly concerned.

The development of the Scargill Community, near Skipton in Yorkshire, has been very similar to that of Lee Abbey, though on a smaller scale. There was felt to be a need in the north of England for a place similar in its aims to Lee Abbey, and in 1959, fourteen people

formed the nucleus of a Community. That number has risen in recent years to about thirty, with over five thousand associates and friends all over the world. For some the Community provides a family holiday in an atmosphere of Christian fellowship; for others it is a retreat centre; and for still others it is a place to discuss and share the relevance of the Christian faith today. Like Lee Abbey, it has a mixture of 'long term' and 'short term' Community members.

Not far from the Pilsdon Community is the 'Barnabas Fellowship' at Whatcombe House, near Blandford Forum, Dorset. The full story of this 'experience in Community' is told by John Gunstone in The Beginnings at Whatcombe.[2] This opened as a Conference Centre in 1972. The vision was of a small Community whose life together was rooted in prayer, and who would encourage other members of the Church through conference and other similar gatherings. It is Anglican based, but very much ecumenical in its approach, and is also closely linked with the 'Charismatic movement' within the Church. Many of its conferences are thus concerned with the person and work of the Holy Spirit. There has been a link with Pilsdon, and members of that Community gave much help and advice, particularly in the early stages of its life. Although much smaller than Lee Abbey, one can see immediately the same idea of a community-based conference centre, catering for all ages, providing also a place for retreat and renewal. Like Pilsdon, the commitment of the Community members at Whatcombe House is, in the main, 'long term'.

We have noted earlier the great contribution made by Nicholas Ferrar at Little Gidding, to the life of the Church at that period and indeed subsequently, and it is interesting to discover that in recent years once again there is a family-based Community living there, including a clergyman who is also Vicar of that and other neighbouring parishes. The first meetings to discuss this took place in 1969 and the Community

moved into the farmhouse in 1972. They see themselves as a retreat centre, ecumenically orientated, and also as having a concern for the preservation of the environment. Their programme consists of Quiet Days, Family Days, Members' Fortnight and Work Camps.

The Othona Community has two centres - one is at Bradwell-on-Sea in Essex, and the other is in Dorset, at Burton Bradstock. This Community was originally set up in 1946, their aim being to work for the visible organic unity of the Church, but they have realised over the years that authentic unity is more profound and far-reaching than organisational agreements. A simple lifestyle is practised and encouraged by the Community, and they welcome individuals to come and stay for shorter or longer periods, to experience refreshment and renewal.

A Community which has been on the move since it began in this country is the Community of Celebration. This has its roots in the United States, centred around the Church of the Holy Redeemer, Houston, Texas. The story of developments there is told by Michael Harper in A New Way of Living.(3) In 1972, the Rector - Graham Pulkingham - and twenty-five members of the Church there, were invited to come to England by the then Bishop of Coventry, to share their vision of community life within the local Church. From a parish in Coventry, they moved to a Manor House in Berkshire, where about a hundred people lived as a community, some running the day to day affairs, others travelling all over the country ministering in different parishes. Now they have two centres - one on the Isle of Cumbrae off the West coast of Scotland, and the other at Lytchett Minster in Dorset. As well as a ministry of outreach and encouragement to parishes they publish Christian music and literature.

More recently there have been a number of community experiments emerging in the towns and cities of this country. One example of this is the Community of the Word of God, based in London and established

in 1973. This has the aim of encouraging those who minister in inner-city areas. Also in London, is the Coralline Community, a group of people concerned with ecumenical Church work on the Thamesmead Estate. In some of the towns and cities of England, there have been similar developments in the 'House Church' movement, e.g. at the home of Canon Ivor Smith-Cameron, Diocesan Missioner for the Southwark Diocese, and in Devon at Ottery St. Mary, under the leadership of Arthur Wallis. Whilst not being communities in the sense in which we have been understanding that concept, there is a deep level of commitment within these groups, similar to that found in many residential communities. Some would see these as being divisive, in that many people who become part of such a group, come there disillusioned with the institutional Church, but each group has to be judged on its own merits.

There are a number of Anglican parishes throughout England which seem to have learnt lessons from these more established residential communities, and are forming communities or 'households' within the existing local Church structures. Four such are, St. Michael-le-Belfrey, York, St. Margaret's, Durham, St. Thomas' Crookes, in Sheffield, and St. Hugh's Lewsey, at Luton. New ventures are emerging all the time, but it is impossible as yet to assess the contribution which these will make to the life of the Church as a whole.

It was said by some in earlier days that the emergence of 'lay communities' foreshadowed a great awakening of the Church. Others could see no future in them at all. Others again saw them as a kind of 'remnant' which would stand firm in a time of testing, whereas the mediocrity of the rest of the Church would cause its own downfall. It can not be said that there has yet been a 'great awakening' in the Church, though there has been as we have noted, a greater sense of confidence and hope in the 1970s than there was in the 1960s. It is our belief that the

communities of our study, alongside other developments within the Church have contributed to this. The 'remnant' seems to have less to commend it now, as in it the idea of 'community' is set over against the Church, instead of members of the communities playing a particular part in the Church.

There are perhaps three main objections to community living as part of the life of the Church. The first has always been present - the danger of a double standard; that Christians who live in community and make particular sacrifices in so doing, are taking their discipleship more seriously than other Christians, and this sets them apart in the wrong kind of way. The evidence of our study shows no such tendency as the idea is clearly one of <u>service</u> to the Church and society. As we have seen, this may take the form of a holiday, a retreat or to learn about evangelism in the local setting. Or the community may express concern for people who have experienced a crisis in their lives and need help and support. It may be that living in community is for some a challenge too great to accept, for there is a sense in which communities are an 'eschatological sign' reminding us of the completeness of surrender which discipleship involves. A second objection which is made is that community living is a way of opting out of the main body of the Church, just as 'hippy communes' are for those who want to opt out of society. Undoubtedly there are, and have been, some instances where this is so. Where there is little contact with the outside world and a community lives simply for itself, then this could be escapism. However, the communities which have been our concern are in daily contact with 'the world', with people and their joys and sorrows. The guests at Lee Abbey and St. Julian's, and the people in need at Pilsdon show this clearly. A third objection is that these and other communities support in an unrealistic way those who cannot survive on their own in the world, and

give them a false sense of security. In fact, the evidence seems to show that those who have been in a position of weakness and uncertainty when they went to one or other of the communities, emerge greatly strengthened. Of course there are some who do not, but surely this does not invalidate the whole concept of 'community'? The pressures of life today are such that there are people who need support for varying lengths of time, and it is good that there are places which provide this.

We need to look further at the positive contribution of these three communities in particular, to the life of the whole Church, for clearly this kind of Christian community living is something which now has to be taken very seriously. First of all, there is a concern for the Church of which the community is a part. It is that the ministry of the Church might be more effective that these communities came into being, whether that be in terms of evangelism, spiritual refreshment, or service to the needy. There may be within the communities criticism of what is lacking within the Church and even a rejection of conventionality; there is certainly concern about the unwillingness of much of the Church to change, and the indifference to people's needs; but as Ralph Morton has put it:

> Their criticism of the Church is fierce just because it is there, ready-made, available, but blind to its task, and its opportunities, blocking the way into the future.[4]

Neverthless, there is still a great love for the Church, and a desire to work within the existing structures, though the very existence of these communities can be a threat to the institutional Church. Often a vital Christian experience or renewal of faith is found there which contrasts with the mediocrity of so much of our Church life. Uniformity, and the concept of a monochrome structure are inadequate, and these communities should be seen as part of the unity in diversity which the

Church needs to proclaim. It is noticeable too how all the three communities have changed and adapted as new needs and new situations have arisen. For example, quite recently at Pilsdon, where long term commitment has been the norm, short term membership of the Community rather on the lines of Lee Abbey has become a feature of their life. Earlier on, as we have seen, this was not thought possible because of the danger of instability, and the need for continuity. At Lee Abbey the twin aims of evangelism and renewal are still at the centre, but there is also a greater sense of the value of 'community' in itself. At St. Julian's missionaries still find rest and refreshment, but its ministry has widened far beyond this, which of course also includes developments abroad. As times and needs change, these communities are not so highly structured that they cannot change and adapt.

Secondly, there is clearly a missionary emphasis in these communities, in the sense of the Christian faith meeting the needs of the whole man. In the opening chapter, we saw the effect on the people around of the first Christians' life together, (Acts 4:32 and 2:47), and how this example has influenced so many present-day developments. Those who visit these communities often speak of the quality of life within them, as being that which speaks to them most of the reality of the Christian faith. For not only is the Christian faith preached and taught, it is clearly lived, and this speaks very powerfully to Christian and non-Christian alike. This is in no way to suggest that relationships are perfect within these communities, but the comment of long ago, 'See how these Christians love one another', can be seen to be true of them. In addition to the quality of life being a missionary factor, at Lee Abbey for example, teams from within the Community not only teach and preach at the various conferences, but go all over the country leading missions and giving encouragement to local Churches. The contributions of

Pilsdon and St. Julian's in this missionary way are also clear from what we have already studied.

Thirdly, the ecumenical contribution of these communities is clear. The three of our study are Anglican-based, but have never sought to be exclusive, or to cater only for one denomination. Since the Second World War there has been much talk about unity within the Church, and schemes have been put forward, some of which have been successful, (e.g. the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches uniting to become the 'United Reformed Church'), and others which have failed, (e.g. the Anglican - Methodist proposals). Earlier in this chapter, we commented in relation to the Othona Community how they believed authentic unity to be more profound than organisational agreement, and in recent years this has become clear not only in the life of communities, but in the Church at large. Some would say that we have reached a second stage in the ecumenical movement, on an individual and local rather than national basis. Undoubtedly these communities have contributed to this new desire for co-operation and working together at ground-level, for within them, denominational barriers are of little or no significance. Different approaches and outlooks are acknowledged, and these enrich the life of the community - for example in worship - but they do not keep people apart.

Fourthly, prayer and worship within these communities is a vital factor for them, and those who come to share their lives for shorter or longer periods. We have seen how it was prayer that was at the basis of these ventures, how indeed all three were 'ventures of faith'. And that dependence on God at the outset, continues to be present in their daily lives. They would all say that without God, nothing could be achieved, and that mere human love with its unpredictable nature is not enough to direct and uphold a community. Their expressions of prayer and worship vary both from community to community, and indeed from day to day within

the individual community, but the presence of that devotion is the vital factor. This is, of course, not a life of 'contemplation without action', but rather in the communities we can see work and prayer indissolubly united. Here is both encouragement and challenge for the local Church, where so often corporate prayer outside the liturgical setting is not a high priority. These communities have proved the power of prayer in many different ways.

Fifthly, and linked in with the above, is a concern for holiness, which these communities display. The depth of commitment which is evident within the communities reveals this, as one sees the desire to set apart every aspect of life for God's service, often involving sacrifice in terms of money, family and career. This too is a challenge to other members of the Church, to live more fully as members of the body of Christ, and not to see life divided into compartments, the sacred and the secular.

We have already noted in passing the fact that not only has the 'Community movement' influenced individuals within the Church, but has also resulted in some parishes adopting a form of community living within that existing framework. Is this the way ahead for the Church at large, or is this still a form of life for a comparatively small number of people within the Church? The World Council of Churches in the late 1960s made a study entitled The Missionary Structure of the Congregation, in which working papers examined the changes in society, such as those outlined in Chapter 1, and asserted the need to re-examine previous assumptions. It was pointed out that the parish grew out of a particular form of local community life, characteristic of mediaeval times, and is not changeless or sacred, and the plea was as stated above, for a pluriform structure including the full acceptance of communities in various forms. This was not to say that the Church should discard all the structures at will, but it does mean that the structures which are appropriate for

the Church are shaped by the world in which it lives. As Colin Williams has put it:

> The structures are worldly in the sense that the Church throughout its history has tightly adapted the patterns of common life provided by the surrounding culture as it carried out its task of relating the faith to life.(5)

The World Council of Churches suggested that this pluriformity should have certain structures that suggested wholeness in this process of continuous change. The first was a 'family type of structure' and the second was the need for 'community structure' - a group of people within any given local Church who agree to live together under a common discipline as an expression of their commitment to Jesus Christ. It is these very things that we have seen in our study, and which we are beginning to see further afield in local situations.

'Ecclesia Semper Reformanda' was a slogan of the Reformers, and it continues to be true for the Church today. As Hans Kung has put it:

> It is not only because there are mistaken developments and mistaken attitudes in the Church that she has this task. Even if there were none (there always will be), she would still have the great task of renewal . . . she has to keep adopting new forms, new embodiments . . . she is never simply finished and complete.(6)

It seems that what local congregations should do is assess the situation in which they find themselves, and to whom they are seeking to minister. There must be planning for the individual situation, and greater recognition of ministries within the local Church, which is still in so many cases dominated by the clergy. The communities which have been our concern show the effectiveness of a team each using his or her particular gifts. To quote another Reformation principle, this would

seem to be taking the doctrine of 'the priesthood of all believers' seriously, and not simply paying lip-service to it. It is so easy for the Church to conform to the cultural aspirations of the day, and not to the truths of the Gospel:

> Even the Churches have so reflected our modern pre-occupation with individual man, that no matter how high the doctrine of the Church to which a particular confession might adhere, in actual practice, its congregations are gatherings of individuals who know little of Christian Community in the Biblical sense and expect little from it. Like secular clubs, they meet in their various groups, to hear speakers on a variety of topics which are usually unrelated, undigested, and unillumined by the Christian faith.(7)

This may appear to be rather sweeping, but it does put the onus back on the local congregation to see whether they are fulfilling their function as fully as they might.

Before we come to conclude this analysis of 'the way ahead', there is the factor of failure which has to be reckoned with and examined. Why have some experiments in community not worked out as they should? Is it due to lack of real support from the Church, or does failure and success depend too much on the personalities involved in the venture? This must be considered, because for some, individual examples of failure mean that the whole 'Community movement' is in the end doomed to failure. I would suggest that there are two reasons in particular that can cause failure. The first is a lack of historical perspective. There are some groups that appear to think that they are the first people ever to think of organising their lives in this way, and so they fail to learn from other community ventures past and present. To take

Pilsdon as an example here, the very opposite of that is true; not only was there considerable thought and prayer before action was taken, but Nicholas Ferrar's seventeenth century experiment provided the particular historical perspective. Secondly, we return to the danger of isolation from the rest of society; there have been communities which simply live for themselves, and have no outlet for service within the Church, and the whole venture becomes inward looking, lacking in direction and in the end is almost bound to collapse. We must stress, however, that such failures are the exception and not the rule, and are not in themselves an argument against the concept of community living. F. Norman James has this to say on the matter:

> Many Communities will prove ephemeral, though nearly all of them will have helped their members to mature in the depth of personal relationships. But they need to be more than self-improvement societies . . . they should draw the members beyond themselves into a more realistic understanding of love - love for God, for each other and the world. As long as this experience is fed back into the world, we may be sure that it is not wasted.(8)

As we draw to a conclusion, it must be said again that the communities which have formed the main part of our study, and the others to which we have made reference, represent certain types of Christian community life, which have in different ways made, and continue to make, a very significant contribution to the total life of the Church. It is clear that each community venture contains indigenous and novel elements. In the 'Community movement' as a whole there is a diversity of historical and theological background, and in such communities a divergent pattern of Christian action is clear. Donald Bloesch and others have seen the function of these communities as 'lighthouses' within the Church,

manifesting the light of Jesus Christ in a dark world. Bloesch would go so far as to say that they are symbols of a new age when parochial loyalties, private ownership, violence and class distinction will be superseded. They are a significant means by which the Kingdom of God is advanced and realised in the world. Whether these communities do foreshadow a 'new aeon' is hard to say, but there is no doubt that the denial of the right to possessions, the ties of family being transcended, and other features of their life, do portray a way of life vastly different from the prevailing pattern of culture. As such, they are a challenge not only to the world, but to the Church of which they are a part.

In the Dark Ages, when the framework of social life was collapsing, the Church through its monastic communities preserved the Faith and civilisation. At the Reformation, the Church made the family the bearer of a new life and gave the social setting to a new conception of the individual person. As the Church in those times found the most appropriate form of life, not only for its own members, but in order to reach out effectively into the world, so the Church today must find in its own life a pattern of life for people of this generation. In 'community', the conviction is demonstrated, that the Christian Faith is a life to be lived in a quite distinctive way. The Early Church knew it was the new Community in Christ, and its members had all things in common. Benedict, Basil and those who followed the monastic way to Francis and later, knew that one of the things they must give up was the hold that private property had on them. The Reformers knew that they must make the Christian Faith evident in the daily lives of Christians. What inspired all these, and this applies also to the 'Community movement', was not the adequacy of their schemes, but the conviction that the Church is the body of Christ and that they must follow His call to a radical discipleship.

There will continue to be distrust of such communities, which Bloesch puts down to a:

> generic ecclesiastical fear of the novel and prophetic.[9]

He would also suggest that fears of sectarianism or a double standard are symbols of a refusal to face up to the challenge which communities make. The call to community living is not 'higher' than that of other Christians, but a different expression of Christian commitment. The Community is not to be seen as a rule for the Church, but a reminder of the radical obedience demanded of the Christian. The Churches should not try and emulate such communities, but rather should seek to learn from these 'pioneering fellowships'.

There is a much greater acceptance of communities within the Church today - had this not been so then perhaps they would have become the 'remnant' to which we made reference earlier. It is a healthy and necessary thing that questioning and discussion goes on about these matters, for the motives, purposes and achievements of these and other ventures need to be continually evaluated. Opinions will no doubt continue to differ, but it seems to me what cannot be denied is the significance of what has been happening in recent years, not simply for the people involved in these ventures, but in terms of the 'way ahead' for the Church:

> Carried along in its ('the Community movement') sweep, are most of the issues, the avoidance of which will bring about our corporate destruction. In addition 'Community' in its deepest sense is what the Church is all about. It is about a quality of life whose way is sacrificial and transforming, that in its expression embraces all men, not in abstract, but 'in situ' as brothers.[10]

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