

## INTRODUCTION

*“What Christ Jesus taught is not what is most important, but rather what he has given humanity. His resurrection is the birth of a new faculty within human nature.” —RUDOLF STEINER*

This book is intended to contribute to the sacramental theology of The Christian Community, Movement for Religious Renewal, which was founded in 1922. Feeling unable to connect with what was handed to them from the past, its founders intended to begin something entirely new in the history of Christianity. New names also had to be created in order to avoid confusion with the past. For example, for years, many of the founders rejected the word *church*, because it seemed to point to a relic that was no longer relevant. This inner orientation toward the future is still the most important characteristic of The Christian Community, but in the meantime we can see more clearly that its understanding of its role in the world needs to be refined. The Christian Community is not only a *creation out of nothing* but is rather embedded in a certain stream within the development of Christianity, which Rudolf Steiner once referred to as the *church stream*. He also formulated the principle of continuity for spiritual streams: that a new spiritual impulse must always connect in some form with what has preceded it, if it is to become fruitful for the world. The Christian Community must be able to account for where it spiritually connects with the past, without allowing itself to be determined by the past.

With this in mind our intention is to examine the evolution of sacramental theology to find practices and concepts that can be understood as the foundation stones for a new sacramental understanding. In particular, we seek to discover where developments in human consciousness over the course of the last two millennia require an entirely new starting point.

From the new perspective that arises out of the examination of the nature of sacramentalism (parts 1 and 2), we will discuss the sacraments of The Christian Community in detail (part 3). We will be less concerned with practical congregational issues than with an understanding of the spiritual processes that come to expression in each ritual. The Sacrament of Marriage will be an exception, for with this sacrament, it seems necessary to approach the theme more intensely from its practical, concrete side. Furthermore, the chapters in that section do not follow a uniform pattern and are developed in detail unevenly, in part with longer inserts (Baptism), in part concentrating on essential, basic elements (Act of Consecration of Man). At the end we consider the whole again, but with an increased understanding of renewed sacramentalism. Those readers interested primarily in individual sacraments could also begin with part 3.

This book is intended for readers interested in the spiritual foundations of The Christian Community and its place in the history of theology. In general, a certain familiarity with the basics of Anthroposophy is assumed; for example, when it comes to the various sheaths of the human bodily nature—i.e., physical body, etheric body, astral body and “I,” ego or self. Furthermore, in a study such as this, it is sometimes necessary to introduce more detailed points of

view derived from the anthroposophical worldview. It must be mentioned that Anthroposophy as such is not, in a narrower sense, the source of The Christian Community's theology, but for many important questions, Anthroposophy does offer crucial insights that help one to understand the issues better.

The present book has a history. It began in 1969 at the Priest Seminary of The Christian Community in Stuttgart, Germany, when Gottfried Husemann<sup>1</sup> commented with regret during a class that The Christian Community has until then not developed its own sacramental theology. This reflected the fact that most of the founders of The Christian Community came out of Protestantism and for this reason concerned themselves more at the beginning with a new understanding of the Gospel. Here, too, Rudolf Steiner offered a wealth of suggestions with respect to that task. Those first forays into theology have led to numerous remarkable publications in books and periodicals, even into the present time. However, efforts to better understand the sacraments have been largely limited to the fundamentals and introductory literature. Had there been more founders coming from a Catholic background, then the theological emphasis on these two areas would presumably have been otherwise—perhaps even reversed. The first seed for a theology specializing in the sacraments was planted by Rudolf Frieling<sup>2</sup> in a short essay that appeared in 1939 in the periodical *Die Christengemeinschaft*. This was not developed further, not even by Frieling himself.

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<sup>1</sup> Gottfried Husemann (1900–1972) was a co-founder of The Christian Community and the first director of the priest seminary founded in 1933 in Stuttgart.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Frieling (1901–1986) was a co-founder of The Christian Community and beginning in 1960 its leader. The essay has since appeared as a reprint. See the bibliography.

The thoughts expressed here have not arisen from personal studies alone; they came about through almost thirty years of teaching at The Christian Community priest seminary in Stuttgart; they are the result of dialogue with students and other teachers. They do not claim to be the final word on this topic, but rather seek to stimulate additional dialogue in this important area of theology. For this reason, I would like to thank numerous students as unnamed coauthors in the background. Then I would like to extend my gratitude to the students, colleagues and coworkers at the priest seminary in the summer semester of 2005 for making a ten-week absence possible, and to Dorothea and Michael Schmidt for a place to live on their farm in Ontario while writing this book; my gratitude goes out also to those who read and gave helpful comments on this work during its creation. Heartfelt thanks to Arnold Suckau in particular for a critical first reading of the manuscript and for the valuable theological advice he provided. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Wolfgang Niehaus for encouraging this project from the beginning and for accompanying it through to the end as an insightful, knowledgeable reader.