

Looking Westward

by Susan Locey

As my days in Toronto become numbered, I find that leaving is not easy, but I feel it is the right step to make. Last year during the retrospection of my life as a priest during the 25th anniversary celebration, I had the grace of what Rudolf Steiner described as “rising above oneself in retrospection.” I could look back and take hold of original impulses in a new way, to be able to go forward into a new phase of development. And it became clear that I had to let go of the life and web of connections that has grown up here like a tended garden, and be willing “to die and become.” This is a process difficult both for me and for the community.

This is an ash process, whereby offering becomes a way for enrichment.

The good that we have worked together will fall like ash fertilising a field to enrich the foundation for new growth, for receiving new impulses. It is not that the “old” is destroyed, and the ever sought-after new becomes sovereign like a novelty fashion. It is that the old becomes fixed in its forms, like in the forming of a salt, where the crystal captures a particular stage. And in order for new life to spring up, a dissolving or yielding or metamorphosing must take place.

Of these possibilities, the choice has been made for me to take up work in Vancouver, for someone new to come to Toronto. Although everyone recognises that this is an opportunity for renewal, it is not without effort. Some may even feel that in my leaving, an unspoken agreement is being unacknowledged. But the agreement of a priest must be a commitment to something more far-reaching than to a particular community: it is a commitment to the body of Christ in Christian Communities. And in that we are all ultimately affected by the health of the whole. We cannot rest in our achievements, the comfort of the known and loved, once our consciousness expands beyond our current scope.

I am going to a congregation that has existed many decades, founded by Verner Hegg, and where Werner Grimm has worked for a long time, and also Michael Kientzler. There is a church building there in Burnaby, similar to the church on Avenue Road. Many people debate whether or not the church should be located there near the downtown, or in North Vancouver, where most of the people live.

Vancouver itself looks out towards Vancouver Island, the Pacific, the Aleutian Islands, and the International Dateline where today becomes tomorrow... It is situated on the Pacific rim, which encircles an ocean floor unlike the other oceans of the earth. Under the other great oceans, a structure is evident in the ocean floor that expresses a deep and vital process of circulation. A ridge, like a backbone, directs the flow of the currents of water. The metabolism that takes place at the bottom of the Atlantic, for example, helps to keep the tectonic plates which carry the continents encircling the Atlantic healthy. But the Pacific ocean floor does not have this underlying structure. It is rough and torn, still scarred by the ancient wrenching free of matter that left the earth and eons ago formed the moon.

Forces are at work on the Pacific rim that wash over and influence the rest of the world. Just think how Hollywood, Silicon Valley and recognisably West coast ideals have ruled modern culture in the past half-century through popular and sub-cultures! Why do these new ideals

and impulses rise up from the west coast? Is there something rearing up, leftover from those ancient lunar forces?

Is there something from the Pacific that is calling for healing, for a role in the creation of a new world, a new order?

Can we recognise this and acknowledge its role? Is it possible to meet the adversarial spiritual tsunami, so that the west is not swept away by its influence before North America has fulfilled its mission in the evolving of cultural periods? Does religion, the ultimate bridge-builder connecting heaven and earth, also have to work to build protective walls?

No wall can protect against the adversary, or prevent conflict – not in Berlin, nor in Israel, nowhere. Walls invite breeching. A translucent veil may be more effective as protection, a fine veil that does not try to block what is rising up, but meets it, may filter it. What means do we have to filter and focus these up-rising forces so that they may ultimately be incorporated into a healthy process of evolution?

Perhaps we can metamorphose the gesture of the monks in Ireland of the 9th century, who built their chapels on the cliffs facing the east, with no windows to the west. They worked through prayer and meditation spiritually to ward off the influence from the west until Europe and Christianity had developed a certain strength. And then the Renaissance and the Age of Exploration could open the way westward.

In strengthening our westernmost Christian Communities, we too can strive to direct the formative religious life of our continent towards the rising of light, towards the dawn of the return of the Risen One. And we can seek to recognise what is washing over the world from the west, to find a way actively to include this power in the healthy shaping of the future. We would be lifting up a veil of spiritual renewal in the far west to catch the Word spoken with the rising sun across all the continents from the east: “Christ in You!”

We need Christ in us in order to turn with strength towards the future, to focus spiritual peace on the “anti-Pacific.” And when we have “caught” this word from the East, it may strengthen the Word in us and become a force for working in the meeting and transforming of adversarial forces. And in the future, we can begin to reflect back to the rising sun a transformed and transformative power for Renewal.

With thoughts and ideals like these, I prepare to move at the end of the summer.