

<p><b>Community Under the Word, With Dietrich Bonhoeffer, <i>Live Together</i></b></p>	
<p><b>Citation</b></p>	<p><b>Comments</b></p>
<p>“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1).</p> <p>It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians.</p> <p>Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the Cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God.</p> <p>So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. There is his commission, his work.</p>	
<p>“The Kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people. O you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared?” (Martin Luther).</p>	
<p><b>Romanticizing Community:</b></p>	
<p>Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than they love the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial.</p>	
<p>It is as if he [the dreamer] is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure.</p> <p>When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself.</p>	
<p><b>What is “Under the Word?”</b></p>	
<p>Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this.</p> <p>What does this mean? It means, first, that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that in Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and united for eternity.</p>	
<p>Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may</p>	

<p>participate.</p> <p>The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it.</p>	
<p>The Christian lives wholly by the truth of God's Word in Jesus Christ. If somebody asks him, Where is your salvation, your righteousness? He can never point to himself. He points to the Word of God in Jesus Christ, which assures him salvation and righteousness. He is as alert as possible to this Word.</p>	
<p>Because he daily hungers and thirsts for righteousness, he daily desires the redeeming Word. But God has put this Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others.</p> <p>God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man.</p> <p>Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him.</p>	
<p><b>Confession:</b></p>	
<p>He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone.</p> <p>[For some] the final break-through to fellowship does not occur, because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners.</p>	
<p>Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person.</p> <p>This can happen even in the midst of a pious community. In confession the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light.</p>	
<p>The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners.</p> <p>Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned.</p>	
<p>To stand there before a brother as a sinner is an ignominy that is almost unbearable.</p> <p>In the confession of concrete sins the old man dies a painful, shameful death before the eyes of a brother.</p>	
<p>It is not experience of life but experience of the Cross that makes one a worthy hearer of confessions.</p> <p>The most experienced psychologist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the Cross of Jesus.</p>	

<p>The greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot grasp this one thing: what sin is.</p> <p>Worldly wisdom knows what distress and weakness and failure are, but it does not know the godlessness of men.</p> <p>And so it also does not know that man is destroyed only by his sin and can be healed only by forgiveness. Only the Christian knows this.</p> <p>In the presence of a psychiatrist I can only be a sick man; in the presence of a Christian brother I can dare to be a sinner.</p> <p>The psychiatrist must first search my heart and yet he never plumbs its ultimate depth.</p> <p>The Christian brother knows when I come to him: here is a sinner like myself, a godless man who wants to confess and yearns for God's forgiveness.</p>	
<p><b>Together under the word of Christ:</b></p>	
<p>"He is our peace," says Paul of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:14). Without Christ there is discord between God and man and between man and man. Christ became the Mediator and made peace with God and among men.</p>	
<p>Without Christ we should not know God, we could not call upon Him, nor come to Him. But without Christ we also would not know our brother, nor could we come to him.</p> <p>The way is blocked by our own ego. Christ opened up the way to God and to our brother. Now Christians can live with one another in peace; they can love and serve one another; they can become one.</p> <p>But they can continue to do so only by way of Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ are we one, only through him are we bound together.</p>	
<p><b>Thankfulness:</b></p>	
<p>In the Christian community thankfulness is just what it is anywhere else in the Christian life.</p> <p>Only he who gives thanks for little things receives the big things. We prevent God from giving us the great spiritual gifts He has in store for us, because we do not give thanks for daily gifts.</p>	
<p>We do not complain of what God does not give us; we rather thank God for what He does give us daily.</p> <p>And is not what has been given us enough: brothers, who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of His grace?</p>	
<p>Is the divine gift of Christian fellowship anything less than this, any day, even the most difficult and distressing day?</p> <p>Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too, stand under</p>	

<p>the Word of Christ?</p>	
<p>We pray for the big things and forget to give thanks for the ordinary, small (and yet really not small) gifts. How can God entrust great things to one who will not thankfully receive from Him the little things?</p> <p>If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even where there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith, and difficulty;</p>	
<p>This applies in a special way to the complaints often heard from pastors and zealous members about their congregations.</p> <p>A pastor should not complain about his congregation, certainly never to other people, but also not to God. A congregation has not been entrusted to him in order that he should become its accuser before God and men.</p>	
<p>When a person becomes alienated from a Christian community in which he has been placed and begins to raise complaints about it, he had better examine himself first to see whether the trouble is not due to his wish dream that should be shattered by God; and if this be the case, let him thank God for leading him into this predicament. 80</p>	
<p>But if not, let him nevertheless guard against ever becoming an accuser of the congregation before God. Let him rather accuse himself for his unbelief.</p> <p>Let him pray God for an understanding of his own failure and his particular sin, and pray that he may not wrong his brethren.</p>	
<p>What may appear weak and trifling to us may be great and glorious to God. Just as the Christian should not be constantly feeling his spiritual pulse, so, too, the Christian community has not been given to us by God for us to be constantly taking its temperature.</p>	
<p>The more thankfully we daily receive what is given to us, the more surely and steadily will fellowship increase and grow from day to day as God pleases.</p>	
<p>Many people seek fellowship because they are afraid to be alone. Because they cannot stand loneliness, they are driven to seek the company of other people.</p> <p>There are Christians, too, who cannot endure being alone, who have had some bad experiences with themselves, who hope they will gain some help in association with others.</p>	
<p>[Then] They are generally disappointed. Then they blame the fellowship for what is really their own fault. The Christian community is not a spiritual sanatorium. The person who comes into a fellowship because he is running away from himself is misusing it for the sake of diversion, no matter how spiritual this diversion may appear.</p>	

<p>He is really not seeking community at all, but only distraction which will allow him to forget his loneliness for a brief time, the very alienation that creates the deadly isolation of man.</p> <p><i>Let him who cannot be alone beware of community.</i></p> <p>But the reverse is also true: <i>Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.</i></p>	
<p>The day also needs definite times of silence, silence under the Word and silence that comes out of the Word. These will be especially the times before and after hearing the Word. The Word comes not to the chatterer but to him who holds his tongue.</p> <p>Silence is the simple stillness of the individual under the Word of God.</p>	