

The Othona Community

**THE OTHONA COMMUNITY:
“A STRANGE PHENOMENON”**

by

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Preface

I feel very honoured to have been asked to write the preface to this master work, *A Strange Phenomenon*, on the history, ethos and charism of the Othona Community.

In the very last paragraph Andrea states:

Othona is so much more than it seems to be on the outside. It is more than a lifestyle or mindset or holiday place. It represents (in theological language) values which stand for the Kingdom: (in practical language) it is the practice of hospitality on the margins; of solidarity, inclusivity, diversity, a place of healing, a supportive family and a rootedness called *Heimat*.

It is the in-depth analysis, exploration and justification of this statement which make this such an important book for anyone remotely interested in the Othona Community.

In its original form the thesis earned Andrea the title of Doctor of Philosophy from Birmingham University (via the Urban Theological Union in Sheffield) with the highest of marks. It involved hours of interviewing members of the Community at Bradwell as well as a huge amount of academic research into almost everything that has been written about Othona, from the founder Norman Motley's book "Much Ado About Something" and from the Community newsletters dating back to the 1940s as well as many other sources which over the years would never have seen the light of day again without Andrea's work.

The thesis itself contains detailed explanation of Andrea's methods of research and working, and includes meticulous bibliography and the sources of all her information. Now it has been slimmed down to make a book more accessible to the general reader.

Perhaps more relevant to most of us, the book also contains an in-depth analysis of 'intentional communities' and attempts to explain the strange phenomenon which is the Othona Community, both the negative and the positive aspects. For me, the work has helped to explain what it is that draws me and so many others back to Othona over the years and continues to do so in spite of past traumas which are inevitable in any vibrant community. I think it is summed up in the German word *Heimat* which Andrea describes so well. *Heimat* is that home in the heart's centre to which we long to return. It is the spiritual home which Othona has become at both centres for so many people over the years.

In the future this book will be a useful resource for any student of the phenomenon of communities, religious or secular, and of course it will remain a mine of information and interest for anyone involved in Othona, particularly at Bradwell.

Janet Marshall

DEDICATION

Long Live Othona: To a Place that has tremendously enriched us.

Special Thanks to: Pete	Brenda
Al	Robert
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To Janet Marshall and Norman Motley!

To the UTU in Sheffield who have proved once again that learning is exciting at any age:
Thank you, Dr John Vincent and Dr Ian Duffield for giving me this great opportunity, for your inspiration, patience and help!

And thanks to Kate, the good soul of the UTU.

And last but not least: Paula und Sam, meine Liebsten, ohne deren Ermutigung und Unterstützung nichts wäre, wie es ist.

Andrea-Renée Misler



Lüneburg, January 2019

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore the “strange phenomenon” of the Intentional Christian Community Othona in Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex, Great Britain, founded in 1946 by Norman Motley, to cherish differences and diversity through reconciliation among nations that had been at war with each other. An old neglected chapel, St Peter-on-the-Wall, became the spiritual centre of this Community.

A phenomenographic, auto-ethnographic and multi-dimensional research approach, designed to investigate and describe the Othona Community and its praxis and the researcher's involvement in it, is used for the empirical part of the thesis.

The study seeks to discover a) the *Lebenswelten* — or the world created by its life — of the Othona Community, b) members'/participants' perception of the Community through interviews and Community literature, c) a way of understanding this “strange phenomenon” and its special charism with the help of an “endogenous theology”.

This thesis shows that a two-fold *encounter* lies at the heart of the experience at Othona: encounter between a person and the “Other” (represented by the Stoep) and between a person and the “Wholly Other” (represented by the Chapel). Through examination of these encounters light is shed on the extraordinariness of Othona. The German term *Heimat* (a deeply spiritual home) is introduced here to encapsulate these “encounterly” experiences which induce a transformation of place and people alike.

Theologically, the thesis claims that a combination of a Theology of Encounter and an understanding of *Heimat* can assist the appreciation of the Othona phenomenon as a Community of temporary withdrawal and restoration, where differences and a Kingdom model are experienced in narrative encounters on the margins by offering *Heimat* through belonging and significance.

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