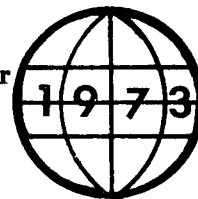


Contemporary Issues:

A Radical Vision of Community

by Richard J. Foster



Dear Martin,

Thank you for asking some excellent questions about community; these issues are at the very heart of a Christian's faith.

The various humanist and quasi-religious groups that are attempting to realize community through communal arrangements of all sorts and sizes do not lack sincerity. Many go to amazing sacrifices to have community. Individuals will give up everything they own. Many have been severely persecuted for their rejection of the totalitarian/militaristic state which destroys our humanness. I in no way question the high ideals and earnest motives of the radical humanists. Nevertheless they will fail for they do not possess the *power* to bring about needed individual and social transformation.

Community based on human contrivance is doomed to collapse. Such a community springs from a "wish dream" of what Life Together should be like, and each person seeks to impose his own wish dream on the others. Disillusionment is the ultimate result. The individual then becomes, "first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself." (Bonhoeffer) In short, community is humanly impossible. It is not sufficiently radical!

I would like to propose an alternative to humanistic and quasi-religious "community"; *Radical Christian Community*.

Radical Christian Community cannot be forced into existence. It is a gift from God to be received with doxology. Actually Christian Community is never our goal, but comes as the result of a deeper decision to follow the "rule of Christ." Candidates for this community are those who know by experience the breaking into their lives of the Light, who is Jesus Christ.

Radical Christian Community is composed of those who without qualification submit to the rule of Christ in their lives and relationships. Obviously the term "radical" is redundant — Christians by definition are radicals — but I use it in order to distinguish between what I am talking about and what many associate with the term "Christian."

The rule of Christ includes *the transformation of our minds*. There is no conceivable way

that we can live in love with our brothers and sisters without being possessed by the mind of Christ. Our understanding of the law of love is defined to us by Christ himself, our present teacher. Hence any Christian Community will have both private and corporate experiences of study, prayer and worship.

The rule of Christ includes *our use of possessions*. We are no longer able to talk about "my things." "If your goods are not available to the community at large they are stolen goods!" (Luther) Obviously the community will learn to live by faith in regard to daily bread. Further, the community will live on the basis of the principle of simplicity, as Thoreau has said, "simplify, simplify." The model is Jesus Christ, but we must hammer out the meaning of simplicity for today on the hard anvil of radical discipleship.

The rule of Christ includes *responsibility for and accountability to the community*. To think that we can make decisions independently of the community is absurd. Every major decision in our lives will be brought to the community for mutual seeking, prayer and guidance. Further, we need to be corrected by the community when we are wrong. Likewise the community needs our word of encouragement, exhortation and rebuke.

The rule of Christ includes *living in the power of God*. Faith is a gift. Through faith we have access to the power of God and are given power both "to be" and "to do." All of life — personal righteousness, direct social action, interpersonal relationships — must be experienced in the power of God. Until we learn this we will continue to believe that we can accomplish the good through our own cleverness.

Being part of a Radical Christian Community is demanding business involving a covenant similar to marriage and just as serious. It is the only vision of community I know that is sufficiently radical to survive. All else is death. It alone marks the path of life.

Martin, may God guide you to brothers and sisters who will share this vision of Radical Christian Community.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Catalyst