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THE JOYFUL COMMUNITY

AN ACCOUNT OF THE BRUDERHOF,
A COMMUNAL MOVEMENT NOW IN ITS
THIRD GENERATION

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□ CONTENTS

Preface to the Phoenix Edition	7
Acknowledgments	13
Introduction	17
<i>Chapter One. The Living Church</i>	
1. Woodcrest	25
2. Bearing Witness: The Religious Ideology	27
3. The <i>Gemütlich</i> Tenor of Life	36
4. A Circular Sense of History	42
5. The Bruderhof Day	45
6. The Sacred Year	49
7. The Moral Basis	55
<i>Chapter Two. From Communion to True Community</i>	
1. Communion (1920–26)	70
2. Charismatic Community (1926–35)	74
3. Transitional Community (1935–40)	81
4. Isolated Sect (1941–50)	85
5. Communitarian Social Movement (1950–58)	93
6. Years of Crisis and Schism (1959–62)	98
7. Church-Community (1962–)	110
<i>Chapter Three. All Things Common</i>	
1. Practical Communism	114
2. Marriage and Family	116
3. Children and Education	122
4. Community of Goods	127
5. Community Playthings	130
6. Other Work Departments	138
7. Maintaining Community Boundaries	143

Chapter Four. The Power of the United Brotherhood

1. The Brotherhood	152
2. Joy	158
3. Harnessing Joy	164
4. Unity	169
5. Depth of Participation	178
6. The Interpretive Framework	182
7. The Triggering Process	184
8. Mobilization for Action	186

Chapter Five. Leadership and Social Control

1. The Exclusion System	194
2. The Hierarchy	201
3. The Power of the Servants	205
4. Choosing and Deposing Leaders	211
5. Setting Policy	215
6. Personal Deviance	223
7. Managing Tension	233

Chapter Six. Leaving the Old Self Behind

1. Who Joins the Bruderhof?	239
2. Hearing the Call	243
3. The Death and Birth of the Self	246
4. The Special Case of the <i>Sabra</i>	267
5. The Maintenance of the Weak Self	273
6. Effects on the Individual	277
7. The Apostate	282

Chapter Seven. A Model for Utopia?

1. Freedom versus Community	286
2. Post-industrial Society	289
3. The Hippie Response	300
4. The Bruderhof as a Model	321

<i>Appendix A. Novitiate and Baptism Vows</i>	327
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<i>Appendix B. Methods of Study</i>	331
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<i>Appendix C. Bibliography</i>	334
---------------------------------	-----

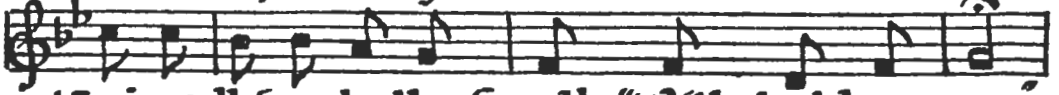
Notes	343
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Index	349
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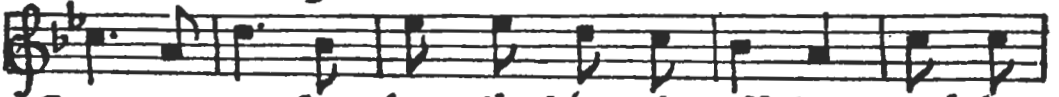
SONG FOR THE PRESENT DAY



He is speak-ing to the North: "O come!"—



He is call-ing to the South "With-hold no more:



Come, o come, to where the King is call-ing, send-ing



out a wind to wake the seek-ers and the poor.

There is nothing that can bar your way,
Though the breaking may be blood upon the sand:
Lift your hearts, for hark, the wind is calling,
Breaking down the barriers, however high
they stand.

There are rivers running strong between,
There are watches where the stars are never still,
Come, though come, to where the King is calling,
Calling for a people in a city on a hill.

In the Tumult of a world of steel,
There's a whisper of a wind upon the street:
Rise, and come, though long and hard the journey,
Yonder is the city, where the South and North
shall meet.

Philip Britts.

Bruderhof poet

□ PREFACE TO THE PHOENIX EDITION

When a book about communal living written at the beginning of the 1970s is reissued at the beginning of the 1980s, it is reasonable to ask whether the perspective taken then is still relevant to the events as we understand them today. This book describes the evolution and organizational dynamics of the Bruderhof, a commune whose men and women require of themselves the absolute surrender of their self-interests. This radical organizing principle seemed at that time to be an anomaly within American society, even among communes. By now, however, it has proved itself to be the goal and destiny of many hundreds of thousands of contemporary youths and older persons in America and throughout the secularized regions of the world. Some of the more well-known products of this pattern of choice—the Moonies, the Manson Family, the Jesus Freaks, and the inhabitants of Synanon and Jonestown—have convinced many people of the need to know more about this mysterious and sometimes terrifying phenomenon.

Response to the first edition of *The Joyful Community* was, if anything, too uniformly positive. It is not that I object to praise, but rather I suspect that too many readers have been enchanted with the story of the Bruderhof as history and ethnography, and are therefore unwilling to pay much attention to what must have seemed a set of interesting but rare social processes. The sociological idea of the Bruderhof is that a stable society can be structured around the capacity to love. Whether true or false, this is too important an idea—and in the light of our knowledge

8 *The Joyful Community*

of the rapidity with which indiscriminating love can become indiscriminating hate, too fateful an idea—to be accepted uncritically as the premise of an interesting and inspiring story. I want, therefore, in this brief preface, to try to locate this study within a larger corpus of unfinished sociological business.

If I were rewriting this book today, there are several things that I would change but many more I would leave alone. The argument of the book is built upon four theoretical concepts: charisma, communion, collective behavior, and thought reform. Of these, only collective behavior has not withstood the test of time. It is not that it is wrong necessarily to describe the joyous communion of the Bruderhof decision-making circle as a controlled collective behavior experience, just that there is so much more that can and should be said. The use of the concept of collective behavior, by giving a name to a pattern of interrelationships, puts an end to inquiry just at the point where it really ought to begin. Recent advances in our ability to trace subtle changes in networks of relationships have made it possible to view as structural what formerly could be detected only at a cognitive level.

The concept of charisma should perhaps have had a larger place in the analysis. Although the critical role of the charismatic leader comes through clearly in the book, the notion that entire patterns of social structure can themselves be charismatic is not explored. To the extent, however, that the book provides evidence that charismatic influence is potentially widespread within any collectivity and that it can be evoked by both the needs of the followers and the intention of the leader, the ideas presented are those which have continued to shape my more recent work.

The rapidly rising tide of charismatic movements in America makes it urgent that we remember what has been too quickly forgotten about this potent but dangerous social force and that we learn more about its actual dynamics. Sociologists have been right in following Weber's lead in attempting to trace the origin of many social forms to the routinization of charisma. But a consequence of this preoccupation is that we know little about

the circumstances which give rise to charismatic patterns of interaction in the first place. It seems likely that the 1980s will be a time in which both the religious and the political thirst for charismatic intervention will intensify in our society. Building upon our knowledge of the Bruderhof and other charismatic communities, can we begin to formulate testable propositions about the genesis of charisma in the larger society?

The concept of communion is closely related to the concept of charisma. In the last few years, the work of Herman Schmallenbach, whose theory of communion greatly influenced me during the writing of *The Joyful Community*, has become more widely available in English.* One hopes this will have the effect of stimulating more research on communion as a form of social organization. It is questionable, however, whether it will stimulate this work along the lines laid out by Schmallenbach, lines which require the recognition that unconscious human dispositions have a central role in the formation of social bonds. Sociology, at the present, seems to be in retreat from its brief flirtation with the unconscious as a source of knowledge about society. I doubt that this book itself can do much to turn the tide. Although I sympathize with the great difficulties the concept of the unconscious has presented to sociological measurement, I cannot sympathize with the tendency to ignore fruitful lines of inquiry on the grounds of convenience.

We come finally to the concept of thought reform, which is used to account for the radical and dramatic experiences of resocialization and personality change which accompany the conversion crises of most Bruderhof members. Many more recent studies have corroborated my findings in this area since this book was first published. From a practical point of view, the success of the so-called deprogrammers in reversing the permanent effects of such total resocialization strengthens our confidence in the essential validity of the concept. Of course much more is now known about the technical intricacies of

* See Gunther Luschen and Gregory P. Stone eds., *Herman Schmalenbach: On Society and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

thought reform, and we may be at the threshold of finally understanding how to arm people psychologically against its assaults.

Overall, I think it is fair to say that the first six chapters of this book, those dealing with the Bruderhof itself, have stood up well to subsequent investigations. The same cannot be said for the final chapter on contemporary communes. This chapter has been completely superseded by subsequent research,[†] and is included here only for its historical interest. A comparison of this chapter with my more recent treatment of the subject may also be interesting from the point of view of highlighting the difficulties of studying a social movement while it is still going on.

And what of the Bruderhof itself? How has it endured these nine years? As predicted in the book, the Bruderhof has moved to reincorporate itself within the Hutterian Church. This is seen within the community as the most significant event of the decade. Aside from this renewed identification with something larger than itself, the Bruderhof has undergone very little change. No new “hofs” have been built in America and the one in England has simply regrouped at a new location. A trickle of apostate or exiled members continues to be reinstated as the wounds of the great crisis slowly heal. New members continue to be drawn from both *sabra* and outside stock. The daily life of the Bruderhof continues to flow along pretty much unchanged. This pattern of life, as exemplified in cults, has attracted much recent attention, almost all of it negative. Alongside all of this the Bruderhof continues to bear quiet witness to a beautiful and life-affirming version of the same form of social organization which has elsewhere—as in Jonestown—caused so much death and suffering.

[†] See Benjamin Zablocki, *Alienation and Charisma: A Study of Contemporary American Communes* (New York: The Free Press, 1980). This is a systematic comparative study of 120 communes conducted over the period from 1965 to 1978.

□ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people helped me with this book. I am all the more grateful to the members of the Bruderhof for their help and hospitality, considering their often-stated contempt for 'studies'. I want to thank the ex-members, especially, for their courage in talking openly and freely to a stranger about an intimate and often very painful subject. All of them contributed, not only information, but important ideas. However, through their wishes, they must remain anonymous.

My wife Elaine worked with me at every stage of the project. Every idea in the book comes out of long discussions between us. Much of the material on Bruderhof women is her contribution alone and, because of the sex-segregated character of much of Bruderhof life, would not have been otherwise obtainable.

Within the academic community, Professor Daniel Bell and Professor Staughton Lynd helped me to get started in my search for contemporary intentional communities at a time when I was groping blindly. Professor John Markoff, Professor Robert Friedmann, Professor Neville Dyson-Hudson, and Professor Sasha Weitman made many valuable suggestions during the planning stage of this research. I am particularly indebted to Professor Weitman for calling my attention to the work of Herman Schmalenbach on communion. Professor Philip Selznick and Professor Neal Smelser read an early version of the manuscript and offered important criticisms which have been incorporated into the book.

This research was originally carried out and presented as a Ph.D. thesis in the Department of Social Relations, at the Johns

Hopkins University, in Baltimore, Maryland. I cannot begin to express my gratitude to my two mentors at Hopkins, Professor James Coleman and Professor Arthur Stinchcombe. Both of them had the faith in me to allow me to follow my own leading, even at times when it was incomprehensible to them. At the same time, both were constant sources of inspiration to me. Professor Coleman taught me to seek answers to the ‘important questions’ of sociology, and not to get sidetracked by anything less. Professor Stinchcombe taught me how to pursue an argument that is more than three steps long without getting lost. I hope that they will be pleased with the way I have incorporated these lessons into this book.

In chapter seven, I mention that I have visited close to a hundred contemporary communes in the last five years. I was a founder or a member of a few of them. At most of them, I was merely a guest. All of them are a part of my family. It would be impossible to acknowledge each act of help, hospitality, and love that I have experienced in my commune journeys. But some communitarians have taught me so much, that I must mention them by name. Mildred Loomis, editor of the *Green Revolution*, doesn’t know anything that isn’t known by thousands of communitarians across the country; she just figured it all out a generation before anyone else did, and was busy teaching it when people finally decided it was time to listen. I consider Calvino De Filipis, Steve Durkee, and Lou Gottlieb the three wise men of the communitarian movement. I have been privileged to work and talk with all of them. My friends, David and Kitty Stephens, have taught me more about the emotional side of community than anyone else.

I was lucky in having as an editor of this book, my old friend and fellow communitarian, Abigail Grafton. I’m one of those sociologists who doesn’t write ‘to gud’, and she performed the miracle of transforming my manuscript into a comprehensible book. Sometimes she had to beat me over the head before I would allow this to happen.

This book required money and typing. The former was supplied by the National Institute of Mental Health, first in the form of a

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University of California
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1966 – 70

□ INTRODUCTION

Community is an idea whose time has come. America is currently experiencing a flowering of communitarian experiments unequalled even by the great utopian movements of the early nineteenth century. It almost seems as if the post-industrial Western world, having solved (theoretically at least) the problems of *liberté* and *égalité*, has turned its energies toward that last and most elusive item on the French Revolutionary agenda – *fraternité*: brotherhood, tribalism, community. This rapidly awakening interest can be seen not only in the thousand or more currently existing rural communes of the hippies and in the even more numerous urban communes, but also in the widespread participation in encounter groups by the older middle class, and in the movement away from integration and toward the development of ethnic solidarity on the part of many racial minority groups. Communitarianism in America today is still primarily a movement of the young, but a movement in which portents for the future of our entire society can be read.

The Bruderhof is a community unlike any I have ever seen. When I first visited it in the winter of 1965, I felt as if I had wandered in a dream into a medieval village, or into a world outside of history where neither time nor space existed. Never before or since have I felt the presence of brotherly love so permeating a place that I felt I was breathing it. I have visited close to a hundred contemporary communes and studied the history of those of the last century. The Bruderhof can be classified with neither the new nor the old. It is not at all a typical case. I present this study not as a key to the understanding of some

larger social movement, but because I feel that the problems that it raises and the solutions that it offers are fundamentally related to our society's quest for *fraternité*.

In 1947, in a cave near Qumran at the northern end of the Dead Sea, an Arab boy made a discovery which was to bring to the world a knowledge of one of the most fascinating social experiments of the ancient Near East. This discovery of the so-called 'Dead Sea Scrolls' has thrown light on the beliefs and daily life of the Essenes, a communitarian sect within ancient Judaism whose members lived approximately two thousand years ago. The Roman occupation of Palestine had posed a grave crisis to the Jewish religion. The ancient traditions were crumbling upon contact with modern Hellenistic influences. Various movements arose in response to this crisis. The Zealot revolutionaries were working to expel the Roman conquerors by force. The Pharisees were reformers, choosing to work within the system, modifying a bit here, reinterpreting a bit there. The Essenes chose a completely different strategy. Rather than attacking or trying to modify the Roman Empire, they ignored it. Reasoning that Roman authority could not be omnipresent, they chose to live within the interstices of occupied Palestine. They chose a rather austere and remote habitat on the banks of the Dead Sea and there set up a microcosm of life as they believed it should be lived. Those who would call this the strategy of the ostrich must argue with the many scholars who believe that Jesus and the early Christians were profoundly influenced by their early contacts with the Essenes.

The Essenes represent the first known instance, in the Western world, of a phenomenon which has recurred periodically throughout subsequent history, and of which the Bruderhof is a contemporary example – the phenomenon of the communitarian response. Arthur Bestor, in his brilliant study of early American utopian communities, defines it as one of four methods for implementing change:

Communitarianism was, in fact, one among four . . . alternative programs. Today we are apt to think of but three. Individualism, now largely associated with conservative thinking, we can recognize as an authentic philosophy of reform in the hands of an Adam Smith or a

Jefferson, and in the ringing words of Emerson's Phi Beta Kappa Address of 1837, 'If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him.' Revolution, too, is a possible path to social change, as present to our experience as it was to the eighteenth or nineteenth century. In between we recognize, as a third alternative, the multitude of reform movements, best described as gradualistic, which employ collective action but aim at an amelioration of particular conditions, not a total reconstruction of society.

Communitarianism does not correspond exactly to any of these. It is collectivistic not individualistic, it is resolutely opposed to revolution, and it is impatient with gradualism. Such a position may seem no more than an elaborate and self-defeating paradox. To the communitarian it was not. The small, voluntary, experimental community was capable, he believed, of reconciling his apparently divergent aims: an immediate root and branch reform, and a peaceable, non-revolutionary accomplishment thereof. A microcosm of society, he felt, could undergo drastic change in complete harmony and order, and the great world outside could be relied on to imitate a successful experiment without coercion or conflict.¹

Many writers on the subject have referred to communitarian experiments as 'utopian communities'. I have chosen to use the term 'intentional community' instead. This term is Quaker in origin. Its use avoids the value loadings of such alternatives as 'utopian community', 'communistic society', or 'cooperative colony'. The Fellowship of Intentional Communities, a federation of communities, that existed during the 1950s, formulated an operational definition of the term that will serve well enough for our purposes:

An intentional community is a group of persons associated together [voluntarily] for the purpose of establishing a whole way of life. As such, it shall display to some degree, each of the following characteristics: common geographical location; economic interdependence; social, cultural, educational, and spiritual inter-exchange of uplift and development. A minimum of three families or five adult members is required to constitute an intentional community.

Communitarian movements seem to arise in waves at particular times in particular places. America during the nineteenth century

experienced several waves of intentional-community building, many of them originally European movements transplanted to the New World. Europe after World War I experienced a wave of communitarianism, as did America and Japan after World War II; and, of course, the same phenomenon is occurring in America at the present time. Israel's kibbutz movement was begun after World War I and experienced its greatest expansion in the years following World War II.

It would seem that the rise of communitarianism has something to do with wars, but the relationship is not simple. This disruption of normal life patterns and the upheaval of moral and social norms brought about by war often precede the appearance of intentional communities. The Fourieristic communities which arose in America in the 1840s constitute the most striking exception to this rule. It is interesting that England and Europe, having sprouted so many communal experiments after World War I, were unreceptive to such movements after World War II. The crucial difference seems to be the feeling that a new age was dawning, which was prevalent in Europe in 1920 but decidedly not in 1945.

The myth of a new age dawning often stimulates the rise of communitarian movements. We can well imagine that the messianic fever that swept through Palestine in the century preceding the birth of Jesus was instrumental in motivating the Essenes to make the sacrifices necessary for their communitarian retreat. Again, during and after the Protestant Reformation, more than 1500 years later, we can see that a feeling that the dead hand of the past had been removed and that a new and better life was on the horizon stimulated the birth of innumerable intentional communities. The Hutterians, one group of communitarian experiments spawned by the Reformation, have kept their structure intact to the present day.

Turning to more recent times, widespread belief in the coming of a new age certainly helps to explain the impetus behind many of the communitarian experiments of nineteenth century America. The virginity of the frontier combined with the pragmatic philosophy of the new American republic fostered the belief that

man was free to create his own forms of social organization. Precisely this attitude was most bitterly criticized by Karl Marx in his famous attack on the 'utopian socialists' in the *Communist Manifesto*:

Historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones, and the gradual, spontaneous class-organization of the proletariat to an organization of society especially contrived by these inventors. Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into the propaganda and the practical carrying out of their social plans.²

Karl Marx and his nineteenth century revolutionary followers also believed that the coming of a new age was imminent. To understand why they turned to revolution where others turned to communitarianism we must ask what forces these groups saw as impeding the arrival of the new age. Revolutionaries characteristically see the problem as a power struggle. Their vision of a new society is clear and unambiguous, but certain segments of society prevent its realization. The problem thus becomes one of gaining and using sufficient power to remove the obstacles to the coming of the new age.

Exactly the contrary is true for communitarians. They picture a society in which the means for ushering in a new age are readily at hand but in which men's hearts have not been stirred by the vision of this new age. While Marxists see men as historically determined, communitarians believe that men are essentially free to choose their own destinies. Some communitarians would agree with Marx that society is based on conflict. They seek not to transform the world but to separate themselves from it. Other communitarians believe that ignorance is the only barrier to global peace and harmony. They seek to educate the world by the power of their example. The Bruderhof falls into this latter category.