

Looking for a City with Foundations

Intentional Urban Communities as a Christian Response to Violence, Oppression, and Injustice

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For he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God
(Hebrews 11:10).

This study of Christian intentionality is anchored in the historical experience of the European-American ‘peace churches’, and the Radical Reformation more specifically (Gingerich and Peachey 1989, Durnbaugh and Speicher 2003). The focus will be on the attempt made by North American Mennonites to draw conclusions from the horrors of World War Two, a process which ultimately led – six decades ago – to the founding of the most longstanding intentional Christian urban community on the continent, Reba Place Fellowship (RPF) in a suburb of Chicago, a decade after the end of the war. The historic peace churches have situated themselves within a two thousand year old trajectory, originating in the Middle East of classical Roman times (Sensenig 2016) and leading ultimately to the conflict ridden, inner city neighborhoods of the United States in our current day. RPF will serve as an example of the largely successful attempt to apply concepts of economic and social reciprocity, within a community, and solidarity, between an intentional community, its immediate neighbors, and society at large. Emphasis will be placed on the declared intention to witness to their faith in fields as diverse as inner city poverty, racism, protection of the environment, and refugee issues. Furthermore, this study will explore the manner in which communal living shapes the lives of the participants themselves. Finally, an attempt will be made to apply the principle of affectedness, as a scientific tool and scholarly asset, in the area of religious faith and

spirituality. Discourse on ‘Betroffenheit’, as introduced by the feminist women’s movement in the 1980s (Mies 1991) and expanded to other fields in which researchers are personally affected by their topic of inquiry, will be applied to this case study. This methodological ‘leap of faith’, though unconventional, would seem advisable because of the fact that Christian intentional communities (CIC) actually take the veracity and validity of the spiritual components of their activity as a given. Thus, studying this phenomenon can be enriched and substantiated by a researcher’s personal experience with the same level of spirituality aspired to by the subjects of study (Sensenig-Dabbous 2006a).

Preceding the “vast, open-ended, and geographically, culturally, and ideologically diverse (...) 1960s-era communal tide” (Miller 1999: ix) by a decade, RPF is the oldest existing urban Christian intentional community in North America, and one of the oldest in the Global North. Founded in 1957 in the socially diverse Chicago suburb of Evanston Illinois, it looks back on a long history of faith-based cooperative experimentation, taking its inspiration from the original communities established in the 1st century AD by the contemporaries of the historical Jesus Christ. Many strands of communitarian tradition served the founding families at RPF as sources of inspiration. Along with various biblical references to living in community (e.g. Act 2:42-47) and collective governance and power sharing (e.g. Matthew 18), the historical German (‘Taufgesinnte’) and Dutch (‘Doopsgezinde’) Tauffer movement of the 16th century Radical Reformation played an important role in guiding the young Mennonite students and scholars who initially founded the Fellowship (Jackson and Jackson 1987: 27-36). In their perception, the

churches of Europe had failed miserably in confronting and challenging militarism and social injustice during the 1930s and 1940s and Christianity in the United States was in the process of making the same mistakes. Most shocking for the post-war generation of young Mennonites, who spent time as relief workers or students in the war-torn Europe of the late 1940s and early 1950s, was the fact that despite their Taufer traditions of non-violence, freedom, and social justice, the peace churches of Europe had in general not performed differently than the rest of the continent's Christians during World War Two.

At the height of the Cold War, the 1950s saw a far reaching reassessment of the historical Taufer vision of shared community, faith, and social responsibility. Published during the last year of the war, Harold Bender's "The Mennonite Conception of the Church and Its Relation to Community Building" was a turning point for many young visionaries who were looking for a radically new approach to life at mid-century (Hershberger 1957). The founding of an inner-city, intentional community at Reba Place was a direct result of this, as Bender put it, "rediscovery of the Anabaptist Vision" of the early 16th century. Please note here that this author prefers the historically precise term 'Taufer' (Kauffman 2009, 175), as opposed to the more commonplace descriptive 'Anabaptist', because the former more appropriately signifies the nature of the Radical Reformation – (Bender, Friedmann and Klaassen 1990).

The Fellowship was also a manifestation of conflicts within the Mennonite Church, which were indicative of the transition that the Taufer movement was going through during the first half of the 20th century. According to Jackson and Jackson:

By the early 1950's, the Mennonite church was finally emerging from its ethnic and cultural isolation to bloom as an authentic American denomination. It was enjoying the status infused by its relatively new seminaries and colleges. Its publishing houses were in full swing. It felt it had risen above the nasty debates between modernism and fundamentalism. For its young men, it had won official exemption from the military service on the grounds of conscientious objection. Mennonite mission and relief work was highly esteemed (the Mennonite Central Committee had sent out about 1500 relief workers). And original research by scholars such as Harold S. Bender was very gratifying and, to some, relieving: their 16th century Anabaptist ancestors had had a very respectable vision and rationale for not getting assimilated into the mainstream Protestant Reformation (1987: 12).

The founding members of RPF were the product of heated social and theological debates carried out in the above mentioned Mennonite schools of higher education, primarily in Indiana and Virginia, as well as the direct result of the above mentioned experience of a small group of activists who had spent time in post-war Europe. Two issues were at the center of the thinking which ultimately led to the establishment of the RPF as a living community bent on witnessing to their Christian faith in an urban, rather than the more traditional rural, environment. The first was the perceived need to counter the assimilation of the Taufer movement into the militarist, materialist, and individualist – or as the founders of RPF termed it “Mars (war), Mammon (materialism), and Me (individualism) (Schreiner Youngquist and Varela 2011: 45)” – mainstream of modern Western society, both in North American and Western Europe. The second was the desire to reintroduce the concept of the 1st and 16th century believers' church – in which everyone in the group should be equally responsible for leading the community (Jackson and Jackson 1987: 113) – in a setting relevant for life in the 20th century, i.e. the big city (Harris 1973: 79-87). As shall be described in following, RPF proved to be highly successful in their first goal, establishing a CIC which to this day serves as a role model

for others intent on implementing the principles of the Radical Reformation. The second aspiration, that of establishing a community in which leadership rested in the hands of its entire membership, proved to be much more difficult. The struggles the Fellowship faced in dealing with the concentration of leadership in the hands of a few can also serve, however, as a guidepost of sorts on how Christian egalitarian principles can be implemented in a society in which abuse of power seems to be the norm. Reference will be made in this context to communitarian impulses within the trajectory of overall church history (Kauffman 2009), the unique contributions of Evangelical monasticism, and the urban monastic tradition (Markofski 2015). Because of the role it played in pioneering urban intentional community living and service in North America, the contribution of Catholic Social Teaching during the first half of the twentieth century, will also be considered.

According to Carter (2012), Huyser (2008), and Varela (2010), the spirit of Reba Place cannot be properly understood without factoring in the role of spiritual faith amongst its adherents. In his foundational PhD dissertation on the subject, Harris attributes both the longevity and comparative success of RPF to its rooting in the above mentioned “Anabaptist Vision”, their adherence to the biblical concept of “radical discipleship” based on the life of the Jesus Christ, and the assumption that the principle of collective leadership of a community of equals can best be maintained by relying on the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit (1973, 79-88). Upon its founding in 1957, RPF took a radically Trinitarian approach to self-governance. Going beyond the deontological goal of becoming “a fellowship of believers, determined to be radically obedient to their Lord,

regardless of the consequences” (83) and following the historical Jesus as a role model, the principle of consensus-based decision making proved to be a radical departure from the conventional wisdom of the Mennonite church of its day. RPF was guided by the conviction that governance is a give-and-take amongst equals, that a conflict between members of the collective “represents the potential ‘Will of God’; (that) the group must be committed to a careful hearing of such dissenting opinion” (177) because it draws in the intervening guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. It is this final attribute of the CIC experience to which we will now turn, before moving on to a more descriptive portrayal of the Reba Place experience during the last 60s years.

Methodology

The dialectical give-and-take between the positivist and the conflict based approaches to the social sciences is ongoing and has proven fruitful in fields as varied as economics, psychology, international affairs, gender studies, jurisprudence, philosophy, and cultural studies. Early Comtean positivism was first challenged by the socialist labor movement, in the mid-19th century. Following in this tradition of activist scholarship, feminists within the gender studies community mounted a concerted attack against the predominance of positivism within Western academia in the mid-20th century. This study will attempt to expand this dialogue even further by applying the concept of affectedness to research on faith-based communities.

In his “Appendix to Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy”, Karl Marx states in his 11th Thesis that scientific research should not only endeavor to

explore, analyze, and explain social reality, but also to actively attempt to improve the world. “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.” (1888). From the perspective of social class, supporters of the labor movement were assumed by the socialist revolutionaries of the day to not only be affected by injustice, exploitation, and oppression, but also to be the agents of progressive transformation. Analogous to this early socialist model, feminist women’s studies introduced the concept of ‘Betroffenheit’ or affectedness in the mid-1980s. In her updated preface to the groundbreaking 1986 study “Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale”, Maria Mies writes in 1998:

It created ‘*Betroffenheit*’ – a term I had used early on in the movement to spell out the difference between feminist research and the usual indifferent, uninvolved attitude of positivist mainstream research. The German word ‘*Betroffenheit*’ expresses not only concern, a state of being affected, but also reflection and the appeal to do something, to act. (xi).

This author has attempted to expand the logic of ‘Betroffenheit’, often also translated as “subjectivity”, to the study of faith-based social movements. In order to better place the concept of affectedness within social science discourse, use will also be made of Hubert Dreyfus’ analysis of Heidegger’s concepts of “*Befindlichkeit*” and “*Stimmung*”, which are combined to result in the concept of affectedness (1991: 168-183), as well as Robyn Eckersley’s principles of “belongingness” and “affectedness” in her work on the “Green State” (2004: 172-202). Based on Ian Barbour’s fourfold typology of ways of relating science and religion (1989), an attempt will be made to illustrate that the ‘affected’ social scientist is capable of understanding aspects of CIC that might be inaccessible to a non-affected scholar. This author will reflect on the way that RPF influenced his own childhood and youth in the late 1950s and early 1960s and illustrate

the inter-generational impact of this form of collective living. Ultimately, this study will take the claims made by the members of the Fellowship at face value. It will assume that spiritual experience provides an ‘added value’ (Sensenig-Dabbous 2006b), which enables its adherents to perform differently when confronted with issues related to political oppression, economic exploitation, and structural violence.

Historical and Societal Roots

The founding of RPF can be followed back to the “Concern Movement”, which was the direct result of reflections of a group of young Mennonite intellectuals meeting in April 1952 in Amsterdam (Toews 1990) in order to process their disappointment with their own historical peace church tradition. In the Netherlands, Mennonites and Quakers participated in the overall church resistance movement against Nazi occupation. Their contribution, however, did not go significantly beyond that of the Dutch Reform and Catholic churches (Zijpp and Brüsewitz 2011). The situation in Germany and Eastern Europe was much more troubling. At best, the Mennonites put up little resistance to the gradual introduction of totalitarianism throughout the 1930s. By the late 1940s it had become increasingly evident, however, that in the Eastern part of Germany and in the regions occupied by the Nazis as of 1939 many Mennonites had openly sympathized with the German authorities (Regier 2004, Schroeder 2003). The Concern Movement saw this pervasive inability or unwillingness to resist fascism as indicative of the larger crisis within the church in general, and the Täufer tradition in particular. According to Paul Toews’ definitive study, ‘The Concern Movement: Its Origins and Early History’ (1990) and Hershberger’s analysis of the impact of ‘Concern’ on the Mennonite church today

(2013), RPF should be understood as the tangible realization of the hopes and dreams of those young critics of the Tauffer tradition who had been forced to consider a radical transformation of their approach to community and service to society. One of the up-and-coming Mennonite intellectuals of his day, Paul Peachey, “wrote his colleagues that ‘from all appearances Amsterdam succeeded in jolting us out of some of our complacency’ (Toews 1990: 12).” Upon returning to the United States, this group would discover that – at least initially – few within the leadership of the Mennonite church shared their exuberance for a radical renewal of the faith.

Several members of the Amsterdam group played a direct role in applying their newly won convictions to both their scholarly work and practical life experience. With the support of his fellow theologian, John Howard Yoder, RPF founder John Miller attempted to implement the thinking of Concern in both instruction and communal living at Goshen College Biblical Seminary in Indiana. Returning from Europe in 1954, Miller brought

“to Goshen (...) the Concern Movement’s sense of historic importance. An article he coauthored with Norman Kraus stated, ‘In the light of reports coming in from every tradition of the world-wide church we have boldness to believe that the ‘intimations of another way’ that have come to us in past months are not simply some private idiosyncrasies (Jackson and Jackson 1987: 16).”

This ultimately led to Miller being forced by his employers, in early 1957, to take an extend leave of absence in order to reconsider his radical intentions. Rather than discouraging the adherents of Concern (Miller, Peachey, and Yoder) in their attempt to revolutionize the church, this disciplinary measure was actually the spark leading to the founding of the first urban community within the, until then primarily agrarian, Tauffer

tradition. Taking a group of young scholars and students with him, Miller and his wife Louise moved to Evanston in the summer of 1957, setting up a Mennonite commune in a run down, three story Victorian mansion in a short, one-way street named Reba Place. They were followed shortly thereafter by a small group of graduates of Eastern Mennonite College (EMC) in Harrisonburg Virginia, including this author's young parents. As a member of the Concern team, the eminent Mennonite sociologist, Paul Peachey, played an important role in promoting the Reba Place experiment at EMC, today's EMU. John Howard Yoder, known internationally as author of the definitive pacifist study on church-state relations, "The Politics of Jesus" (1994), remained at Goshen College, supporting RPF from within the largely ambivalent to hostile Mennonite 'academic establishment' (Jackson and Jackson 1987).

According to Timothy Miller's exhaustive survey of intentional communities in North America during this period, the decision to set up a CIC in a major city was a break with Tauffer tradition. The founders of RPF took the 'unprecedented and radical step of planting a Christian community not in a rural area, as the Hutterites and Bruderhof had done before them, but in metropolitan Chicago – a place where they could use the traditional Anabaptist vision of righteousness to confront endemic social evil (1998:182).' Many rural role models existed at this time, which the founders of the RPF could have emulated, including the Amish, Old Order Mennonite, and Hutterite communities of their own Tauffer tradition, the afore mentioned Society of Brothers (Bruderhof) with its German-Christian Socialist roots, and most importantly, the interracial Koinonia Farm, founded in 1942 at the height of the segregationist period, in

Americus Georgia. The Bruderhof actively discouraged John Miller from founding a Mennonite CIC in Evanston stating, according to the RPF archives “that planting a Christian community in a city ‘has never been done and should not be tried’ (Jackson and Jackson 1987: 21).”

As shall be illustrated below, the choice of an urban context proved to be beneficial on all fronts. It not only provided a solid financial foundation and readily available housing and infrastructure for the Fellowship, it also promoted the peace, freedom, and social justice agendas of this community by placing them in the center of various escalating conflicts during the coming decades, including the wars in Vietnam and Central America, the struggle for civil rights, and battle for affordable and dignified housing in America’s big cities (Harris 1973). In the words of the founders, as cited by Jackson and Jackson:

The reasons favoring Evanston were: there were VS (voluntary service, ES) job possibilities at Evanston General Hospital; there was an expected influx of black families in south Evanston (with the accompanying tensions) that could provide a context for personal service and witness; there was a very weak church witness in south Evanston and no Anabaptist center in this part of the city (1987: 24).

A wealth a literature now exists on the history of Reba Place and the role of the Taufer tradition in its development. As described by Toews (1990) and Hershberger (2013), the founders of Concern Movement and RPF looked back into their shared history to anchor themselves in the experience of 1st and 16th century Christian communities in the Middle East and Central Europe respectively. According to a reference in Janzen’s overview of CIC in North America, Dietrich Bonhoeffer has played a role, if only indirectly, in the trajectory of RPF (1996: 133). Often cited as a major influence on 20th and 21st century New Monasticism, Bonhoeffer’s 1938 volume “Gemeinsames Leben” (Life Together)

stands in stark contrast to the capitulation of German Mennonites when faced with the terror of the Nazi regime. “Communal life is again being recognized by Christians today as the grace that it is, as the extraordinary, the ‘roses and lilies’ of the Christian life (1945:21).” Although never mentioned specifically in the two most authoritative studies of RPF (Harris 1973, Jackson and Jackson 1987), Huysler considers Bonhoeffer’s famous 1935 reference to new monasticism as the future of the church after the fall of the Third Reich, as part of the tradition upon which the post-war Taufer CIC movement was built. “The restoration of the church will surely come from a sort of new monasticism which has in common with the old only the uncompromising attitude of a life lived according to the Sermon on the Mount in the following of Christ (2008: 414).”

During its formative years, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, RPF had close ties to numerous CICs throughout North America. Koinonia Farm, the Bruderhof, and the Hutterites were the most significant and are well documented in the Jackson and Jackson study (1987). Like the Amish and Mennonites, the Hutterites were part of the Taufer historical peace church tradition, dating back to the early 16th century. The Bruderhof, rooted as it was in the Protestant branch of German Christian-Socialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was outlawed after the Nazis came to power in Germany. Its North American branch, the Society of Brothers, was created through a merger with the Hutterites in 1930 and absorbed much of the potential of the movement during and immediately after the war. (Pfeiffer 1992, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bund_der_Religi%C3%B6sen_Sozialistinnen_und_Sozialisten_Deutschlands, 02 May 2017). The founders of RPF were attracted to both traditions,

but ultimately shied away from a merger with either, encouraging those interested in a rural existence to join these agrarian communes individually (Jackson and Jackson 1987:85.) Ties with Koinonia Farm were much closer. Although this agrarian project was rooted in the historic traditions of earlier centuries, it shared the peace, freedom, and social justice commitments of the FPF founders. Both communities were openly interracial and anti-racist, at a time when – even in 1950s Chicago – this was by no means the norm. In times of need, Koinonia and RPF supported each other financially, send staff and even entire families to each other’s communities, and participated in joint anti-war and economic development projects. Both communities were based on what Markofski terms ‘holistic communitarianism’, a tradition in which Christian evangelism, spirituality, and social justice activism go hand-in-hand (2015: 21-22).

A final strand in the development of urban Christian communitarianism, which most likely did have an influence on RPF, can be located within the Catholic and secular labor organizations and civil rights movement in the Chicago area. Evidence of this is purely anecdotal, though the literature on new monasticism does emphasize the importance of – for example – “the Catholic Worker Movement (founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in 1933) (Huyser 2008: 414) and the interaction between Martin Luther King Jr and RPF (Berger 2007, Shenk 2011, Miller Shearer 2015). Historically, Mennonites shared and supported many of the social justice goals of the labor movement in the United States, although they were skeptical of labor unions in particular because of their perceived militancy (Thiessen 2009, Thiessen 2016). This author was unable to find any direct references between the Catholic Worker Movement and RPF during the formative

years. However many links can be found today (Kauffman 2009). It should also be noted here, that by the late 1960s a significant percentage of the RPF membership were either Catholic or mainline Protestant.

Countering Mars, Mammon, and Me

Over the 60 years of its existence, RPF has successfully resisted the pull of mainstream American society. Along the lines of Markofski's concept of 'holistic communitarianism', it has placed itself in opposition to American militarism at home and abroad, to corporate and individual greed, and to the prevalent culture of selfishness now common in many parts of the world. RPF has developed a variety of alternative businesses, ranging from educational and caring services, to home repairs and office services, furniture production and bicycle repairs. These are described in great detail on its website (<http://www.rebaplacefellowship.org/>). This alternative economic model is seen as a form of Christian witnessing and as a tangible way of loving one's neighbor. Individually and collectively, members of RPF have actively opposed the US wars and intervention in Korea, Vietnam, Latin America, Southern Africa, and the Middle East. Two specific examples – one related to countering government refugee policy and the other to undermining speculative housing practices – will be presented here in order to illustrate the hands-on approach taken by RPF.

The 'Overground Railroad' helps Central American refugees circumvent US immigration authorities and make their way safely to Canada (Epstien 1986). It was set up in the 1980s by Koinonia and RPF. According to Betzelberger: "Because Reba Place

Fellowship and Koinonia shared an emphasis on social justice, pacifism, and close-knit common-purse communities, they formed a close bond (2011: 24).” Together they created a network of faith-based organization throughout the US and Canada.

The most significant difference in Reba Place’s complimentary program was the use of a dispersed network of churches and communities. This entire network, rather than exclusively Reba Place Fellowship, bore the cost of supporting refugees during the sometimes lengthy asylum process (2011: 26).

The Fellowship also actively supported refugees from Cambodia during this period and ultimately many began attending the Reba Place worship services and some were baptized into the Christian faith.

Of equal significance on the local and personal level was the work for renters’ and home owners’ rights. RPF was set up intentionally in 1957 in a racially mixed area of southern Evanston, in order to promote racial and social reconciliation and to fight housing speculation head on. In this manner, members of the Fellowship were able to literally live their faith and love their neighbors, figuratively and practically. The following example is just one of many illustrating how RPF took an active stand in their community.

According to Harris’ 1973 study, the neighbors of RPF saw them

as a stabilizing factor in a transient area. They cite the influence of (the Fellowship, ES) in the face of an influx of black residents as the persuasion of many white residents to remain. They perceive (the Fellowship, ES) as several hundred thousand dollars of real estate which is committed to remaining and working to stabilize the neighborhood. On that occasion, (the Fellowship, ES) members had gone door to door in the several block area to try to persuade their neighbors to remain. The size and dedication of (the Fellowship, ES) undoubtedly permitted more influence than several single families would have exercised (106-107).

Less encouraging, but equally enlightening, is the experience RPF has made with egalitarian and collective leadership during its six decade-long history. Based on the thinking of the Concern Movement at the end of World War Two, and on the leadership of John Miller in particular, RPF sought to establish a governance system in which everyone rules, but God is in control. Russell Harris' 1973 study is considered by many to be the most in-depth and systematic on this topic. His assessment of the system of self-governance was drawn from three field research stays at RPF in 1964, February 1969, and August 1969. Thus his empirical research was completed during the period in which John Miller was the indirect, albeit undisputed leader of the Fellowship. According to Harris, the success of the Fellowship model of egalitarian self-rule was based on two factors. The first being the fact that formal and informal leadership positions had no impact on the living standards and external manifestations of prestige of those members entrusted with them. Because of the collective decision-making processes and the fact that all members agreed to live on a subsistence income – equal to the welfare recipients with whom they shared their neighborhood – leadership was considered a responsibility, but not a form of power or recognition. Secondly, the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding decision making and influencing conflict situations was taken seriously. As mentioned at the outset of this study, the members of RPF saw disagreements and dissent as manifestations of divine Grace at work within the Fellowship of believers. This equilibrium would collapse after the departure of Miller in mid-1969. According to Jackson and Jackson, the introduction of the Charismatic Renewal Movement to RPF in the early 1970s led to a concentration of power in the hands of the middle and top level leadership. One decade later, after a severe crisis of confidence, this process was

reversed. In the words of Albert Steiner, one of the original ‘rebels’ who accompanied John Miller from Goshen to Evanston, the Fellowship abandoned its democratic principles during the Charismatic experiment between 1972 and 1979.

Albert Steiner also notes that there was a change in Reba’s leadership style. “Before his departure,” recalls Albert, “there was a certain, almost pride in our not having leaders—a pride led by John Miller, himself. This attitude was built on the theory that everyone in the group should be equally responsible, and it came from a strong reaction to some historical abuses by clergy.” Actually, John had advocated identifying the leaders of the group—with everyone’s consensus, of course—but mostly so that no one drifted into that role or took it on his or her own. John’s style had been very low key, and the leadership he exerted, though powerful, was to motivate the group rather than accept responsibility himself for what was done. After the Millers left, more and more responsibility was given to the Coordinating Committee (later called elders). And the authority pendulum began to swing until ultimately Reba’s leaders became involved in their own abuses of authority (Jackson and Jackson 1987:113-114).

The Fellowship began an extended, painful, but ultimately successful process of “Repentance, Regrouping, and Renewal” as of 1978 (Jackson and Jackson 1987:244-251). By 1980 the process of concentration of power in the hands of a few had been reversed. “The Review, a seven-month in-depth look at what had gone wrong and what needed to change” determined that the abuse of power by the elders, household leaders, and those enjoying informal power had “betrayed not only the trust of the community but also their responsibility to the Lord” (Jackson and Jackson 1987: 194, 197). According to Schreiner Younquist and Varela (2011) this abuse of power had a particularly detrimental effect of two groups, namely women and minorities, primarily African-Americans and Latinos. Today RPF has taken great strides to rectify these problems, integrating women and minorities into its leadership and diversifying its membership structures to include those choosing not to live in communal households.

Returning to the three questions posed at the outset of this survey of the first 60 years of RPF, was this intentional community able to successfully combine witnessing to their faith as Christians with service to the community, based on the principles of solidarity and reciprocity? Were they able to remain loyal to the “Anabaptist Vision” which the founding families has attempted to implement in their personal lives following the horrors of World War Two. Finally, has the concept of affectedness proven to be an asset in assessing the impact of faith-based communal life on both the individuals living at RPF and the neighborhood in which they were situated?

The few concrete cases presented in here were intended to illustrate that RPF was able to have a significant impact within its immediate neighborhood, on society at large, and with respect to the Mennonite Church during the last half century. The attempt to implement the egalitarian and communal leadership goals of Concern proved to me more difficult. The Fellowship became guilty of serious abuses of power in the period in which it experienced in most rapid growth, during the 1970s, only to return to its principals of collective leadership during the last several decades. This author spent most of the first decade of his life growing up at RPF. At the recommendation of Paul Peachey, his parents moved to Evanston from Harrisonburg Virginia in 1958 after his father graduated from EMC. He also shares the RPF’s understanding of personal faith, and the role of the Holy Spirit more specifically, as it affects individual and community development.

Hopefully this brief introduction has convinced the reader that the concept of affectedness is beneficial when studying not only class conflict and gender relations, but also the role that religious faith and spirituality play in a communal setting. As seen from

the perspective of the Fellowship, it was intervening power of the Holy Spirit which enabled them to halt a self-destructive process in the turbulent 1970s and pull back from the abyss which destroyed many other CICs. This working relationship with spirituality can only be fully understood by those who themselves have been affected by it.

RPF is an urban intentional community built on the conviction that the interplay between the individual, the community, and God provides a solid foundation for the “Rediscovery of the Anabaptist Vision” in the modern world. In a small way, this form of radical Christian witnessing has made a difference in the lives of many struggling with the impact of globalization, both in the Global North and in the Global South. Accordingly, Christian intentional communities would seem to provide a viable model for those searching for an integrated approach to both personal and societal development in tune with a higher cause.

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