

SECOND EDITION

Edited by Charles E. Moore
Foreword by Stanley Hauerwas

Called to Community

The Life Jesus Wants
for His People

Eberhard Arnold ♦ Benedict of Nursia ♦ Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Joan Chittister ♦ Dorothy Day ♦ Richard J. Foster
Gerhard Lohfink ♦ Chiara Lubich ♦ Thomas Merton
Henri J. M. Nouwen ♦ Elizabeth O'Connor
John M. Perkins ♦ Eugene Peterson ♦ Mother Teresa
Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove ♦ and others

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Life in community is no less than a necessity for us – it is an inescapable “must” that determines everything we do and think. Yet it is not our good intentions or efforts that have been decisive in our choosing this way of life. Rather, we have been overwhelmed by a certainty – a certainty that has its origin and power in the Source of everything that exists.

EBERHARD ARNOLD, *Why We Live in Community*

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FOREWORD

Stanley Hauerwas

COMMUNITY IS DANGEROUS. This is easy to forget at a time when we often hear calls for more community. Of course, it's quite understandable that many people today feel the need for it. After all, we live in a social order that has confused freedom with the isolation of the self. We may think we know one another, but our "knowing" only intensifies our isolation from one another. This is because, although we bump up against one another, we share no common story and no corresponding judgments about what is true, good, and beautiful. As a result, we become strangers to ourselves and to those we call friends. In such a social order, people too often confuse community with being a crowd. And crowds are intrinsically dangerous.

We live in a time when people think they should have no story other than the story they chose for themselves when they had no story. The story they chose is, they think, the story of freedom. The only problem with this belief is that none of us actually did choose this particular story. As a result, lives lived according to this false story are subject to self-deception and

self-hate. Lives so constituted are often quite destructive for any attempt to sustain community life across time.

I began observing that the loneliness created by such an understanding of freedom and autonomy produces a hunger that can be dangerous – and hunger is the right word, indicating as it does the physical character of the desire and need to touch another human being. That is why Alasdair MacIntyre, the great moral philosopher, resists being called a communitarian. MacIntyre resists calls for community because he fears that in this place and time such calls are bound to lead to nationalistic movements. Those who hunger for community should never forget Nuremberg. I share MacIntyre’s worry that the label “communitarian” does little to help us understand what kind of community we ought to desire.

All the more, how fortunate we are to have this book! This is not a book that celebrates community as an end in itself. It is written by veterans of community living who know full well the pathologies of community life. I suspect these reflections will make many readers question their assumption that they are called to community. The stark realism of these essays makes clear that when we are dealing with people we must be ready to confront one another with truths about ourselves that we seldom want to acknowledge.

But interestingly enough, the very fact that such confrontation is required is why we cannot live without community. Therefore this book is a treasure of wisdom gained by those who have discovered the necessity of community for our being human.

I can only hope that it will be widely read, because I am certain that contained in this book is the future of being Christian. ♦

INTRODUCTION

Charles E. Moore

HOW WOULD YOU go about destroying community, isolating people from one another and from a life shared with others? Almost forty years ago Howard Snyder asked this question and offered the following strategies: fragment family life, move people away from the neighborhoods where they grew up, set people farther apart by giving them bigger houses and yards, and separate the places people work from where they live.¹ In other words, “partition off people’s lives into as many worlds as possible.” To facilitate the process, get everyone their own car. Replace meaningful communication with television. And finally, cut down on family size and fill people’s homes with things instead. The result? A post-familial, disconnected culture where self is king, relationships are thin, and individuals fend for themselves.

On the whole, this destruction of community has only been compounded by the advance of digital technology. As Sherry Turkle observes in her book *Alone Together*, the web’s promise of “bottomless abundance” has left millions inwardly and relationally famished. We live, Turkle suggests, in a “culture

of simulation,” where real, tactile, face-to-face relationships of loyalty and intimacy are all but a memory. Ours is truly an age of isolation, with relationships that may be free but also very shallow and fleeting.²

In a culture of connectivity, where we have countless people to text and tweet, millions are under the illusion that a networked life is a rich, meaningful life. But community is more than connectivity. Although it is easier than ever to communicate and stay in touch with one another, we are fast losing the ability to commune with one another. We know how to text, but we don’t know how to converse. We exchange vast amounts of information, but find it increasingly difficult to confide in one another. We no longer know how, or think we don’t have the time, to give each other our full attention. Though we may not be alone in our virtual worlds, we remain lonely. Our lives lack cohesion: we live in pieces, in fragments, lacking any overall pattern or any steady, identifiable community in which to belong.³

Social commentator Michael Frost suggests that our culture has become like an airport departure lounge, “full of people who don’t belong where they currently find themselves and whose interactions with others are fleeting, perfunctory, and trivial.”⁴ Nobody belongs there, nobody is truly present, and nobody wants to be there. We’re tourists who graze from one experience to another, nibbling here and sampling there, but with very little commitment to bind us to one another. We exist in an untethered “nowhereness,” under the illusion that we are free. And yet, as Robert Wuthnow observes, “community is sputtering to an undignified halt, leaving many people stranded and alone.”⁵

The disappearance of community has led to a plethora of human and social problems, which have been exposed and

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explored in countless books. The question this collection of readings seeks to answer is what we can do about it. Many social commentators have addressed the problem and continue to grapple with it. New structures of belonging have been proposed, many of which hold promise. But as good and viable as these may be, the main thrust behind this book is that the answer lies in the hands of God's people. We need more than new structures. We need spirit-filled ways of living that are capable of combatting the corrosive ideologies of our age that undermine community. Only when the church lives out its original calling, as a contrast community and foretaste of God's coming reign, is there hope for the world. And there is hope. The Bible assures us that through faith in Jesus and by God's spirit a new kind of social existence is possible. Christ has defeated the principalities and powers that keep people apart. In him relationships can be healed and transformed. This is what being the church is all about.

Although many people bemoan the fact that society is so fragmented, a small but growing number of people are daring to step away from the status quo and follow the beat of a different drummer. Committed followers of Christ from every corner of society and from all walks of life are responding to Christ's call to embody an integrated spirituality that encompasses the whole of life and is lived out with others. New intentional communities are emerging that bear witness to Christ's healing power. A radical renaissance is unfolding among disenchanted Christians who are no longer satisfied with either Sunday religion or social activism. These Christians want to actually be the church, to follow Christ *together* and demonstrate in their daily lives the radical, transforming love of God. Of course, in a world in which family life is undermined and faithfulness and loyalty are old-fashioned concepts,

living in community will not be easy. The broader culture rarely reinforces values such as fidelity, the common good, and social solidarity. It's everyone out for themselves. We're on our own, whether we like it or not. And yet for growing numbers of Christians this world, with its dominant philosophy of expressive individualism, is not the final adjudicator of what is or is not possible, let alone desirable. The world Christ was born into was also splintered and confused; it was violent, factious, morally corrupt, spiritually bankrupt, full of tensions, and teeming with competing interests. Yet, into this world a brand new social order erupted. It caught everybody's attention, and eventually transformed the entire Roman pagan system.

Throughout the history of the church, movements of renewal have arisen. In each instance, the church's spiritual and corporate life was revitalized. The question before us today is this: Are we ready and eager for a new work of the Spirit in which everything, including our lifestyles and church structures, is turned upside down? If so, this book can help. It is intended to encourage and strengthen the current movement of the Spirit in which people are consciously pledging themselves to live out their faith with others on a radically new basis. Part I presents a vision of community, supplying a theological and biblical ground on which to be God's people together. Many people seek out community to ameliorate such problems as loneliness, economic injustice, racial division, and environmental destruction. This is good, and yet we must step back and first grasp what God's plan is for his people and the way in which we are to build, in the words of Clarence Jordan, a demonstration plot for God's kingdom. Part II tackles the question of what community means and what it takes to nurture it. Forming community is not just a matter of living

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close to one another. Prisoners do that. Rather, community demands personal sacrifice and personal transformation.

The ideal of togetherness is one thing; becoming a vibrant, united circle of comrades that remain together is another. Part III covers some of the nitty-gritty issues of life in community. New communities of faith often fall to pieces simply because they are not able to navigate the mundane matters of human coexistence. We need to unlearn certain ways of being before we can go the long haul with others. Finally, Part IV addresses the need for every community to see beyond itself. Community is not an end in itself. An inward-looking community will eventually implode. Christ gathered his disciples together to serve a purpose larger than themselves, to pioneer God's coming reign in which all things will be reconciled.

The selections in this volume are, by and large, written by practitioners – people who have lived in community and who have discovered what it takes to fruitfully live a common life with others. The writings of Eberhard Arnold, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Henri Nouwen are especially notable. Books such as Arnold's *Why We Live in Community*, Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, and Nouwen's *Community* should be read in their entirety. Yet there are countless other voices that have wisdom and insight to offer. This collection brings many of these diverse voices together to address some of the most essential issues of community life.

You may be reading this book on your own. However, it is best read and discussed together with others. There is little point in reading a book such as this unless it actually helps you to build community. Whether you have just begun thinking about communal living, have already embarked on this journey, or have been part of an intentional community for

many years, the selections in this collection are meant to encourage, challenge, and strengthen you to follow the call to live as brothers and sisters in Christ. Growing together and keeping a community alive takes time and effort. That's why the book has been divided into fifty-two chapters, so you can read one chapter a week and then meet together to discuss what you've read.

It has been said that true community is all or nothing, and that communities which try to get there by degrees just get stuck. This may be true. And yet, much like a healthy marriage, it takes time and wisdom to build a community. It also takes very little to break and destroy a community. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why so few people dare to commit themselves to building a common life. As Henri Nouwen writes, fearful distance is awful, but fearful closeness, if not properly navigated, can turn into a nightmare.⁶

Thomas Merton once noted that living alone does not necessarily isolate people, and that merely living together does not necessarily bring us into communion with one another.⁷ So what is the key to communing with one another? Hopefully the selections in this book will help to answer this question. In the meantime, community as Christ intended it demands, if nothing else, a commitment to care for one another right where we are – to be our brother's and sister's keeper despite the limitations of our circumstances. Without simple deeds of love, community is not possible.

Dr. Paul Brand, who devoted himself to eliminating leprosy, was once working alone in an attic when he came across some boxes of skeletons that had been dug up from a monastery. He remembered a lecture he heard given by anthropologist Margaret Mead, who spent much of her life researching prehistoric peoples. She asked her audience, "What is the earliest sign

Introduction

of civilization? A clay pot? Iron? Tools? Agriculture?” No, she claimed, it was a healed leg bone. Brand recalls:

She explained that such healings were never found in the remains of competitive, savage societies. There, clues of violence abounded: temples pierced by arrows, skulls crushed by clubs. But the healed femur showed that someone must have cared for the injured person – hunted on his behalf, brought him food, and served him at personal sacrifice. Savage societies could not afford such pity. I found similar evidence of healing in the bones from the churchyard. I later learned that an order of monks had worked among the victims: their concern came to light five hundred years later in the thin lines of healing where infected bone had cracked apart or eroded and then grown back together.⁸

Community is all about helping each other – caring enough to invest oneself in the “thin lines of healing.” There is no other way to have community. The apostle Paul wrote, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal. 5:6). Words and ideas, forms and structures can take us only so far. In the end, it’s a matter of whether we will lay down our lives for one another. For Christ’s followers, this is not just a matter of obedience but the distinguishing mark of our witness. Jesus says, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34–35). ♦

1 Howard A. Snyder, *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 113–114.

2 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 6–12.

3 Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 177.

C A L L E D T O C O M M U N I T Y

- 4 Michael Frost, *Incarnate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 16.
- 5 Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1994), 5.
- 6 Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Lifesigns: Intimacy, Fecundity, and Ecstasy in Christian Perspective* (New York: Doubleday, 2013), 19.
- 7 Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1972), 55.
- 8 Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 68.



PART I



A Call to Community

This is a preview. Get the entire book here.

Everywhere the world is going to pieces. It is crumbling and rotting away. It is going through a process of disintegration. It is dying. And in these fearsome times, through the Holy Spirit Christ places the city-church with its unconditional unity right into the world. The only help for the world is to have a place of gathering, to have people whose will, undivided and free of doubt, is bent on gathering with others in unity.

EBERHARD ARNOLD, *God's Revolution*

I

The Great Idea



Fyodor Dostoyevsky

HE HAD LONG been an official in the town; he was in a prominent position, respected by all, rich, and had a reputation for benevolence. He subscribed considerable sums to the almshouse and the orphan asylum; he was very charitable, too, in secret, a fact which only became known after his death. He was a man of about fifty, almost stern in appearance and not much given to conversation. He had been married about ten years and his wife, who was still young, had borne him three children. Well, I was sitting alone in my room the following evening, when my door suddenly opened and this gentleman walked in. . . .

And from that time forth he came to see me nearly every evening. And we should have become greater friends, if only he had ever talked of himself. But about himself he scarcely ever said a word, yet continually asked me about myself. In spite of that I became very fond of him and spoke with perfect

frankness to him about all my feelings; “for,” thought I, “what need have I to know his secrets, since I can see without that that he is a good man. Moreover, though he is such a serious man and my senior, he comes to see a youngster like me and treats me as his equal.” And I learned a great deal that was profitable from him, for he was a man of lofty mind.

“That life is heaven,” he said to me suddenly, “that I have long been thinking about”; and all at once he added, “I think of nothing else indeed.” He looked at me and smiled. “I am more convinced of it than you are; I will tell you later why.”

I listened to him and thought that he evidently wanted to tell me something.

“Heaven,” he went on, “lies hidden within all of us – here it lies hidden in me now, and if I will it, it will be revealed to me tomorrow and for all time.”

I looked at him; he was speaking with great emotion and gazing mysteriously at me, as if he were questioning me.

“And that we are all responsible to all for all, apart from our own sins – you were quite right in thinking that, and it is wonderful how you could comprehend it in all its significance at once. And in very truth, so soon as people understand that, the kingdom of heaven will be for them not a dream, but a living reality.”

“And when,” I cried out to him bitterly, “when will that come to pass? And will it ever come to pass? Is not it simply a dream of ours?”

“What then, you don’t believe it,” he said. “You preach it and don’t believe it yourself. Believe me, this dream, as you call it, will come to pass without doubt; it will come, but not now, for every process has its law. It’s a spiritual, psychological process. To transform the world, to recreate it afresh, people must turn into another path psychologically. Until you have

become really, in actual fact, a brother to everyone, brotherhood will not come to pass. No sort of scientific teaching, no kind of common interest, will ever teach people to share property and privileges with equal consideration for all. Everyone will think his share too small and they will be always envying, complaining, and attacking one another. You ask when it will come to pass; it will come to pass, but first we have to go through the period of isolation.”

“What do you mean by isolation?” I asked him.

“Why, the isolation that prevails everywhere, above all in our age – it has not fully developed, it has not reached its limit yet. For everyone strives to keep his individuality as apart as possible, wishes to secure the greatest possible fullness of life for himself; but meantime all his efforts result not in attaining fullness of life but self-destruction, for instead of self-realization he ends by arriving at complete solitude. All mankind in our age have split up into units; they all keep apart, each in his own groove; each one holds aloof, hides himself and hides what he has, from the rest, and he ends by being repelled by others and repelling them. He heaps up riches by himself and thinks, ‘How strong I am now and how secure,’ and in his madness he does not understand that the more he heaps up, the more he sinks into self-destructive impotence. For he is accustomed to rely upon himself alone and to cut himself off from the whole; he has trained himself not to believe in the help of others, in people and in humanity, and only trembles for fear he should lose his money and the privileges that he has won for himself. Everywhere in these days people have, in their mockery, ceased to understand that the true security is to be found in social solidarity rather than in isolated individual effort. But this terrible individualism must inevitably have an end, and all will suddenly understand

how unnaturally they are separated from one another. It will be the spirit of the time, and people will marvel that they have sat so long in darkness without seeing the light. And then the sign of the Son of Man will be seen in the heavens. . . . But, until then, we must keep the banner flying. Sometimes even if he has to do it alone, and his conduct seems to be crazy, a man must set an example, and so draw people's souls out of their solitude, and spur them to some act of brotherly love, that the great idea may not die." ♦

2

Blessed Community



Rufus Jones

RELIGION, which is as immemorial as smiling and weeping, does not begin with a Saint Stylites alone on the top of a pillar. If it had so begun the saint would soon have perished without a sympathetic community to see him – or, what is more important, to admire him. It is foolish for us to waste any precious time trying to settle the issue whether religion originates with the individual or the group. It is as absurd as trying to find a stick which has only one end. Individual and group cannot be cut apart and be treated as though either were real as a sundered existence.

The moment an individual has arrived on the scene with a capacity for the mystical, that is, the direct personal apprehension of God and capacity to interpret his experience, there is bound to be behind this individual the long molding processes of history, the accumulations of the experiences and transmissions of many generations. If the given individual runs on

ahead of the group, as a prophet-genius does, it will be along the lines and in the direction for which the group has long been preparing the line of march. And the individual does not possess his insight with a permanent assurance until he has interpreted it and carried others along with this conviction. In short, however important the creative insight of the rare soul may be, religion does not count as a contribution to the race until a beloved community is formed and the discovery is interpreted and transmuted into a social movement. As far as its significance is concerned, religion is essentially social. It is an affair of a beloved community. . . .

The primary function of a church, if it is to be the continuing body of Christ in the world, is to raise human life out of its secular drift and to give reality to the eternal here in the midst of time. When it ceases to bear witness to the real presence of an eternal reality operating in and upon our lives, its race is run; it has missed its mission. But just as certainly the church is commissioned as the organ of the Spirit to bring health and healing to our human lives and to the social order in which our lives are formed and molded.

It may be true, as the higher critics tell us, that the kingdom of God as presented in the Gospels is not a new social order to be slowly, painfully, and creatively realized here in the furrows of our world through the cooperation of God and humankind together. On the other hand, there is most assuredly a type of life presented in the Gospels which, when it appears, seems to be already the kingdom of God – a type of life in which love is the supreme spring and motive, in which the spirit of forgiveness has come to ripeness, and which aims to do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven. Insofar as the church carries on and incarnates that commission it becomes the

sower of the seeds of the kingdom of God and the bearer of a new order for human society.

There is a proverb which says that God empties the nest not by breaking the eggs, but by hatching them. Not by the violent method of revolution will the new social order of life come, not by the legal enforcement of ancient commands, or by the formal application of texts and sayings, but by the vital infusion of a new spirit, the propagation of a passion of love like Christ's, the continuation through the church of the real presence of eternity in the midst of time, will something come more like the order of life which we call the kingdom of God. It is the role of the church, I maintain, to be the fellow laborer with God for this harvest of life. . . .

Christ calls us to . . . [live] as an organic part of a kingdom, a fellowship, which expresses in invisible and temporal fashion, in ever-growing and unfolding degrees, the will of God – the heart and purpose and spirit of the divine life. Here in this kingdom God's life differentiates itself and pours itself through finite lives as the sap of the vine pours itself out into all the branches and twigs and shoots which go together to make the vine a vine. It is the vast Yggdrasil tree of a spiritual humanity. The kingdom, even in its imperfect stage as we now see it – still a good deal of a mustard seed – is the most impressive revelation of God there is in the world today. It is the only way that the will and life and love of God can be fully revealed. In this emergent group life, where love comes more fully into play than it does anywhere else, we catch some gleams of the Great Life that works through us now and some prophecies of that kingdom which shall be when all people see what a few see now.

Life culminates in forms of organism, in which the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts. The kingdom of God

is the highest form of such organism that has yet emerged – a *corpus spirituale*, a “blessed community” – a living whole in which part contributes to part, and all the parts unitedly cooperate to express the life of the whole. Each member is both end and means, an end in itself and a means to the fulfillment of the life and purpose of the whole. We are as far removed here as we can be from a scheme of life which focuses upon rewards or which aims to secure an excess of pleasures over pains. In fact, we have transcended categories of calculation and even of causation and have entered into that organic way of life where each lives for all and where the interpretation of the life of the whole is the business and, at the same time, the joy of each member. The formation of such a kingdom, life in such a kingdom, is the fundamental end of life for Christ, as set forth in the Gospels. The length of his purpose horizontally is the inclusion of all people in such a cooperative community and the height of it upward is the raising of all people to a full consciousness of sonship with God, in a family-fellowship, living to do his will. Here, once more, the emphasis of Christ is on life and action, not on theory and definition. The kingdom of God is something we *do* – not a place to which we go. . . .

We are forever seeking to find ourselves, but our sporadic quests lead us off on trails that end in some cul-de-sac, or, as Emerson would say, “up a tree in a squirrel hole.” Our subordinate ends bring and have always brought frustration, disillusionment, and defeat. Let us once find the real end for which our nature is equipped and we can live thrillingly and triumphantly. That real end, according to Christ of the Gospels, is the kingdom of God, a spiritual organism, a fellowship of persons, bound together in cooperative love and forming in union with God the tissue and web of the spiritual world – the eternal universe. To this end were we born and for

Blessed Community

this cause we came into the world, that we might bear witness to this reality and that we might reveal its laws, its principles, and its serene and demonstrative power. ♦

