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Lord willing, there may emerge a comprehensive training programme offering a master's degree in Christian counselling. There is a long way to go, and we welcome input from Christian counsellors and theological educators in other Asian countries.

CONCLUSION

The Asian scene is rapidly changing. China with the greatest population is concentrating her effort on "modernization"; similar trends are obvious in other developing countries. As a by-product of modernization, the increase in demand for counselling is predictable. Counselling is rapidly becoming a new frontier for the Asian Church. Christians who are concerned about theological education, church growth, pastoral care, evangelism and social concern should attempt to contribute to the advancement of the field of Christian counselling. In response to the challenge, some initial efforts are being made in certain Asian countries. To enable greater strides forward, there needs to be more awareness of the demands; more willingness to devote time, money, energy and talents; more openness to cooperate at a local as well as pan-Asian level.

> "Lord, give us mountains,
> and the courage to climb!"

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The New Gospel of Community

Derek Tidball

Reprinted from Third Way, April 1980*, with permission*

The idea that Christians ought to live in communities is currently receiving much attention. For some Christians, community living seems to have become the new gospel which they are zealously preaching as the answer to man's personal problems. Other Christians are almost as zealously opposed to the idea and propagate scare stories about the supposed harmful effects of community living. In spite of the topicality and importance of the subject, little real awareness of issues seems evident among Christians.

The current emphasis on communities amongst evangelical Christians stems from three recent movements. The briefest such movement was the Jesus movement of the 1960s and early 1970s whose communes reflected the secular communes of their generation. They were designed to insulate the Jesus converts from the contaminated world around them and to provide a controlled lifestyle for them which relied on strong leadership. Some of these communes were transitory and others developed in a disturbing way. Ronald Enroth has recorded the sad story in *Youth Brainwashing and the Extremist Cults* (Paternoster, 1977). It is the fear of the repetition of these experiences that causes some Christians to react negatively towards the idea of community living.

More significantly, the desire for community living stems from the charismatic movement. The most publicized example of a community which came into existence as a result of a church experiencing charismatic renewal is that of the Church of the Redeemer, Houston, Texas. Its story has been told by Michael Harper in *A New Way of Living* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1973) and retold by its Rector, Graham Pulkingham in *They Left Their Nets* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1974). Several other communities have been encouraged to start as a result of this one church alone.

The third strand in the emphasis on community living is to be found among the advocates of 'radical discipleship' who have received increasing attention since the Lausanne Congress in 1974 which provided them with a world-wide platform. The idea of community living is not always explicitly spelled out as the final chapter of Jim Wallis' *Agenda for Biblical People* (Harper and Row, 1976) shows. Occasionally it is explicitly cold-shouldered as in Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (p.91). But even so the idea is present and implicit in much of what is written. The basic proposition of the group is that Jesus came to found a community which would live in an alternative way to the generally accepted way of society. According to John Howard Yoder such a community would be 'a visible structured fellowship' where members had consciously accepted the costs of commitment and were defined by a distinct lifestyle with the object of changing the world *(The Politics of Jesus)*. These last two streams often converge to produce the practice of community living such as that which has been adopted by some at St. Michael-le-Belfry, York. David Watson has made this plain in his book *I Believe in the Church* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1978).

COMMUNITIES IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The arguments used by those who advocate such community living are numerous. Some communities emphasize some arguments more than others but they usually fall into two groups: biblical and/or pragmatic.

The biblical arguments are numerous but even in combination are not impressive. They centre on the teaching of Jesus and the practice of the early Church. Jesus is said to demand of his disciples that they forsake all personal ambition, private property and the things of this world, even one's family, in order to follow him in the new community of the kingdom. Clearly Jesus did make radical claims which may be seen in that way (Mark 3:31–35; 6:7–13; Luke 5:11, 27–28; 18:18–30, etc.). But a literal interpretation of his words was not applied even by Jesus himself to *all* his disciples. Peter may have kept his boat and was able to go back to it after the crucifixion. Jesus continued to care for his mother even at the moment of his death. He was glad to use the house of Lazarus and his sisters at Bethany and nowhere seems to have treated them as second-class citizens of the kingdom.

Each person who wants to follow Jesus has to face a crux decision, a particular issue, if he is to make Jesus his lord. For the rich young ruler of Luke 18:18–30 it was the question of possessions and consequently Jesus demanded an absolute commitment *from him* in that area of his life. For others the absolute demand of Jesus was expressed differently. They had different idols and were different people and so faced different crux decisions.

It has been suggested by Dick France in his excellent article on the teaching of Jesus on wealth (*Third Way*, 18 May 1978) that there may well have been a two-tier system of discipleship, the distinction being between those who were itinerant with Jesus on a full-time basis and other supporters who remained in their jobs and home. Gerd Theissen in his sociological examination of the Gospels, *The First Followers of Jesus* (SCM, 1978), also supports this suggestion. The idea of two tiers may be misleading—implying that one was

superior to the other. Jesus needed, used and accepted both forms of discipleship. But the demands and functions of those who were itinerant were obviously different from those who remained settled. The demands of the first should not be universalized for Jesus did not do so, even though those in the second group should be confronted with them. Maybe this is the right principle to apply today. All should face up to the issues but those who accept the way of community will be a minority. They will not enjoy inherent spiritual superiority because they have done so.

Apart from the Gospels, the most frequently quoted argument for community living comes from the community of goods practised by the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37). But again the argument that we should return to this pattern of living, because this is how the Church lived when closest to Pentecost, is far from straightforward. Luke makes clear that the practice was entirely voluntary (Acts 5:4) and many influential people in the primitive Church obviously did not dispose of their property (e.g., Mary the mother of John, Acts 12:12). The last reference to their primitive communism occurs in Acts 6:1–6 when the Church was experiencing difficulties because of it and it is neither spoken of nor recommended subsequently. The rest of the New Testament emphasizes that the Church exists by the voluntary but generous giving of its members out of their possessions (1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8 and 9).

Some have argued that the pooling of resources in this way led to poverty later on in the church at Jerusalem. But such was probably not the case. The city of Jerusalem was not viable as an economic entity and had to be supported by the gifts of faithful Jews who lived elsewhere. The Jerusalem church, which had a large number of apostles and widows dependent on it, was no exception to that economic fact. And the practice of community living was obviously no remedy.

An even weaker argument used by some younger members of community is that the early Church adopted a household structure which they believe they are copying today. But to argue this is to totally misunderstand the meaning of the 'church in your own home' referred to in 1 Cor. 16:9, Philemon 2, etc. The household was not a specifically Christian invention but a normal Roman social structure. It consisted of a principal family and a number of dependent families of all social statuses who would live on or near the same property but not as a single family. The members of the household would all usually be engaged in a common commercial or agricultural venture or supporting the estate of the chief family in the household. The evangelistic mission of the Church used this structure to great effect. Many groups of believers met in what must have been the relatively wealthy property of the householders for worship. But in no way does it compare with the contemporary idea of community. Nor was it a spiritual invention on the part of the Church aimed at expressing the essence of the Gospel through a new or alternative social structure.

Far from discovering direct evidence of or arguments for communities in the New Testament it would seem that the real roots of community living must lie elsewhere. Contemporary communities have much more in common with the Essene community at Qumran than with the practice of the New Testament Church. Basing their common life on Isaiah 40:3 this closely-knit group of volunteers prepared for the coming of the 'righteous one'. They numbered a few hundred; were organized hierarchically; had a strict system of discipline; gave up all private property after a suitable period of initiation and probably practised celibacy. Their monastic existence was very different from the common life of the New Testament Church.

PRAGMATIC ARGUMENTS

Pragmatic arguments for community living are more convincing. They largely stem from some of the problems created by our western society and show how community living can be one solution to these problems both for the individuals concerned and for the Church. They focus on two issues: relationships and resources.

Contemporary western society faces a crisis of relationships. It is seen directly in terms of the divorce and separation rate; it is felt by many in terms of the generation gap and it is visible in the rising number of one-parent families who are doomed to a struggling existence. Less obvious but equally real is what this breakdown is doing to the next generation. Many who have grown up unwanted or uncared for and who have learned that family life is not the bliss which was once imagined find it difficult to make satisfactory relationships themselves. They are often introspective or bitter and they prefer isolation to any significant integration with others. The community concept provides them with one opportunity to belong without making the total commitment of marriage.

This is not to underrate the painful process which is often involved in living in community. Nonetheless it is in such a context that isolated people can sometimes learn self-acceptance, discover themselves and progress to maturity.

Communities not only care for the casualties of our disintegrating society but for those who have deliberately chosen for one reason or another to remain single. David Watson argues that community living is healthier for the nuclear family as well. With some justification he argues that the extended family rather than the isolated family has been a better norm in history and that it was the norm in the time of the New Testament. An excessively exclusive marriage relationship is not only selfish and therefore sinful but destructive to the couple involved.

The argument from resources stems from the fact that both the world and the Church are suffering from diminishing resources. Since two can live as cheaply as one, it is said that living in community uses the scarce resources of the world more responsibly. Community living also challenges the wasteful and greedy materialism of the mass of the population and serves as an example of an alternative and satisfying way of living. As far as the Church goes it too is finding it difficult to make ends meet and to employ as many full-time workers as it used to do. But living in community and so pooling resources releases both finance and personnel for the work of the Church. It also enables some adventurous forms of ministry or mission to the wider community which would not otherwise be possible.

These pragmatic arguments deserve the attention of every thinking Christian. Since they touch on issues which are crucial for the survival of the society in which we live, they can encourage us to demonstrate a relevant and potent discipleship within that society. But even so, living in community is not the only answer to the problems mentioned and one must respect a fellow believer who chooses an alternative solution.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The reasons given by the proponents of community living for its advocacy must be taken seriously in their own right. However if the current quest for community is to be understood the picture needs to be painted on a much broader canvas than the advocates would themselves choose. Primary justification for community living, as far as its advocates go, is to be found in Scripture and secondary justification is to be found in practice. They often see themselves as more committed to God, less contaminated by the world and in some cases as a clear and visible outpost of the kingdom of God, often with eschatological overtones. But

they show little awareness of the whole diverse phenomenon of community living. It may be that its explanation lies more in a sociological than theological direction.

The quest for community is neither confined to this age nor to groups of believers in Jesus Christ. At least from the time of the Essenes onwards history is littered with examples of community experiments. Other communities have included the Diggers of the seventeenth century; the Anabaptists; Robert Owen and his experiment in Lanarkshire; and the Mennonites. Contemporary groups include the kibbutz in Israel, the Amish, the Hutterites and a wide range of political groups of one sort or another. Many last only a brief period although Christian communities seem to have a better success record, if the test is longevity, than secular communities. It has been estimated that the average length of life for a religious community is fifty years whereas for others it is only five years.

A few communities have suffered the fate of Qumran and been attacked and destroyed. Others have ended in awful tragedy such as the recent sad example of Jonestown. But most just cease to exist. Usually their members drift or fail to agree on objectives and lifestyles and so part company. Survival often depends on adaptability. The history of the Bruderhof as outlined by J. M. Whitworth in *God's Blueprints* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) is a good example of this. It was founded by Eberhard Arnold in 1920 and drew much from the experience of the Hutterites. It was originally formed as a reaction to German bourgeois life and sought to re-establish older patterns of folk and rural life, and it saw itself as a demonstration of the kingdom of God on earth. Today it exists in the form of three pacifist communities in the USA consisting of almost 9,000 people. But its survival has only been possible because over time it has adapted to different locations, different generations, different goals and different patterns of evangelism and isolation. The adaptations have not always been easy, as the 'purifications' of 1958 and 1962, which resulted in the closure of all but the US houses, demonstrated.

After studying three different religious communities Whitworth concluded that they emerged 'when value patterns and institutions were in flux, or being subjected to intensive critical scrutiny'. He further concluded that the enthusiasm for community 'is especially marked in those societies or areas of societies in which life is to a particularly high degree impersonal, anonymous and outwardly demystified and in which human relationships are largely impermanent and conducted within a framework of specific rules'. Both conclusions aptly describe our own society.

Andrew Rigby has studied contemporary communities on a wide scale and published his research in an important work called *Alternative Realities* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974). Though his main interest was in political communes, and his chapter on religious communes is weak, he has much to say which is relevant for our understanding of the desire for communities in evangelicalism. Religious communities are a particular application of his general thesis about why people join communities. Communities are formed, he argues, because conditions are unsettled and a potential recruit is dissatisfied with his present style of life. In the community the recruit hopes to discover a different way of living—an alternative reality to that generally accepted within society.

Using Goffman's concept of career, Rigby traces the steps by which a potential recruit joins a community. Step 1 is dissatisfaction with life in general. Step 2 is an awareness of the existence of communes. Step 3 is some sort of acquaintance with a community or its members, e.g. a weekend visit, which suggests that they may be the answer he is looking for. Step 4 is the discovery of a suitable community and the initial stages of contact with it. Step 5 demands that the potential recruit defines his situation and existing ties as sufficiently free to drop out and join the alternative reality.

The way in which Rigby expounds the reasons for a recruit's dissatisfaction with the 'normal world' is, for our present purposes, the most significant part of his research. Recruits are mostly young people who do not so much object to particular social wrongs as to the general values and orientations on which people in the 'normal world' base their lives. Among those values are materialism; competitive individualism; the institutionalization of hypocrisy; hatred of the rat race; the pointlessness of pursuing an occupation which is not particularly enjoyable and the meaninglessness of the status symbols which the normal world invests with so much importance. As one member of a community told him, 'The alternative society means people caring about one another and sharing. In straight society they are all competing and thinking about themselves.' A community enables a person to escape from the pre-packaged process of living experienced in the 'normal world'. It enables the recruit to resist the attempts of others to label him and so discover his own identity and venture out on his own search for fulfilment.

Communities therefore not only relieve the pressures for the individuals who reject the usual social world's lifestyle but set themselves up as an example to the normal social world of how life ought to be lived. Many go even beyond that to look forward to the time their way of living becomes normal and a new world dawns. The communities may well see themselves as 'seeds of the new age'.

But if life in 'normal society' is really 'not fit for human consumption' why do not more people opt out to join communities? Those who live in communities argue that it is either because people have been fooled by the media into thinking life is better than it is and their false consciousness prevents them from seeing their real situation or because people see how bad it is but do not see the alternatives. Communitarians refuse to be fooled, have seen the options and will not settle for less than the ideal.

What makes a person join a community which is specifically religious? It may be for one of two reasons. First it may be that the community which a potential recruit experienced during stages 3 and 4 of his career was a religious community. Such community appeared to him to provide the alternative reality he was seeking in response to his dissatisfaction with the 'normal world'.

Or secondly, it may be that the recruit was not so much dissatisfied with the whole of the 'normal world' but with his experience of the church in the normal world. Many members of communities are disillusioned church members or the disillusioned second or third generation of Christian families. Their social world is very often confined by the church and its activities. Their disillusionment is not with the wider society but with what they see in the church. And what they see in the church is ironically precisely what others have rejected in the wider normal society. If in the paragraphs above, the words 'normal church' were substituted for 'normal society' or 'normal world' the cause of the disillusioned young Christian's unease would become clear. The same lack of care, personal warmth and integrity, the same concern to label and the same enjoyment of worldly prestige is often to be found within the church as well as in the world.

Ironically theologians since R. Newton Flew onwards (in *Jesus and His Church*, Epworth Press, 1938) in writing about the church have most frequently used the word 'community' to describe it. It is the 'community of the new age', 'the messianic community', 'the community of the kingdom', 'the eschatological community', etc. But equally few theologians have paid any attention to the sociological dimension of the word 'community'. The recent works of Jürgen Moltman, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (SCM, 1977) and *The Open Church* (SCM, 1978) stand as notable exceptions to this, as also do the stimulating books of Howard

Snyder, *New Wineskins* (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1977) and *Community of the King* (IVP, 1977).

What is true at a theological level has often been true as well at pew level. Members of churches have confirmed the theologians' choice of words that the church is a 'community'. But the word and the reality have been different. The incongruity between word and lifestyle has resulted in dissatisfied members searching for real communities. And since their dissatisfaction is generated by religion their solution may either be to reject religion or to discover renewed religion. Like their equally dissatisfied secular counterparts the last group have sometimes found the solution by living in community. For many, no doubt this solution has proved satisfactory. For others it has only led to further disillusionment. So it is important that before jumping out of the frying pan into the fire potential members should be aware of the issues involved in community living.

COMMUNITIES: UTOPIAN SECTS?

It has been customary for sociologists to deal with the phenomena of communities by describing it as a 'utopian sect'. The 'utopian sect' is described as a voluntary group who withdraw from the world because they believe it to be corrupt. Their aim is a radical reconstruction of the world and in that reconstruction they are to play a vital role. Utopian sects usually involve some communitarian structure and this is because their community is to be both the model of the new society and the means by which it is to come about. So, many evangelical sects today emphasize the doctrine of the kingdom of God and see themselves as its visible outpost in the kingdom of Satan. There is a tendency for some communities to become more and more exclusive not only from the world but from the Church. Some also become more and more dogmatic as to when and how the kingdom is to be ushered in. Such groups have a long history of disappointment and failure, for God remains true to his word and has not yet shared the date of the coming again of Jesus Christ with anyone.

This traditional sociological interpretation is no longer adequate to the contemporary phenomenon of community living among evangelical Christianity. Indeed it is doubtful if there ever have been many communities who have conformed precisely to the sociologists' model of a 'utopian sect'. Today the community rather than the sect needs to become the model for analysis. It is necessary to the understanding of the community concept that groups are seen not as distinct types of sect, widely separate from each other, but as groups which can be placed on a continuum. There is only more or less community.

Some are very exclusive and have only minimal contact with the outside world. They shun newspapers and the media; they scorn fashions and possessions and sometimes education. Their leadership is often authoritarian. And they seek to impose total control on a member's time and activities, beliefs and attitudes. These are the groups which can go sadly wrong. They are the groups which are sensationalized and which we have read about in the press. Within evangelicalism however, there are also communities which are much more open to the outside world and to normal lifestyles. Their organization is much more democratic and they are much less inclusive in the range of control they seek to exercise over their members. Nevertheless they are also communities. Such groups usually take the form of an extended family. Somewhere between the two extremes lies the form of community which is composed of a number of households situated within a small geographical area and committed to the community ideas.

Two steps need to be taken in order to prevent further trouble. The 'normal church' needs to examine itself with a view to living as a more authentic community. It also needs to examine the indisputably biblical themes which the communities have rediscovered and they for so long have neglected. The communities on their part need to examine these themes again and constantly keep themselves alert to them and to their Christian brothers to ensure that they have not and will not mistake the letter of the law for the intention and will of God.

Those who live in evangelical communities do so because they sincerely believe this lifestyle to be more biblical than that of the normal church. But the weakness of the biblical evidence supporting that claim and the anti-biblical nature which has developed as a result in the lifestyle of some communities, should make one cautious. Further, the widespread quest for community of all types, not just religious, in today's western society would suggest that unknown to the recruits other motives are really at work. Recruits to secular communities may well be reacting to the futility, hypocrisy and carelessness of secular society. Recruits to religious communities are reacting to those same features within the church. And by any standards that is a condemnation the 'normal church' must take seriously.

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Theological Education and Christian Education: A Theological Educator's Point of View

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INTRODUCTION

In a recent Church Workers Seminar in Taipei, conducted by this speaker and attended by more than 40 pastors and evangelists, two courses were offered. One was on the doctrine of the Church, the other on Christian education. Questions were raised as to the suitability of the latter subject. Some participants hinted that since they were mainly pastors rather than Sunday school teachers, the value of the CE course was questionable.

Knowing that the attitude of the participants was crucial to the success or failure of this course, "Introduction to Christian Education", I began the class with a brain-storming session. I asked the ministers to list on the blackboard the various activities and programmes which are normally conducted each week in the local congregation. More than twenty items were suggested, including Sunday worship, Sunday school, Bible study classes, catechetical