

Bonhoeffer's Life Together WAF Series

Session 2: Bonhoeffer's Theology of Community

September 9, 2015

II. *Life Together* Chapter 1 – Community

"There is probably no Christian to whom God has not given the uplifting *experience* of genuine Christian community as least once in his life. But in this world, such experiences can be no more than a gracious extra beyond the daily bread of Christian community life. We have no claim upon such experiences, and we do not live with other Christians for the sake of acquiring them. It is not the experience of Christian brotherhood, but the solid and certain faith in brotherhood that holds us together....We are bound together by faith, not by experience." (p. 39)

A. Christian community is an immeasurable gift of God's grace.

1. Christians are scattered among the peoples of the world.
2. Some Christians receive the blessing of being in community.
 - a. "But if there is so much blessing and joy even in a single encounter of brother with brother, how inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who by God's will are privileged to live in daily fellowship of life with other Christians!" (p. 20)
3. Christian community can never be attained by human efforts. It is always a gift of God.
4. "Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we much realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate." (p. 30)
 - a. It can be compared to sanctification. It is something that God does, our efforts do not bring it about, and only God knows the state of it. (p. 30)
5. Those who experience Christian community often may easily take it for granted.
 - a. "It is true, of course, that what is an unspeakable gift of God for a lonely individual is easily disregarded and trodden under foot by those who have the gift every day." (p. 20)

B. Christian community is centered on Christ alone.

1. Christians need others because of Jesus Christ.
 - a. Our righteousness is an "alien righteousness" in that it comes from outside of us.
 - b. God has put the Word into our mouths so that we may communicate the Word to others.
 - c. We need other Christians to speak God's Word to us.
 - d. This communication of the Word is the goal of Christian community.
2. Christians come to others only through Jesus Christ.
 - a. "Without Christ there is discord between God and man and between man and man." (p. 23)
 - b. "Without Christ we also would not know our brother, nor could we come to him. The way is blocked by our own ego. Christ opened up the way to God and to our brother."(p. 23)
3. In Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and united for eternity.
 - a. "What God did to us, we then owed to others." (p. 25)
 - b. "Not what a man is in himself as a Christian, his spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of our community. What determines our brotherhood is what that man is by reason of Christ. Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us." (p. 25)
 - c. "Because God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients. We thank God for what God has done for us. We thank God for giving us brethren who live by His call, by His forgiveness, and His promise. We do not complain of what God does not give us; we rather thank God for what He does give us daily. And is not what has been given us enough: brother, who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of His grace?" (p. 28)

C. Christian community is not an end to itself, for this leads to sectarianism, shifting the focus away from Christ.

1. "life together under the Word will remain sound and healthy only where it does not form a movement, an order, a society, a *collegium pietatis*, but rather where it understands itself as being a part of the one, holy, catholic, Christian Church, where it shares actively and passively in the sufferings and struggles and promise of the whole Church." (p. 37)
2. Community of the Spirit vs. human community of the spirit (pp. 31-32)

Community of the Spirit	Human Community of spirit
Fellowship of those who are called by Christ	Fellowship of devout souls
Burns bright love of brotherly service, <i>agape</i>	Dark love of good and evil desire, <i>eros</i>
Ordered, service to one another	Disordered desire for pleasure
Humble subjection to the one another	Humble yet haughty subjection of a others to one's own desire
Word of God alone rules	Along with the Word rules the exceptional person
Word alone is binding	Besides Word, people bind others to themselves
All power surrendered to the Holy Spirit	Power is sought and cultivated, though for devout intentions, still dethroning Holy Spirit, relegating the Spirit to a remote unreality – only the human is operative here
Spirit governs	Psychological techniques and methods govern
Simple, naïve service to others	Calculating, methodical, analytical service to others

3. "Human love is directed to the other person for his own sake, spiritual love loves him for Christ's sake." (p. 34) "Jesus Christ stands between the lover and the others he loves." (p. 35)
4. "Perhaps the contrast between spiritual and human reality can be made most clear in the following observation: Within the spiritual community there is never, nor in any way, any "immediate" relationship of one to another, where human community expresses profound, elemental, human desire for community, for immediate contact with other human souls, just as in the flesh there is the urge for physical merger with other flesh." (p. 33)

D. Christian Community is (almost) always an imperfect mixture of spiritual and human community.

1. Disillusionment with community is part of being within Christian community.
 - a. "God's grace speedily shatters such dreams" (p. 26)
 - b. "By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world." (p. 27)
 - c. "He who loves his dream of community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be so honest and earnest and sacrificial." (p. 27)
 - d. "God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly." (p. 27)
 - e. "That dismisses once and for all every clamorous desire for something more. One who wants more than what Christ has established does not want Christian brotherhood. He is looking for some extraordinary social experience which he has not found elsewhere; he is bringing muddled and impure desires into Christian brotherhood. Just at this point Christian is threatened most often at the very start by the greatest danger of all, the danger of being poisoned at its root, the danger of confusing Christian brotherhood with some wishful idea of religious fellowship, of confounding the natural desire of the devout heart for community with the spiritual reality of Christian brotherhood. In Christian brotherhood everything depends upon its being clear right from the beginning, first, that Christian brotherhood is not an ideal, but a divine reality. Second, that Christian brotherhood is a spiritual and not a psychic [human] reality." (p. 26)
 - f. "Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ?"(p. 28)