



















































PART I



# A Call to Community

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become really, in actual fact, a brother to everyone, brotherhood will not come to pass. No sort of scientific teaching, no kind of common interest, will ever teach people to share property and privileges with equal consideration for all. Everyone will think his share too small and they will be always envying, complaining, and attacking one another. You ask when it will come to pass; it will come to pass, but first we have to go through the period of isolation.”

“What do you mean by isolation?” I asked him.

“Why, the isolation that prevails everywhere, above all in our age – it has not fully developed, it has not reached its limit yet. For everyone strives to keep his individuality as apart as possible, wishes to secure the greatest possible fullness of life for himself; but meantime all his efforts result not in attaining fullness of life but self-destruction, for instead of self-realization he ends by arriving at complete solitude. All mankind in our age have split up into units; they all keep apart, each in his own groove; each one holds aloof, hides himself and hides what he has, from the rest, and he ends by being repelled by others and repelling them. He heaps up riches by himself and thinks, ‘How strong I am now and how secure,’ and in his madness he does not understand that the more he heaps up, the more he sinks into self-destructive impotence. For he is accustomed to rely upon himself alone and to cut himself off from the whole; he has trained himself not to believe in the help of others, in people and in humanity, and only trembles for fear he should lose his money and the privileges that he has won for himself. Everywhere in these days people have, in their mockery, ceased to understand that the true security is to be found in social solidarity rather than in isolated individual effort. But this terrible individualism must inevitably have an end, and all will suddenly understand

how unnaturally they are separated from one another. It will be the spirit of the time, and people will marvel that they have sat so long in darkness without seeing the light. And then the sign of the Son of Man will be seen in the heavens. . . . But, until then, we must keep the banner flying. Sometimes even if he has to do it alone, and his conduct seems to be crazy, a man must set an example, and so draw people's souls out of their solitude, and spur them to some act of brotherly love, that the great idea may not die." ♦

## 2

# Blessed Community



Rufus Jones

**R**ELIGION, which is as immemorial as smiling and weeping, does not begin with a Saint Stylites alone on the top of a pillar. If it had so begun the saint would soon have perished without a sympathetic community to see him – or, what is more important, to admire him. It is foolish for us to waste any precious time trying to settle the issue whether religion originates with the individual or the group. It is as absurd as trying to find a stick which has only one end. Individual and group cannot be cut apart and be treated as though either were real as a sundered existence.

The moment an individual has arrived on the scene with a capacity for the mystical, that is, the direct personal apprehension of God and capacity to interpret his experience, there is bound to be behind this individual the long molding processes of history, the accumulations of the experiences and transmissions of many generations. If the given individual runs on

ahead of the group, as a prophet-genius does, it will be along the lines and in the direction for which the group has long been preparing the line of march. And the individual does not possess his insight with a permanent assurance until he has interpreted it and carried others along with this conviction. In short, however important the creative insight of the rare soul may be, religion does not count as a contribution to the race until a beloved community is formed and the discovery is interpreted and transmuted into a social movement. As far as its significance is concerned, religion is essentially social. It is an affair of a beloved community. . . .

The primary function of a church, if it is to be the continuing body of Christ in the world, is to raise human life out of its secular drift and to give reality to the eternal here in the midst of time. When it ceases to bear witness to the real presence of an eternal reality operating in and upon our lives, its race is run; it has missed its mission. But just as certainly the church is commissioned as the organ of the Spirit to bring health and healing to our human lives and to the social order in which our lives are formed and molded.

It may be true, as the higher critics tell us, that the kingdom of God as presented in the Gospels is not a new social order to be slowly, painfully, and creatively realized here in the furrows of our world through the cooperation of God and humankind together. On the other hand, there is most assuredly a type of life presented in the Gospels which, when it appears, seems to be already the kingdom of God – a type of life in which love is the supreme spring and motive, in which the spirit of forgiveness has come to ripeness, and which aims to do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven. Insofar as the church carries on and incarnates that commission it becomes the

sower of the seeds of the kingdom of God and the bearer of a new order for human society.

There is a proverb which says that God empties the nest not by breaking the eggs, but by hatching them. Not by the violent method of revolution will the new social order of life come, not by the legal enforcement of ancient commands, or by the formal application of texts and sayings, but by the vital infusion of a new spirit, the propagation of a passion of love like Christ's, the continuation through the church of the real presence of eternity in the midst of time, will something come more like the order of life which we call the kingdom of God. It is the role of the church, I maintain, to be the fellow laborer with God for this harvest of life. . . .

Christ calls us to . . . [live] as an organic part of a kingdom, a fellowship, which expresses in invisible and temporal fashion, in ever-growing and unfolding degrees, the will of God – the heart and purpose and spirit of the divine life. Here in this kingdom God's life differentiates itself and pours itself through finite lives as the sap of the vine pours itself out into all the branches and twigs and shoots which go together to make the vine a vine. It is the vast Yggdrasil tree of a spiritual humanity. The kingdom, even in its imperfect stage as we now see it – still a good deal of a mustard seed – is the most impressive revelation of God there is in the world today. It is the only way that the will and life and love of God can be fully revealed. In this emergent group life, where love comes more fully into play than it does anywhere else, we catch some gleams of the Great Life that works through us now and some prophecies of that kingdom which shall be when all people see what a few see now.

Life culminates in forms of organism, in which the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts. The kingdom of God

is the highest form of such organism that has yet emerged – a *corpus spirituale*, a “blessed community” – a living whole in which part contributes to part, and all the parts unitedly cooperate to express the life of the whole. Each member is both end and means, an end in itself and a means to the fulfillment of the life and purpose of the whole. We are as far removed here as we can be from a scheme of life which focuses upon rewards or which aims to secure an excess of pleasures over pains. In fact, we have transcended categories of calculation and even of causation and have entered into that organic way of life where each lives for all and where the interpretation of the life of the whole is the business and, at the same time, the joy of each member. The formation of such a kingdom, life in such a kingdom, is the fundamental end of life for Christ, as set forth in the Gospels. The length of his purpose horizontally is the inclusion of all people in such a cooperative community and the height of it upward is the raising of all people to a full consciousness of sonship with God, in a family-fellowship, living to do his will. Here, once more, the emphasis of Christ is on life and action, not on theory and definition. The kingdom of God is something we *do* – not a place to which we go. . . .

We are forever seeking to find ourselves, but our sporadic quests lead us off on trails that end in some cul-de-sac, or, as Emerson would say, “up a tree in a squirrel hole.” Our subordinate ends bring and have always brought frustration, disillusionment, and defeat. Let us once find the real end for which our nature is equipped and we can live thrillingly and triumphantly. That real end, according to Christ of the Gospels, is the kingdom of God, a spiritual organism, a fellowship of persons, bound together in cooperative love and forming in union with God the tissue and web of the spiritual world – the eternal universe. To this end were we born and for



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this cause we came into the world, that we might bear witness to this reality and that we might reveal its laws, its principles, and its serene and demonstrative power. ♦