

## **The Apostle Paul and the Three Essentials**

Elizabeth Sanders

9 May 2018

Over the past year, the Camphill Association of North America has taken up an exploration of the Three Essentials as a theme for regional study and conversation. There are many directions one can take from a study of this small essay of Konig's, and many debates one can continue to have concerning their relevance in Camphill today. With our changing worldviews, our changing regulatory environments, our changing organizational structures, and our changing relationship to the world, it can be difficult to swallow these "essentials." Often with some perceived judgement, we conclude that either Konig or we—as Camphill in the 21st century—are in need of revision. Perhaps this comes from that tidy anthroposophical habit of fitting everything together so harmoniously: where there is a threefoldness, we strive to superimpose innumerable other threefoldnesses on top of it (and from there twelve, then four, etc), and the exercise is one of getting the right pieces in the right order. When we manage, there is a clarity, a revealing of something ordered and balanced, like the geometric radiance of gems upon which we can gaze, or the assemblage of seemingly disconnected pieces into a cathedral within which our thoughts can dwell. When we don't, we keep trying.

For me, there is no greater witness to this endeavor than Paul of Tarsus—the Apostle Paul—and with him the centuries of interpreters who followed in his wake. If we look at what Paul has said and what others have said about Paul, we learn many things about this remarkable man and his influence.<sup>1</sup> Paul is a social and political revolutionary, a social and political conservative, a feminist, a misogynist, a supporter of slavery and a fierce abolitionist, a Hellenizer and a Judaizer, a radical individualist, *and* a radical

---

<sup>1</sup> N.T Wright's *Paul: A Biography* (2018) is a highly engaging and accessible portrait of Paul which offers a comprehensive account of Paul's life, cultural context, theological perspectives, and aims without the distracting and overly technical treatment of most academic writings. I am deeply indebted to Wright's perspectives on Paul in shaping my own.

communitarian. Paul was the “patron saint” of the Protestant Reformation and the evangelist of papal and secular hierarchy. No doubt an anthroposophist somewhere has written a fine paper extolling Paul’s epochal contributions to world evolution, only to be echoed by another anthroposophist who has—with equal conviction and justification—condemned Paul for throwing the whole course of evolution off the rails. Paul and his interpreters are a maddening bundle of tangled contradictions. So much for gems, so much for balanced cathedrals of thought!

This, however, is no surprise. In Paul’s own words:

“To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law...To those outside the law I became as one outside the law...so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.

(1 Corinthians 9:19-22)

By all means, then, Paul may give me license to explore what we, in Camphill, might need him to become today, particularly in light of our struggle with the Three Essentials. I was heartened by Richard Steele’s essay which reminds us of the provisional, exploratory nature of this essay from which we have extracted these “three essentials.” I can’t help but be heartened by how Paul, too, never intended his letters—written to specific people in particular circumstances—to become “essential” doctrine. A man who took scripture so seriously would have probably been scandalized by the fact that today we treat his correspondence as holy writ! As we do with drafts, we give them to trusted friends who can look them over with fresh eyes to give us feedback. Perhaps in the process of approaching the Three Essentials in the 21st century we can enlist Paul as one of our friends, and see what he might have to say in reply. But also, as

with any draft, the exegesis will not be tidy and the structure will not quite fit. I take courage from Paul, that walking, talking, community-building pile of contradiction, to forge ahead and keep trying.

### **Being known**

*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

*1 Corinthians 13:12*

The first image I turn to is Paul on the road to Damascus. The story, told several times in Acts (but never in Paul's letters) is celebrated on Saint Paul's Day every January 25th. We can brush the scene in broad outlines: Paul, a zealot for God (Acts 22:3), goes to Damascus to deal with some extremely dangerous people who claimed to have identified a Messiah. What happened on that road to Damascus has become the archetypal Christian conversion narrative: an encounter with the blinding light of revelation begins a three day journey through darkness towards new sight. Naturally, the story is not so simple. This is not the place to go deeply into Paul's worldview and theology,<sup>2</sup> but needless to say the notion of "conversion" is neither historically nor theologically accurate. Paul did not "change" from one "religion" to another. The convention of renaming Saul "Paul" at this point in the narrative only serves to reinforce this misleading notion.

It might be better, if still not completely accurate, to speak of the *epiphany* on the road to Damascus. Merriam-Webster defines an epiphany as "a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something, an intuitive

---

<sup>2</sup> See N.T. Wright's *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2013) for an extensive description of Paul's worldview. Wright is one of the best known theologians representing what is known as the "new perspective" on Paul, which emphasizes his thoroughly Jewish worldview and embeds his relationship to Christ in his cultural context, in contrast to hitherto dominant lines of interpretation which stemmed from Reformation critiques of the Roman Catholic church.

grasp of reality through something (such as an event) usually simple and striking, an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure.” Surely we can see such an epiphany in Paul’s experience of the risen Christ. And yet, there is another side of what happened in this story—right in front of us, but quieter. Think of Ananias, who cannot comprehend that the Lord would have him heal this wicked man Saul and doubt’s the Lord’s commandment to him (Acts 9:13-14). But the Lord maintains, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

The epiphany we mostly discuss is that of Christ—the illuminating discovery of the risen Christ—but the other, and first, epiphany in the narrative is that of Paul himself. The core of the story is the moment when Paul’s name is sounded: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4). In this moment, as the Lord later confirms to Ananias, Paul is named, claimed, known, and and made real by God. The first epiphany on the road to Damascus is not the epiphany of Christ but the epiphany of Paul. What has become an archetypical conversion story is simultaneously, and perhaps more subtly, a creation story. Humanity’s tragic beginning in Genesis is here inverted: when once we named, now we shall *be named*; when once we knew, now we shall *be known*. Following in the pattern set by Jesus (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45), and cemented in the epiphany of Paul, we have been chosen to become instruments to serve rather than lords to be served.

This epiphany of the human being is a pattern laid out by epiphany on the road to Damascus. Already we are known by God, and now in remembering Christ’s new commandment (John 13:14-15, 34-35) we might strive to minister thus unto each other. Perhaps this background, this gift of God , should stand behind what we read then in Koenig’s first essential. That we, as human beings, acknowledge that there is within each person, regardless of outer manifestation, a divine and eternal core, becomes meaningful in our biographies when this knowledge is an event—an encounter or epiphany. Regardless of any outer manifestation, this child is named, claimed, known, and made

real by God, and this gift of God in so naming and knowing us makes it possible for us to do this for one another, to speak one another's names as an act of worship for Christ in you.

In fact, what Koenig explicitly calls the first essential—conviction in the truth of reincarnation—is to me perhaps the least significant moment in this encounter. What different perspectives can we draw from this essential when we pivot from emphasizing *what we know* towards an emphasis on *that we are known*, that the child is known? Where we fail to recognize, God does not fail. Where we may forget, God does not. Mark's Gospel more strongly than the others reminds us, painfully, how even the disciples of Jesus failed—repeatedly and agonizingly—to recognize who He was. We can fail to recognize the other and ourselves, we can forget the other and yes, even become strangers to ourselves. But we are, nevertheless, named, claimed, known, and made real by God. Steiner regards this striving to recognize the other, and thus to do unto one another as Christ has done unto Paul and all humanity, as faithfulness:

“Let your loyalty to another human being come about in this way: there will be moments —quickly passing by—when he will seem to you filled and illumined by the true, primal image of his spirit. Then can come, yes, will come, long stretches of time when your fellow-being seems clouded, even darkened. But learn at these times to say to yourself: The spirit will strengthen me; I will remember the true, unchanging image that I once saw. Nothing at all — neither deception nor disguise — can take it away from me. Struggle again and again for the true picture that you saw. The struggle itself is your faithfulness.”

## **Being transformed**

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*Romans 12:2*

Our faithfulness to one another, so described by Steiner, leads us towards a second major theme in Paul's life and letters, and like with conversion, we will ultimately have to complicate the common understanding we have of "faith."

Paul is constantly wrestling with what it means—both theologically and practically—to have been named and claimed by Christ. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ *in daily life*, and moreover in the daily life of an extremely reverent, devoted first-century Jew? As a community-builder and something of a rabble-rouser amongst the nascent church hierarchy in Jerusalem, Paul was constantly fielding these sorts of questions and instigating these sorts of debates. What is the place of the Law: largely as the symbol of our covenant with God, and minutely, in particular prohibitions or requirements? What does being a Christ follower mean for our social organization, for our relationship to secular political authority, to our Jewish heritage or our pagan culture?

Although Paul was constantly in a position of giving advice, he never articulated a practical list of which commandments could be dispensed with and which retained, nor any sort of actionable moral code. Indeed, as he articulates in 1 Corinthians 8:4-13, whether or not one should observe dietary restrictions may be more a matter of tact—not in the superficial sense of dinner party etiquette but rather as a matter of social, empathic sensitivity—than an act which in itself has moral substance. So too, in his letter to Philemon, he explicitly refuses to command Philemon to free his slave Onesimus, who has in the meantime become a Christ follower and a pupil of Paul's (Philemon 1:8-9). The question of what we should do, for Paul, is secondary to the more fundamental question of who we are, and therefore brings us back to the epiphany of the human being.

When we are named by Christ, this is not simply a recognition of who we have been unto ourselves, as if—were we *not* named and known—nothing would be different. The cognition of who we are is indeed a re-cognition, and thus we are named, claimed, known, and *made real* by being *in* Christ. It is not so simple as to say that now the law is void, that our outward behavior doesn't matter, that “works” are irrelevant and all that matters is inward “faith.” Such attitudes would impose an anachronistic dualism and, in the process, void the radical event of the Incarnation itself.

Similar problems can arise out of this moral, behavioral debate as what Steiner addresses early in *The Philosophy of Freedom*, where both reductionist monisms of spiritualism *and* materialism, as well as their unsatisfying compromise in dualism, fail to bring together and recognize the fullness of the human being and human life. Behavior is not irrelevant, and yet, truly “moral” behavior cannot be an external imposition. Rather, like the radical ethical individualism which Steiner articulates in *The Philosophy of Freedom*, our deeds are only authentic and thereby morally creative deeds when they are outpourings of the spirit through us *as* unique individuals *in* unique situations. This is not, however, a slippery slope towards “moral relativism” because the spirit which animates and inspires us—what Steiner describes as the “concept” at work in thought and deed—is universal. For Paul, this indwelling spirit is none other than Christ: “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And *the life I now live in the flesh* I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Paul does not command Philemon to free Onesimus, but rather forcefully reminds Philemon that both he and Onesimus have been claimed by Christ, are brothers in Christ. What you must do, then, is not what “one should” do, but rather what *you* must do *because of who you are*. Can a Christian hold another Christian in slavery? If it is no longer we, but Christ in us, will Philemon thus enslave Christ Himself?

Paul's admonition that we are justified through faith and not “by doing works of the law” (Galatians 2:16; see also Philippians 3:9) is extremely difficult to work through,

as evidenced by the history of Christianity for the last 501 years. For me, in Camphill today, I contend that his admonitions do not place “faith” (as we today reduce it to “belief”) and “works”, or belief and practice, in mutually-exclusive conflict, vying with one another for dominance. Such would mean that because we have faith we can do anything we desire (an issue for the Corinthians), or that we revert (as triggered Paul’s letter to the Galatians) to the apparent security of the law to establish moral and spiritual superiority. We must reinvigorate the notion of faith as one of *faithfulness*—what scholars have begun to retranslate from “faith *in* Christ” to the “faith *of* Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Faithfulness as obedience, as perseverance, as unwavering commitment (see Romans 4) compels us to be faithful to the call of God, and what that calling may be is unique depending on who we are in Christ.

For Konig, the second essential is precisely this inner transformation through faith. What is being asked of the teacher at any moment are not specific deeds, and they cannot be prescribed as specific exercises or lesson plans. What is demanded, instead, is courageous creativity, “endurance and sacrifice, [our] continued care of the child and [our] attempt ‘to fast and pray’, thereby creating ‘the grain of mustard seed’ in [our] soul.” It is no less than faith, as faithfulness, as granted to us through this inner transformation. We are not transformed from the outside in, as if in the training courses we simply memorize abstract anthroposophical concepts or legalistic procedures for how to teach a child to read. Rather, as Konig states, “[it] is not mere knowledge that is given to our students. They learn to kindle their creative forces and to make them into a continuous source of strength and sacrifice.” Thus we are not “conformed” to this world outwardly or in thought, but rather “transformed” through the renewal of our minds. This being-transformed, as with our being-known, is no accomplishment of ours and for

---

<sup>3</sup> This is a major debate in biblical studies and theology today, and dovetails with debates over the “new perspective” on Paul. See RB Hays (1983) *The Faith of Jesus*. For a highly accessible approach, listen to Luke Timothy Johnson’s (2001) lectures on “The Apostle Paul,” available through *The Great Courses*.

ourselves. It is a constant sacrifice, laid down by the “self-emptying pattern” of Christ’s faithfulness.<sup>4</sup>

### **Being re-membered**

*“Let all things be done for building up.”*

*(1 Corinthians 14:6)*

There is a notion in Christianity that every Sunday is a miniature Easter—a celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ. This is why, so confusingly, the fast of Lent lasts longer than 40 calendar days. This is not untrue for life in Camphill, and yet the liturgy—the actual embodied practice<sup>5</sup>—of the Festival of Offering service points to something that may remain somewhat under the surface, and is something that one actually needs to be present—in the flesh—to realize. Every Sunday the room stands up, its quiet at first, and then two people begin to walk around the room, facing each person gathered there one-on-one, each in their turn. They speak a blessing, a form of which has been sounded multiple times, as a chorus, throughout the preceding service. And yet this time, a response. A warmly dissonant chorus of many voices—words of the mouth, sounds of the throat, movement of hands, staring of eyes, shuffling of feet—speaking the same words: I may receive the Spirit of Christ. Through many voices and through many bodies, there is one being, one spirit, one Word. Not only Easter, but Pentecost as well do we celebrate every Sunday.

What is the community? What is the purpose of it? Does there need to be a physical, embodied group of people for there to be a community? Does there need to be a community for there to be a Camphill? What is the relationship between the individual and the communal, and the rights and responsibilities due from one to the other? It is no

---

<sup>4</sup> See Johnson (2001) “The Apostle Paul”

<sup>5</sup> For a captivating investigation of the role of liturgy and embodied worship on our inner education as human beings, see

wonder that the third essential is the one which gives us the most trouble today. This may be, however, the one place where Paul is unambiguous. That which is individual, which is unique, is wonderful. Our individual spiritual gifts are to be praised. But just as they—like any work or deed—are meaningless if separated from their source in God, so too are they meaningless without their end in community, in the service to others for the glory and worship of God. And what is the community? No less than the body of Christ.

I have struggled to articulate much more about this overwhelming notion of community, of human fellowship as the body of Christ. I quote from Paul's letter to the Corinthians at length:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say,

“Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”

(1 Corinthians 12:4-26)

This is a concise and inspiring description of how the Whitsun event is played out in daily community life. It should remain at the heart of Camphill, and I believe should guide our understanding and working through the third essential in particular. However, a somewhat more difficult task is laid before us if we continue to read what Paul had to say about these spiritual gifts.

It is not just that diversity is celebrated, and in our manifoldness we become the united members of the body of Christ. Like the notions of “conversion” and “faith,” “fellowship” or “community,” even one which seemingly celebrates diversity as the reading above does, becomes more complicated in Paul’s letters. Although he celebrates

all spiritual gifts, Paul specifically encourages the Corinthians to “strive for greater gifts” (12:31). What follows this is Paul’s famous chapter on love, which he considers greater than all other spiritual gifts (13). However, he then returns to quite specific gifts—speaking in tongues, prophesying, interpretation, and so on. He ranks them as higher or lower quite clearly (14:1-5), though still with the notion that all are necessary, and encourages that one with a particular gift should always pray for those with a gift different from theirs which can complement and fulfill it (14:13). All gifts, after all, should be directed towards one overarching aim: the building-up of the church as the body of Christ (14:12).

But this interlude of love, perhaps one of the most beautiful and enduring passages ever written by a human being, troubles our notion that diversity, in itself, as it is, and fixed, is to be celebrated. Where would be the hearing if all were eye? True enough, but what if someone joins this fellowship who is only eye and cannot be hearing, cannot provide that missing piece? Here is where the anthroposophical tendency to fit everything together in a harmonious whole gets shaky, where I get nervous that I have spares of one component of the building, but am missing one or two others which are absolutely essential. The body is incomplete.

There is a lived experience in community, an experience which is deeply painful: the recognition that something is *missing*, and there is a deafening silence in response to calls for something or someone to come and fill that space. We have a class of children, and no teacher; we have land, and no gardener, we have a person, and they have no friend. It is only in going through this experience that Paul’s interlude on love begins to make sense. Suddenly, we can understand why something apparently so meek, and quiet, and subservient, is the greatest of all spiritual gifts, and the one which we should strive for. Because it is only through love that we can let go of the gifts which we have been given and take up the tasks which are needed by others.

We are all, as Paul would say, members of the body of Christ. We can at times become aware of how unique each member is, and forget this larger body. It is only through the greatest gift, through love, that one gift can become another, that perfect hearing could sacrifice a bit of itself to become sight. To re-member this body, to remember Christ in all things, is the gift of love.

This does not mean that we all have to give up our lives, our individual strivings, our need for that which is private and unique and of which we should absolutely not be ashamed. Konig echoes this point clearly in carving out the protected space for the individual, for the free spiritual life. If we sacrifice a gift of ours to take up a task which is needed by others, but we are resentful of that sacrifice, then it was the wrong thing to do. And sometimes, those who are gifted in many diverse and important tasks may, through their zeal to do whatever is needed at any given moment, may actually become a stumbling block to someone else who slowly, quietly, and nevertheless courageously might step forward to take something on.

It is that greatest of gifts, love, which makes a community. A collection of people doing things—whether that group be homogenous or diverse—does not make a community. It is the real presence of the potential for love, for sacrifice, for the giving up and taking on of what is asked and what is needed by others. This may be true of an individual within a community, but so too could it be possible of one community amongst many. It is good and fitting that we—as individuals and as communities—recognize our unique identities and gifts, but if those gifts do not contribute to the building up of the larger community, then what is it, exactly, that the larger community may need us to become?

**An essence**

This essay began with me trying to gain some insight from Paul in thinking about the Three Essentials. Who does Camphill need Paul to be today? Of course, in typically Pauline fashion, I've ended up somehow in the place I started but with the compass pointing the other way, a maddening contradiction become a point-circle meditation. What does the world need Camphill to be today? I don't believe the Three Essentials need to be radically rewritten (although certainly some language could be updated for the modern day); in fact, I believe they do approach something "essential." That is, not a distillation or reduction to common features, as in the image of an essential oil or a schematic drawing, but rather as a nodal point, a growth point, a fulcrum or vanishing point from which all creativity and newness can emerge.

Where we began, then, perhaps we can begin from again. With a faithfulness and cognizance of our own identity, could Camphill, through love, become all things to all people, that by all means it might serve some? It is not tidy, but it is just as Paul would have it.