# Life Together

## Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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Fortress Press

*Minneapolis*

# Preface

The subject matter I am presenting here is such that any further development can take place only through a common effort. We are not dealing with a concern of some private circles but with a mission entrusted to the church. Because of this, we are not searching for more or less haphazard individual solutions to a problem. This is, rather, a responsibility to be undertaken by the church as a whole. There is a hesitation evident in the way this task has been handled. Only recently has it been understood at all. But this hesitation must give way to the willingness of the church to assist in the work. The variety of new ecclesial forms of community makes it necessary to enlist the vigilant cooperation of every responsible party. The following remarks are intended to provide only one individual contribution toward answering the extensive questions that have been raised thereby. As much as possible, may these comments help to clarify this experience and put it into practice.

# Community

"How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1) In what follows we will take a look at several directions and principles that the Holy Scriptures give us for life together [gemeinsame Leben] under the Word.

The Christian cannot simply take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. In the end all his disciples abandoned him. On the cross he was all alone, surrounded by criminals and the jeering crowds. He had come for the express purpose of bringing peace to the enemies of God. So Christians, too, belong not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the midst of enemies. There they find their mission, their work. "To rule is to be in the midst of your enemies. And whoever will not suffer this does not want to be part of the rule of Christ; such a person wants to be among friends and sit among the roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the religious people. O you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing, who would ever have been saved?" (Luther).

"Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me" (Zech. 10:9). According to God's will, the Christian church is a scattered people, scattered like seed "to all the kingdoms of the earth" (Deut. 28:25). That is the curse and its promise. God's people must live in distant lands among the unbelievers, but they will be the seed of the kingdom of God in all the world.

"I will . . . gather them in. For I have redeemed them, . . . and they shall . . . return" (Zech. 10:8–9). When will that happen? It has happened in Jesus Christ, who died "to gather into one the dispersed children of God" (John 11:52), and ultimately it will take place visibly at the end of time when the angels of God will gather God's elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matt. 24:31). Until then, God's people remain scattered, held together in Jesus Christ alone, having become one because they remember *him* in the distant lands, spread out among the unbelievers.

Thus in the period between the death of Christ and the day of judgment, when Christians are allowed to live here in visible community with other Christians, we have merely a gracious anticipation of the end time. It is by God's grace that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly around God's word and sacrament in this world. Not all Christians partake of this grace. The imprisoned, the sick, the lonely who live in the diaspora, the proclaimers of the gospel in heathen lands stand alone. They know that visible community is grace. They pray with the psalmist: "I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival" (Ps. 42:5). But they

remain alone in distant lands, a scattered seed according to God's will. Yet what is denied them as a visible experience they grasp more ardently in faith. Hence "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10) the exiled disciple of the Lord, John the author of the Apocalypse, celebrates the worship of heaven with its congregations in the loneliness of the Island of Patmos. He sees the seven lampstands that are the congregations, the seven stars that are the angels of the congregations, and in the midst and above it all, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, in his great glory as the risen one. He strengthens and comforts John by his word. That is the heavenly community in which the exile participates on the day of his Lord's resurrection.

The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. With great yearning the imprisoned apostle Paul calls his "beloved son in the faith," Timothy, to come to him in prison in the last days of his life. He wants to see him again and have him near. Paul has not forgotten the tears Timothy shed during their final parting (2 Tim. 1:4). Thinking of the congregation in Thessalonica, Paul prays "night and day . . . most earnestly that we may see you face to face" (1 Thess. 3:10). The aged John knows his joy in his own people will only be complete when he can come to them and speak to them face to face instead of using paper and ink (2 John 12). The believer need not feel any shame when yearning for the physical presence of other Christians, as if one were still living too much in the flesh. A human being is created as a body; the Son of God appeared on earth in the body for our sake and was raised in the body. In the sacrament the believer receives the Lord Christ in the body, and the resurrection of the dead will bring about the perfected community of God's spiritual-physical creatures. Therefore, the believer praises the Creator, the Reconciler and the Redeemer, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the bodily presence of the other Christian. The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian living in the diaspora recognizes in the nearness of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. In their loneliness, both the visitor and the one visited recognize in each other the Christ who is present in the body. They receive and meet each other as one meets the Lord, in reverence, humility, and joy. They receive each other's blessings as the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ. But if there is so much happiness and joy even in a single encounter of one Christian with another, what inexhaustible riches must invariably open up for those who by God's will are privileged to live in daily community life with other Christians! Of course, what is an inexpressible blessing from God for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trampled under foot by those who receive the gift every day. It is easily forgotten that the community of Christians is a gift of grace from the kingdom of God, a gift that can be taken from us any day—that the time still separating us from the most profound loneliness may be brief indeed. Therefore, let those who until now have had the privilege of living a Christian life together with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of their hearts. Let them thank

God on their knees and realize: it is grace, nothing but grace, that we are still permitted to live in the community of Christians today.

The measure with which God gives the gift of visible community is varied. Christians who live dispersed from one another are comforted by a brief visit of another Christian, a prayer together, and another Christian's blessing. Indeed, they are strengthened by letters written by the hands of other Christians. Paul's greetings in his letters written in his own hand were no doubt tokens of such community. Others are given the gift on Sundays of the community of the worship service. Still others have the privilege of living a Christian life in the community of their families. Before their ordination young seminarians receive the gift of a common life with their brothers for a certain length of time. Among serious Christians in congregations today there is a growing desire to meet together with other Christians during the midday break from work for life together under the Word. Life together is again being understood by Christians today as the grace that it is, as the extraordinary aspect, the "roses and lilies" of the Christian life (Luther).

Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. There is no Christian community that is more than this, and none that is less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily community of many years, Christian community is solely this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.

What does that mean? It means, *first*, that a Christian needs others for the sake of Jesus Christ. It means, *second*, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, *third*, that from eternity we have been chosen in Jesus Christ, accepted in time, and united for eternity.

First, Christians are persons who no longer seek their salvation, their deliverance, their justification in themselves, but in Jesus Christ alone. They know that God's Word in Jesus Christ pronounces them guilty, even when they feel nothing of their own guilt, and that God's Word in Jesus Christ pronounces them free and righteous, even when they feel nothing of their own righteousness. Christians no longer live by their own resources, by accusing themselves and justifying themselves, but by God's accusation and God's justification. They live entirely by God's Word pronounced on them, in faithful submission to God's judgment, whether it declares them guilty or righteous. The death and life of Christians are not situated in a self-contained isolation. Rather, Christians encounter both death and life only in the Word that comes to them from the outside, in God's Word to them. The Reformers expressed it by calling our righteousness an "alien righteousness" ["fremde Gerechtigkeit"], a righteousness that comes from outside of us (*extra nos*). They meant by this expression that Christians are dependent on the Word of God spoken to them. They are directed outward to the Word

coming to them. Christians live entirely by the truth of God's Word in Jesus Christ. If they are asked "where is your salvation, your blessedness, your righteousness?," they can never point to themselves. Instead, they point to the Word of God in Jesus Christ that grants them salvation, blessedness, and righteousness. They watch for this Word wherever they can. Because they daily hunger and thirst for righteousness, they long for the redeeming Word again and again. It can only come from the outside. In themselves they are destitute and dead. Help must come from the outside; and it has come and comes daily and anew in the Word of Jesus Christ, bringing us redemption, righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. But God put this Word into the mouth of human beings so that it may be passed on to others. When people are deeply affected by the Word, they tell it to other people. God has willed that we should seek and find God's living Word in the testimony of other Christians, in the mouths of human beings. Therefore, Christians need other Christians who speak God's Word to them. They need them again and again when they become uncertain and disheartened because, living by their own resources, they cannot help themselves without cheating themselves out of the truth. They need other Christians as bearers and proclaimers of the divine word of salvation. They need them solely for the sake of Jesus Christ. The Christ in one's own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of another Christian. The heart in one's heart is uncertain; the Word is sure. At the same time, this also clarifies that the goal of all Christian community is to encounter one another as bringers of the message of salvation. As such, God allows Christians to come together and grants them community. Their community is based only on Jesus Christ and this "alien righteousness." Therefore, we may now say that the community of Christians springs solely from the biblical and reformation message of the justification of human beings through grace alone. The longing of Christians for one another is based solely on this message.

Second, a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. Among human beings there is strife. "He is our peace" (Eph. 2:14), says Paul of Jesus Christ. In him, broken and divided humanity has become one. Without Christ there is discord between God and humanity and between one human being and another. Christ has become the mediator who has made peace with God and peace among human beings. Without Christ we would not know God; we could neither call on God nor come to God. Moreover, without Christ we would not know other Christians around us; nor could we approach them. The way to them is blocked by one's own ego [das eigene Ich]. Christ opened up the way to God and to one another. Now Christians can live with each other in peace; they can love and serve one another; they can become one. But they can continue to do so only through Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ are we one; only through him are we bound together. He remains the one and only mediator throughout eternity.

Third, when God's Son took on flesh, he truly and bodily, out of pure grace, took on our being, our nature, ourselves.

This was the eternal decree of the triune God. Now we are in him. Wherever he is, he bears our flesh, he bears us. And, where he is, there we are too—in the incarnation, on the cross, and in his resurrection. We belong to him because we are in him. That is why the Scriptures call us the body of Christ. But if we have been elected and accepted with the whole church in Jesus Christ before we could know it or want it, then we also belong to Christ in eternity with one another. We who live here in community with Christ will one day be with Christ in eternal community. Those who look at other Christians should know that they will be eternally united with them in Jesus Christ. Christian community means community through and in Jesus Christ. Everything the Scriptures provide in the way of directions and rules for Christians' life together rests on this presupposition.

"Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. . . .But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more" (1 Thess. 4:9f.). It is God's own undertaking to teach such love. All that human beings can add is to remember this divine instruction and the exhortation to excel in it more and more. When God had mercy on us, when God revealed Jesus Christ to us as our brother, when God won our hearts by God's own love, our instruction in Christian love began at the same time. When God was merciful to us, we learned to be merciful with one another. When we received forgiveness instead of judgment, we too were made ready to forgive each other. What God did to us, we then owed to others. The more we received, the more we were able to give; and the more meager our love for one another, the less we were living by God's mercy and love. Thus God taught us to encounter one another as God has encountered us in Christ. "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7).

In this way the one whom God has placed in common life with other Christians learns what it means to have brothers and sisters. "Brothers and sisters . . . in the Lord," Paul calls his congregation (Phil. 1:14). One is a brother or sister to another only through Jesus Christ. I am a brother or sister to another person through what Jesus Christ has done for me and to me; others have become brothers and sisters to me through what Jesus Christ has done for them and to them. The fact that we are brothers and sisters only through Jesus Christ is of immeasurable significance. Therefore, the other who comes face to face with me earnestly and devoutly seeking community is not the brother or sister with whom I am to relate in the community. My brother or sister is instead that other person who has been redeemed by Christ, absolved from sin, and called to faith and eternal life. What persons are in themselves as Christians, in their inwardness and piety, cannot constitute the basis of our community, which is determined by what those persons are in terms of Christ. Our community consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. That not only is true at the beginning, as if in the course of time something else were

to be added to our community, but also remains so for all the future and into all eternity. I have community with others and will continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more everything else between us will recede, and the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is alive between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we really do *have* one another. We have one another completely and for all eternity.

This dismisses at the outset every unhappy desire for something more. Those who want more than what Christ has established between us do not want Christian community. They are looking for some extraordinary experiences of community that were denied them elsewhere. Such people are bringing confused and tainted desires into the Christian community. Precisely at this point Christian community is most often threatened from the very outset by the greatest danger, the danger of internal poisoning, the danger of confusing Christian community with some wishful image of pious community, the danger of blending the devout heart's natural desire for community with the spiritual reality of Christian community. It is essential for Christian community that two things become clear right from the beginning. *First, Christian community is not an ideal, but a divine reality; second, Christian community is a spiritual [pneumatisch] and not an emotional [psychisch] reality*.

On innumerable occasions a whole Christian community has been shattered because it has lived on the basis of a wishful image. Certainly serious Christians who are put in a community for the first time will often bring with them a very definite image of what Christian communal life [Zusammenleben] should be, and they will be anxious to realize it. But God's grace quickly frustrates all such dreams. A great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and, if we are fortunate, with ourselves, is bound to overwhelm us as surely as God desires to lead us to an understanding of genuine Christian community. By sheer grace God will not permit us to live in a dream world even for a few weeks and to abandon ourselves to those blissful experiences and exalted moods that sweep over us like a wave of rapture. For God is not a God of emotionalism, but the God of truth. Only that community which enters into the experience of this great disillusionment with all its unpleasant and evil appearances begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it. The sooner this moment of disillusionment comes over the individual and the community, the better for both. However, a community that cannot bear and cannot survive such disillusionment, clinging instead to its idealized image, when that should be done away with, loses at the same time the promise of a durable Christian community. Sooner or later it is bound to collapse. Every human idealized image that is brought into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be broken up so that genuine community can survive. Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than the Christian community

itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial.

God hates this wishful dreaming because it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. Those who dream of this idealized community demand that it be fulfilled by God, by others, and by themselves. They enter the community of Christians with their demands, set up their own law, and judge one another and even God accordingly. They stand adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of the community. They act as if they have to create the Christian community, as if their visionary ideal binds the people together. Whatever does not go their way, they call a failure. When their idealized image is shattered, they see the community breaking into pieces. So they first become accusers of other Christians in the community, then accusers of God, and finally the desperate accusers of themselves. Because God already has laid the only foundation of our community, because God has united us in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that life together with other Christians, not as those who make demands, but as those who thankfully receive. We thank God for what God has done for us. We thank God for giving us other Christians who live by God's call, forgiveness, and promise. We do not complain about what God does not give us; rather we are thankful for what God does give us daily. And is not what has been given us enough: other believers who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of God's grace? Is the gift of God any less immeasurably great than this on any given day, even on the most difficult and distressing days of a Christian community? Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the common life, is not the one who sins still a person with whom I too stand under the word of Christ? Will not another Christian's sin be an occasion for me ever anew to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ? Therefore, will not the very moment of great disillusionment with my brother or sister be incomparably wholesome for me because it so thoroughly teaches me that both of us can never live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one Word and deed that really binds us together, the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ? The bright day of Christian community dawns wherever the early morning mists of dreamy visions are lifting.

Thankfulness works in the Christian community as it usually does in the Christian life. Only those who give thanks for little things receive the great things as well. We prevent God from giving us the great spiritual gifts prepared for us because we do not give thanks for daily gifts. We think that we should not be satisfied with the small measure of spiritual knowledge, experience, and love that has been given to us, and that we must be constantly seeking the great gifts. Then we complain that we lack the deep certainty, the strong faith, and the rich experiences that God has given to other Christians, and we consider these complaints to be pious. We pray for the big things and forget to

give thanks for the small (and yet really not so small!) gifts we receive daily. How can God entrust great things to those who will not gratefully receive the little things from God's hand? If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian community in which we have been placed, even when there are no great experiences, no noticeable riches, but much weakness, difficulty, and little faith—and if, on the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so miserable and so insignificant and does not at all live up to our expectations—then we hinder God from letting our community grow according to the measure and riches that are there for us all in Jesus Christ. That also applies in a special way to the complaints often heard from pastors and zealous parishioners about their congregations. Pastors should not complain about their congregation, certainly never to other people, but also not to God. Congregations have not been entrusted to them in order that they should become accusers of their congregations before God and their fellow human beings. When pastors lose faith in a Christian community in which they have been placed and begin to make accusations against it, they had better examine themselves first to see whether the underlying problem is not their own idealized image, which should be shattered by God. And if they find that to be true, let them thank God for leading them into this predicament. But if they find that it is not true, let them nevertheless guard against ever becoming an accuser of those whom God has gathered together. Instead, let them accuse themselves of their unbelief, let them ask for an understanding of their own failure and their particular sin, and pray that they may not wrong other Christians. Let such pastors, recognizing their own guilt, make intercession for those charged to their care. Let them do what they have been instructed to do and thank God.

Like the Christian's sanctification, Christian community is a gift of God to which we have no claim. Only God knows the real condition of either our community or our sanctification. What may appear weak and insignificant to us may be great and glorious to God. Just as Christians should not be constantly feeling the pulse of their spiritual life, so too the Christian community has not been given to us by God for us to be continually taking its temperature. The more thankfully we daily receive what is given to us, the more assuredly and consistently will community increase and grow from day to day as God pleases.

Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our community is in Jesus Christ alone, the more calmly we will learn to think about our community and pray and hope for it.

Because Christian community is founded solely on Jesus Christ, it is a spiritual [pneumatisch] and not a emotional [psychisch] reality. In this respect it differs absolutely from all other communities. The Scriptures call pneumatic or "spiritual" [geistlich] what is created only by the Holy Spirit, who puts

Jesus Christ into our hearts as lord and savior. The scriptures call "emotional" what comes from the natural urges, strengths, and abilities of the human soul.

The basis of all pneumatic, or spiritual, reality is the clear, manifest Word of God in Jesus Christ. At the foundation of all emotional, reality are the dark, impenetrable urges and desires of the human soul. The basis of spiritual community is truth; the basis of emotional community is desire. The essence of spiritual community is light. For "God is light and in [God] there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5); and "if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7). The essence of emotional community is darkness, "for it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come" (Mark 7:21). It is the deep night that spreads over the sources of all human activity, over even all noble and devout impulses. Spiritual community is the community of those who are called by Christ; emotional community is the community of pious [fromm] souls. The bright love of Christian service, *agape*, lives in the spiritual community; the dark love of pious-impious urges, *eros*, burns in the emotional community. In the former, there is ordered, Christian service; in the latter, disordered desire for pleasure. In the former, there is humble submission of Christians one to another; in the latter, humble yet haughty subjection of other Christians to one's own desires. In the spiritual community the Word of God alone rules; in the emotional community the individual who is equipped with exceptional powers, experience, and magical, suggestive abilities rules along with the Word. In the one, God's Word alone is binding; in the other, besides the Word, human beings bind others to themselves. In the one, all power, honor, and rule are surrendered to the Holy Spirit; in the other, power and personal spheres of influence are sought and cultivated. So far as these are devout people, they certainly seek this power with the intention of serving the highest and the best. But in reality they end up dethroning the Holy Spirit and banishing it to the realm of unreal remoteness; only what is emotional remains real here. Thus, in the spiritual community the Spirit rules; in the emotional community, psychological techniques and methods. In the former, unsophisticated, nonpsychological, unmethodical, helping love is offered to one another; in the latter, psychological analysis and design. In the former, service to one another is simple and humble; in the latter, it is to strangers treated in a searching, calculating fashion.

Perhaps the contrast between spiritual and emotional reality can be made most clear in the following observation. Within the spiritual community there is never, in any way whatsoever, an "immediate" relationship of one to another. However, in the emotional community there exists a profound, elemental emotional desire for community, for immediate contact with other human souls, just as in the flesh there is a yearning for immediate union with other flesh. This desire of the human soul seeks the complete intimate fusion of I and You, whether this occurs in the union of love or—what from this emotional perspective is after all the same thing—in forcing the other into

one's own sphere of power and influence. Here is where emotional, strong persons enjoy life to the full, securing for themselves the admiration, the love, or the fear of the weak. Here human bonds, suggestive influences, and dependencies are everything. Moreover, everything that is originally and solely characteristic of the community mediated through Christ reappears in the nonmediated community of souls in a distorted form.

There is, likewise, such a thing as "emotional" conversion. It has all the appearances of genuine conversion and occurs wherever the superior power of one person is consciously or unconsciously misused to shake to the roots and draw into its spell an individual or a whole community. Here one soul has had an immediate effect on another. The result is that the weak individual has been overcome by the strong; the resistance of the weaker individual has broken down under the influence of the other person. One has been overpowered by something, but not won over. This becomes apparent the moment a commitment is demanded, a commitment that must be made independently of the person to whom one is bound or possibly in opposition to this person. Here is where those emotional converts fail. They thus show that their conversion was brought about not by the Holy Spirit, but by a human being. It is, therefore, not enduring.

There is, likewise, a "merely emotional" love of neighbor. Such love is capable of making the most unheard-of sacrifices. Often it far surpasses the genuine love of Christ in fervent devotion and visible results. It speaks the Christian language with overwhelming and stirring eloquence. But it is what the apostle Paul is speaking of when he says: "If I give all I possess to the poor, and surrender my body to the flames" (1 Cor. 13:3) —in other words, if I combine the utmost deeds of love with the utmost of devotion—"but do not have love (that is, the love of Christ), I would be nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). Emotional love loves the other for the sake of itself; spiritual love loves the other for the sake of Christ. That is why emotional love seeks direct contact with other persons. It loves them, not as free persons, but as those whom it binds to itself. It wants to do everything it can to win and conquer; it puts pressure on the other person. It desires to be irresistible, to dominate. Emotional love does not think much of truth. It makes the truth relative, since nothing, not even the truth, must come between it and the person loved. Emotional love desires other persons, their company. It wants them to return its love, but it does not serve them. On the contrary, it continues to desire even when it seems to be serving.

Two factors, which are really one and the same thing, reveal the difference between spiritual and emotional love. Emotional love cannot tolerate the dissolution of a community that has become false, even for the sake of genuine community. And such emotional love cannot love an enemy, that is to say, one who seriously and stubbornly resists it. Both spring from the same source: emotional love is by its very nature desire, desire for emotional community. As long as it can possibly satisfy this desire, it will not give it up, even for the sake of truth, even for

the sake of genuine love for others. But emotional love is at an end when it can no longer expect its desire to be fulfilled, namely, in the face of an enemy. There it turns into hatred, contempt, and slander.

Spiritual love, however, begins right at this point. This is why emotional love turns into personal hatred when it encounters genuine spiritual love that does not desire but serves. Emotional love makes itself an end in itself. It turns itself into an achievement, an idol it worships, to which it must subject everything. It cares for, cultivates, and loves itself and nothing else in the world. Spiritual love, however, comes from Jesus Christ; it serves him alone. It knows that it has no direct access to other persons. Christ stands between me and others. I do not know in advance what love of others means on the basis of the general idea of love that grows out of my emotional desires. All this may instead be hatred and the worst kind of selfishness in the eyes of Christ. Only Christ in his Word tells me what love is. Contrary to all my own opinions and convictions, Jesus Christ will tell me what love for my brothers and sisters really looks like. Therefore, spiritual love is bound to the word of Jesus Christ alone. Where Christ tells me to maintain community for the sake of love, I desire to maintain it. Where the truth of Christ orders me to dissolve a community for the sake of love, I will dissolve it, despite all the protests of my emotional love. Because spiritual love does not desire but rather serves, it loves an enemy as a brother or sister. It originates neither in the brother or sister nor in the enemy, but in Christ and his word. Emotional love can never comprehend spiritual love, for spiritual love is from above. It is something completely strange, new, and incomprehensible to all earthly love.

Because Christ stands between me and an other, I must not long for unmediated community with that person. As only Christ was able to speak to me in such a way that I was helped, so others too can only be helped by Christ alone. However, this means that I must release others from all my attempts to control, coerce, and dominate them with my love. In their freedom from me, other persons want to be loved for who they are, as those for whom Christ became a human being, died, and rose again, as those for whom Christ won the forgiveness of sins and prepared eternal life. Because Christ has long since acted decisively for other Christians, before I could begin to act, I must allow them the freedom to be Christ's. They should encounter me only as the persons that they already are for Christ. This is the meaning of the claim that we can encounter others only through the mediation of Christ. Emotional love constructs its own image of other persons, about what they are and what they should become. It takes the life of the other person into its own hands. Spiritual love recognizes the true image of the other person as seen from the perspective of Jesus Christ. It is the image Jesus Christ has formed and wants to form in all people.

Therefore, spiritual love will prove successful insofar as it commends the other to Christ in all that it says and does. It will not seek to agitate another by exerting all too personal, direct

influence or by crudely interfering in one's life. It will not take pleasure in pious, emotional fervor and excitement. Rather, it will encounter the other with the clear word of God and be prepared to leave the other alone with this word for a long time. It will be willing to release others again so that Christ may deal with them. It will respect the boundary of the other, which is placed between us by Christ, and it will find full community with the other in the Christ who alone binds us together. This spiritual love will thus speak to Christ about the other Christian more than to the other Christian about Christ. It knows that the most direct way to others is always through prayer to Christ and that love of the other is completely tied to the truth found in Christ. It is out of this love that John the disciple speaks: "I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 4).

Emotional love lives by uncontrolled and uncontrollable dark desires; spiritual love lives in the clear light of service ordered by the *truth*. Emotional love results in human enslavement, bondage, rigidity; spiritual love creates the *freedom* of Christians under the Word. Emotional love breeds artificial hothouse flowers; spiritual love creates the *fruits* that grow healthily under God's open sky, according to God's good pleasure in the rain and storm and sunshine.

The existence of any Christian communal life essentially depends on whether or not it succeeds at the right time in promoting the ability to distinguish between a human ideal and God's reality, between spiritual and emotional community. The life and death of a Christian community is decided by its ability to reach sober clarity on these points as soon as possible. In other words, a life together under the Word will stay healthy only when it does not form itself into a movement, an order, a society, a *collegium pietatis*, but instead understands itself as being part of the one, holy, universal, Christian church, sharing through its deeds and suffering in the hardships and struggles and promise of the whole church. Every principle of selection, and every division connected with it that is not necessitated quite objectively by common work, local conditions, or family connections is of the greatest danger to a Christian community. Self-centeredness always insinuates itself in any process of intellectual or spiritual selectivity, destroying the spiritual power of the community and robbing the community of its effectiveness for the church, thus driving it into sectarianism. The exclusion of the weak and insignificant, the seemingly useless people, from everyday Christian life in community [Lebensgemeinschaft] may actually mean the exclusion of Christ; for in the poor sister or brother, Christ is knocking at the door. We must, therefore, be very careful on this point.

The undiscerning observer may think that this mixture of ideal and real, emotional and spiritual, would be most obvious where there are a number of layers in the structure of a community, as in marriage, the family, friendship—where the emotional element as such already assumes a central importance in the community's coming into being at all, and where the spiritual is only something added to humanity's physical-

emotional [leiblich-seelischen] nature. According to this view, it is only in these multifaceted communities that there is a danger of confusing and mixing the two spheres, whereas such a danger could hardly arise in a community of a purely spiritual nature. Such ideas, however, are a grand delusion. On the basis of all our experience—and as can be easily seen from the very nature of things—the truth is just the opposite. A marriage, a family, a friendship knows exactly the limitations of its community-building power. Such relationships know very well, if they are sound, where the emotional element ends and the spiritual begins. They are aware of the difference between physical-emotional and spiritual community. On the other hand, whenever a community of a purely spiritual nature comes together, the danger is uncannily near that everything pertaining to emotion will be brought into and intermixed with this community. Purely spiritual life in community [Lebensgemeinschaft] is not only dangerous but also not normal. Whenever physical-familial community, the community formed among those engaged in serious work, or everyday life with all its demands on working people is not introduced into the spiritual community, extraordinary vigilance and clear thinking are called for. That is why it is precisely on short retreats that, as experience has shown, emotion spreads most easily. Nothing is easier than to stimulate the euphoria of community in a few days of life together [gemeinsame Leben]; and nothing is more fatal to the healthy, sober, everyday life in community of Christians.

There is probably no Christian to whom God has not given the uplifting and blissful *experience* of genuine Christian community at least once in her or his life. But in this world such experiences remain nothing but a gracious extra beyond the daily bread of Christian community life. We have no claim to such experiences, and we do not live with other Christians for the sake of gaining such experiences. It is not the experience of Christian community, but firm and certain faith within Christian community that holds us together. We hold fast in faith to God's greatest gift, that God has acted for us all and wants to act for us all. This makes us joyful and happy, but it also makes us ready to forgo all such experiences if at times God does not grant them. We are bound together by faith, not by experience.

"How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity." This is the Scripture's praise of life together under the Word. But now we can correctly interpret the words "in unity" and say "when kindred live together through Christ." For Jesus Christ alone is our unity. "He is our peace." We have access to one another, joy in one another, community with one another through Christ alone.