EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO THE CRITICAL EDITION OF *LIFE TOGETHER*

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IN AN IRONICAL WAY we are indebted to the Gestapo[1] for this remarkable book. It was because they had shut down the preachers' seminary at Finkenwalde that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was finally persuaded to compose his thoughts on the nature and sustaining structures of Christian community, based on the "*Life Together*" that he and his seminarians had sustained both at the seminary and in the Brothers' House at Finkenwalde. Prior to this, except for a brief explanation of the practice of daily meditation, Bonhoeffer had been reluctant to publicize this experiment, feeling that the time was not ripe. With the closing of the seminary at Finkenwalde and the dispersal of the seminarians, however, Bonhoeffer felt compelled not only to record for posterity the daily regimen and its rationale, but also to voice his conviction that the worldwide church itself needed to promote a sense of community like this if it was to have new life breathed into it.

Life Together and the Crises of 1938

With a new sense of urgency, therefore, Bonhoeffer, along with his close friend Eberhard Bethge, went to Göttingen in late September 1938, to the empty home belonging to his twin sister, Sabine, and her husband, Gerhard Leibholz. Though a popular professor of law at Göttingen University and a baptized Christian, Leibholz had been dismissed from his professorship because of his Jewish origins. On September 9, 1938, Bonhoeffer and Bethge had helped the Leibholz family escape Germany into Basel, Switzerland. Later they would emigrate to Oxford, England, where they would be safe during the war years. Working in the Leibholz home, Bonhoeffer completed *Life Together* [*Gemeinsames Leben*] in a single stretch of four weeks. Bethge recalls that, while he himself passed the time studying Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, Bonhoeffer sat at Leibholz's desk and worked on the manuscript almost nonstop. Though they also took breaks for tennis and a music festival and had their work interrupted by the Sudetenland crisis, Bonhoeffer was able to block out these distractions and complete the book in the short time available.[2]

Those detours from the writing of *Life Together* were highlighted by the background drama of Hitler's bold move to gobble up the Sudetenland. The breather from this crisis came with the signing of the Munich agreement on September 30. Munich proved to be a mere deceptive prelude to Hitler's swallowing the whole of Czechoslovakia. Bonhoeffer was working, therefore, against the clock that seemed to be ticking away the time between a shaky peace and the impending conflict with France and England over the fate of Czechoslovakia. At the same time, the military draft was escalating with apparently only one purpose: war. Bonhoeffer and Bethge were plunged, too, into the turmoil of incertitude about the future of the Confessing Church. Throughout 1937 and 1938 Bonhoeffer had been irritated by the Confessing Church's accelerating weakness and its tendency to compromise in the face of Nazi threats. The oath of personal allegiance to Hitler that a majority of Confessing Church pastors had taken by the summer of 1938, absent any strong command to the contrary from church leaders, already filled him with bitterness and frustration. That latest failure in responsibility on the part of Bonhoeffer's church prompted his addressing a stinging rebuke to the synod that had passed responsibility for taking the oath onto the shoulders of individual pastors. His

[1] The *Geheime Staatspolizei* or secret police in Nazi Germany.

[2] Eberhard Bethge, "Afterword to the 1979 Edition of *Gemeinsames Leben*," 5.

admonition of the leadership of the Confessing Church was characteristically blunt: "Will Confessing Synods ever learn that it is important to counsel and to decide in defiance of all dangers and difficulties …? Will they ever learn that majority decision in matters of conscience kills the spirit?"[3]

By the time of the writing of *Life Together* in September 1938, the situation had worsened. Bethge described the "insane tension" of those days when, forced to interrupt their work, he and Bonhoeffer had driven to Berlin around long lines of cars and trucks in order to find out firsthand how far along the path to war Germany had marched. They also craved information about their own situation as pastors about to be inducted into the army. They wanted recognition from the Evangelical Church Council in order to be eligible for exemption from military service. It was not beyond imagining that the Nazis would dismantle the entire Confessing Church leadership. What then? In addition, both Bonhoeffer and Bethge were privy to the earliest conspiracy to overthrow the Hitler government in a coup d'état in which Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, was heavily involved. How advanced were plans for the conspirators' move against Hitler? The future of Jews in Nazi Germany was even more precarious. Harsher anti-Semitic measures, such as the stamping of "J" on Jewish citizens' passports to prevent their emigration, were already set in place. Within this political and ecclesiastical maelstrom, with its unusual distractions that ate into his available time, Bonhoeffer had to set aside time for work on his manuscript.

It is not surprising, then, that the political-religious situation and the unrest of those days worked their way into several of the comments that appear in the first section of the book. Bethge notes, for example, that the Nazi strangulation of the churches lay behind Bonhoeffer's remark that "the Christian cannot simply take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians," adding that Christians belong "in the midst of enemies. There they find their mission, their work."[4] That "mission" and "work," if we can extrapolate from *Life Together*, seemed to be the infusion of new life and a new sense of Christian community into a church grown cowardly and unchristlike.

The crises of 1938 made it even more imperative for Bonhoeffer to finish the book. The Finkenwalde community's "life together" had been rudely terminated by the Gestapo. But he was determined that not even Hitler's secret police would impede the message for the church that had taken shape during the Finkenwalde experiences of genuine Christian community. As Bonhoeffer stated in his own Preface, he wanted simply to tell others about this experiment in community and of how the *Life Together* in the Finkenwalde seminary could become a significant "contribution toward answering the extensive questions … raised" about Christian faith, Christian community, and the nature of the church in a world beset with forces destructive of them all.[5] Theirs was an experience that, with the help of responsible Christians and church leaders, might clarify what was involved in the formation of Christian community guided by the Word of God. The book itself was published in 1939 as volume 61 in the series of theological monographs, *Theologische Existenz heute* (Theological existence today). Beyond all expectations on Bonhoeffer's part, within one year it had been through a fourth printing.

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[3] Bonhoeffer, *TF*, 465 (GS 2:314).
[4] Bethge, "Afterword," 6; see 27 below.
[5] See below, 25.

The Foundations of Bonhoeffer's Idea of Christian Community

The story of how *Life Together* came to be does not, however, begin in September 1938. Although the book grew out of his two years' experience as director of the Confessing Church's seminary in Finkenwalde and the establishment of a Brothers' House within the seminary, Bonhoeffer had a fascination with the formation of a Christian community from the earliest days of his lectures on the church at the University of Berlin. In fact, the interpretive key to so much of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology and, therefore, of his understanding of the nature of community, was set in his doctoral dissertation on the church, *Sanctorum Communio*, and in his second dissertation, Act and Being, which grounded his interpretation of the church as a primary form of God's self-revelation. He was guided then, as he was later in the community of Finkenwalde, by the questions of how God in Christ becomes present in and among those who profess faith in the gospel—and how in turn faith, and communities of faith, must assume concrete form in the world. He claimed in that first foundational study that "God's will is ever directed to the concrete historical human being."[6] In short, the will of God is expressed in a tangible word spoken to specific human beings and their communities. God's "will" should never be allowed to die the death of abstraction through its institutional, dogmatic, or biblicist reductionism. *Life Together* was hardly a study in abstraction. The reality behind the book was the church in its most palpable, somatic form, the Christian community.

In *Sanctorum Communio* we see, too, the guiding spirit of Martin Luther strongly influencing Bonhoeffer during those student days, in this case through the seminars at Berlin and the popular studies of Luther by the church historian, Karl Holl. It was Holl who had emphasized the genius of Luther's binding together a scripturally validated doctrine of justification with a reformed understanding of church. For Holl, the church can be conceptualized only as a community. If Luther's theology of church was to have any meaning in the light of God's Word, then confession of faith in the presence of Jesus Christ and the community's structuring of that confessed presence had to be integrated. This integration is behind Bonhoeffer's adroit refinement of the Hegelian definition of church into the expression for which *Sanctorum Communio* has been noted: "Christ existing as community" [Christus als Gemeinde existierend].[7]

For Bonhoeffer this was more than a theological device to explain the nature of church. The expression emanated from a deeply held conviction that Christian community had to integrate the gospel into its daily life and reflect this to the world. "Christ existing as community" challenges believers to behave as Christ to one another; this same Christ promises those who gather in his name to be present in, with, and for them. We see in both the Berlin dissertations and in *Life Together* the traces of Bonhoeffer's inner longing for a community life in which his call to the ministry and his love for God's Word would merge to bring a more meaningful sense of direction into his life. What Bonhoeffer wrote in *Life Together* on the nature of community, the dialectic of Christians' being together yet needing time to be alone, their service, their prayer life, and their practice of confession and the Lord's Supper, presupposes the Christo-ecclesiological groundwork of *Sanctorum Communio*. The faith-searching explorations that followed in *Act and Being* served to deepen Bonhoeffer's insights into the way that God's revelatory Word breaks through the impasse of human egotism and

[6] Bonhoeffer, *CS*, 103.
[7] Cf. Bonhoeffer, *CS*, 85, 143, 197, 203.

the manipulative desires of an emotionally grounded, self-centered "love," offering individuals and communities the chance to become hearers of that Word, as well as Christ one to another.

Though Bonhoeffer was later somewhat diffident about his Berlin dissertations, all his subsequent writings reveal an indebtedness to the insights he developed in these studies. His immersion in these projects yielded for him the conceptual grist for setting in motion a new way of being the church. The community experience of Finkenwalde was memorable because it provided a unique occasion to test out in concrete experience his understanding of what a church could and should be. At the inner core of the Christology that emerges from the Berlin dissertations is God's Word present in the human being Jesus and in the community of those with whom Christ identifies. *Life Together* never strays from this form of Christocentrism.

One has only to notice coursing through *Sanctorum Communio* the dynamic reality of Jesus Christ, whose vicarious action [Stellvertretung] in the Christian Church is the life-giving principle of the visible communion of saints, to appreciate the connection with the way Bonhoeffer later depicts Jesus' presence inspiriting the Christian community in *Life Together*. Christ is depicted as the embodiment both of God and Christians, who are moved to do what, without Christ, they would be unable to accomplish: to live together, sharing faith, hope, and self-giving love in a prayerful, compassionate, caring community. Christ is present in the community as representative of God's graced outreach to God's children and the incarnate embodiment of all those who crave in their faith for community with God. The Christ of *Life Together* is the binding force of that community in its "togetherness," gracing Christians to go beyond the superficial, often self-centered, relationships of their everyday associations toward a more intimate sense of what it means to be Christ to others, to love others as Christ has loved them.

Jesus' vicarious action on behalf of his brothers and sisters, depicted so carefully by Bonhoeffer in *Sanctorum Communio*, likewise provides the Christocentric foundations for the ecclesiology of *Life Together*. Bonhoeffer's entire approach to the community life experienced at Finkenwalde depends on a strong faith in the vicarious action of Christ in Word, sacrament, intercessory prayer, and service that makes it possible for Christians to be both "with one another" [*mit*einander] and "for one another" [*für*einander]. The seminarians were to live with one another, but only in the spirit of being for one another. His community was a gathering of theological students whose "togetherness" was to be characterized by an unselfish love for one another expressed in the willingness to serve each other, even to be inconvenienced by one another, to intercede for one another in prayer, to extend forgiveness in the name of the Lord, and to share the bread of the Lord's Supper.

Bonhoeffer's experiment in Christian community was in many respects an attempt to take the visible communion of saints depicted in *Sanctorum Communio* back to its roots in gospel praxis and the Reformation tradition. A church can be true to its commitment to *sola scriptura* and *sola fide* only in that sociality where the marks of oneness, holiness, universality, and apostolic sharing in suffering coalesce. This, by its very nature, demanded the structure of a Christian community whose daily regimen would reflect a practical commitment to Jesus Christ and the values embodied in the gospel. Bonhoeffer was unable to hide his aversion for attempts to etherialize the church into structures of empty ritual and perfunctory services that merely fronted for what purported to be an essentially "invisible heavenly reality."

As chaplain at the Technical University at Charlottenburg between 1931 and 1933, he once expressed his worry about such "invisibility" and the future of Christianity. He wondered, too, whether the great demise of the present form of Christianity had not already begun. "Is our time at an end," he asked in a letter to his friend and fellow student, Helmut Rössler, "and has the gospel been given to another people, to be preached perhaps with totally different words and deeds? How do you view the indestructibility of Christianity given the situation in the world and our own lifestyles today? … How is one to preach such things to these people here? Who still believes in these things? The invisibility is killing us.… To be continually cast backwards to the invisible God is insane; we can no longer accept it."[8] Having just returned from America in 1931, he was thinking about the possibility of finding a new concretion of Christianity and a new form of community in the India of the holy Hindu, Gandhi. In August of 1931, however, his quest for new forms of Christian community began to take shape in a different form through his teaching career at the University of Berlin.

Beginnings: The Search for Christian Community in Berlin

Bonhoeffer's attempts to practice what was later to be structured into the community of Finkenwalde, from which *Life Together* would be derived, had their hesitant beginnings in the circle of his students at the University at Berlin. His seminars, open-ended evening discussions, and excursions attracted a number of students, many of whom would become his closest colleagues in the nascent church struggle and some, his seminarians in Finkenwalde. In 1932 these young theological students would organize frequent weekend trips to a rented cottage in the country, there to "talk theology" and to work into the day some rudimentary spiritual exercises interspersed with long walks and hours of listening to Bonhoeffer's record collection of the African American spirituals that had so enthralled him during his stay in America. It was during these times apart that they thought seriously about how to form authentic Christian communities through a structured spiritual life into which would be integrated appropriate forms of service to people in need. Though these beginnings in community life were informal and spontaneous, they provided the earliest sparks for the creation of the kind of community life that Bonhoeffer felt might be able to reanimate the entire church.

The events of the church struggle that began in 1933 were to hinder Bonhoeffer from developing this first, more casual experience of community with his students into something more protracted and permanent. Yet, by the end of 1932, most of the conceptual underpinnings of the community life he would depict in *Life Together* were already in place. Aside from the strong convictions about the nature of Christian community and the insinuating power of God's revelatory Word that leap out of the Berlin dissertations, there is additional evidence in his lectures on the nature of the church and in the conferences he presented in 1932 that the idea of forming genuine Christian community continued to dominate him. Bonhoeffer was interested not merely in reflecting upon the church but in being part of a church setting committed to God's Word, accepting the self-sacrifice embodied in the cross of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer apparently longed for a type of community that, with the courage of Christ born out of obedience to the Word, could live out the gospel more intensely, and thus courageously cope with the crises facing the German nation and, indeed, the world at large.

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[8] Bonhoeffer, *GS* 1:61 [trans. GK].

In his lectures on "The Nature of the Church" presented at Berlin during the summer semester of 1932, for example, Bonhoeffer was able to develop along more practical lines the finely tuned analyses of *Sanctorum Communio*. The language here is trimmed of the heaviness of his dissertation, though essentially he is speaking of the same reality. The church, he insists in these lectures, is not called to be a tiny, sacred haven from the world but, like Jesus, a presence in the midst of the world. The world of the present time, not some heavenly cloud, is the only locus of church life, even though this way of understanding its mission might lead the church into controversial areas in its struggle with evil. The church needed visibility in its sociality. But in its visibility this church was to be neither a church of privilege nor a church totally absorbed into the secularism of the day. It was destined to be, instead, the community of Jesus Christ that is within the world, yet free enough from the world to oppose secular idolatries and to do the courageous deeds required in serving others.

Here we see, even before the experiences at Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer's affirmation of the need for a church to be thoroughly involved in and with the world. But, fortified with Christ's Word, this same church was never to succumb to the ideologies that parade themselves as wholly congruent with faith. "The church is no ideal church," Bonhoeffer told his students,

> but a reality in the world, a bit of the world reality. The worldliness of the church follows from the incarnation of Christ. The church, like Christ, has become world. It is a denial of the real humanity of Jesus and also heretical to take the concrete church as only a phantom church or an illusion.… This means that it is subjected to all the weakness and suffering of the world. The church can, at times, like Christ himself, be without a roof over its head.… Real worldliness consists in the church's being able to renounce all privileges and all its property but never Christ's Word and the forgiveness of sins. With Christ and the forgiveness of sins to fall back on, the church is free to give up everything else.[9]

The renunciation of privileges, the liberating Word of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins, would also be at the forefront of Bonhoeffer's concerns for his community of seminarians. His words here continued to reverberate in his lectures on following Christ. Indeed, they were the binding force that held the community together and were among the major themes of *Life Together*. By that time the world outside Finkenwalde had become a much more dangerous place.

The Community of Finkenwalde

Bonhoeffer's students at Berlin in the years 1932–33, some of whom would join him later in the Finkenwalde seminary, had by then heard his words on Christ, community, and peace in many forms and on varying occasions. Bonhoeffer's biographer, Bethge, notes that because the ordinands from Berlin had maintained such close contact with Bonhoeffer they were already initiates by comparison with the other students.

The opportunity to direct one of the seminaries of the Confessing Church, located first at Zingst and later at Finkenwalde, was created out of a crisis moment in the church struggle. In March 1934, the National Bishop, in compliance with the anti-Jewish laws affecting church ministry,

[9] Bonhoeffer, "The Nature of the Church," in *TF*, 86-87, trans. altered.

decreed the shutting down of the Old Prussian preachers' seminaries. Moreover, students for the ministry were forbidden to take the examinations unless they could present proof of their pure Aryan descent. This move, so clearly dictated by Nazi ideology, forced the opposition Confessing Church to take the matter of ordination under its own control and to organize seminaries under Confessing Church auspices.

Bonhoeffer had been approached in the early summer of 1934 to be part of this new undertaking. Although he had expressed his willingness to become involved, nevertheless he entertained hopes of traveling to India to learn from Gandhi about "community life as well as methods of training."[10] In India, perhaps somewhat idealized in his own imagination, he envisioned an as-yet-unexplored source of new ideas about community, as well as the possibility of counteracting Nazism by means of the Gandhian tactics that had proved so successful against imperial Britain. Hence, in forwarding his acceptance, he attached the proviso that his assumption of the leadership of one of the seminaries would have to wait until spring 1935. The trip to India never materialized. However, a letter to his Swiss friend, Erwin Sutz, reveals both the difficulty Bonhoeffer had in arriving at this decision and the way he intended to run the seminary. Writing from his pastorate in London on September 11, 1934, he confided to Sutz that he was "struggling over the decision on whether I should go back to Germany as director of the new Preachers' Seminary (still to be established) or whether I should remain here or whether I should go to India. I no longer believe in the university and never really have believed in it—a fact that used to rile you. The entire training of young seminarians belongs today in church-monastic schools in which the pure doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount, and worship can be taken seriously—which is really not the case with all three things at the university and, in present-day circumstances, is impossible."[11] Another reason for his delay in accepting the position is seen in this letter. Bonhoeffer also wanted to study firsthand the "monastic" training in vogue in other traditions. This led him to ask George Bell, Anglican Bishop of Chichester, who had already intervened on his behalf regarding his proposed trip to India by writing a letter of recommendation to Gandhi, to write additional letters to the heads of several Anglican monasteries asking for hospitality in Bonhoeffer's endeavors "to have some acquaintance with our methods in England, both with regard to training for the ministry and with regard to community life."[12]

Bonhoeffer made the rounds of these communities and others as well, including the seminaries of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, plus the Methodist College in Richmond. The preparations for his move back to Germany and the setting up of the seminary seemed to help Bonhoeffer to consolidate a number of diverse aspirations that had preoccupied him since his return from the United States in 1931: to deepen the theology of the Sermon on the Mount; to form a Christian community based on commitment to the gospel; to live in a community committed to peace, given to prayer at regular intervals, and dedicated to service of those in need. He had observed diverse ways of attending to these concerns during his visits to the various monasteries and seminarian training centers in England. With that behind him, and with a vision before him of how he would structure seminary life for his church, Bonhoeffer took leave of his London parishioners on March 10, 1935. On April 26, Bonhoeffer and the first ordinands traveled to the site of the

[10] George Bell, "Letter of October 22, 1934," quoted in Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 331.
[11] Bonhoeffer, "Letter to Erwin Sutz, London, September 11, 1934," in *TF*, 412.
[12] George Bell, quoted in Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 335.

seminary, the empty Rhineland Bible School in Zingst. In June they moved to more permanent quarters in a rambling schoolhouse in the small country town of Finkenwalde.

Bonhoeffer called that summer the "fullest time" of his life. He was finally embarked on a mission he had always longed for: the formation of a genuine Christian community based on the Sermon on the Mount. Behind the scenes, numerous events of 1935 were influencing this venture, particularly legislation crafted with the express purpose of destroying the Confessing Church. The existence of the seminary would soon be in violation of the laws of the Nazi government relating to the regulation of church affairs. Maintaining the seminary now put Bonhoeffer and the leaders of the Confessing Church not only squarely in opposition to the German Reich Church, but eventually in noncompliance with the Nazi government as well. For the moment, though, that danger was not paramount in their minds. Their immediate need was to furnish and decorate the house, to convert the gymnasium into a chapel, and to build up a library from nothing. In a move that impressed the seminarians, Bonhoeffer brought his own collection of books from Berlin and placed them at the library's disposal. Their minds were kept focused on the purpose of their seminary training by Bonhoeffer's imposition of a daily schedule and by his intense method of working, always leaving room for prayer and leisure time. We read in *Life Together* Bonhoeffer's detailed account of how the day was to be spent in a balance of piety, study, classes in theology and preaching, services of all sorts to one another, meals together, worship, leisure, and play.

What we do not read in *Life Together* is the story of the tensions Bonhoeffer experienced in directing the seminary his way and in establishing the Brothers' House to provide continuity to the experiment in community living within the seminary. At Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer finally had the time, through his lectures to the seminarians, to write down his thoughts on what following Christ entailed for Christians. These lectures subsequently would become his celebrated book *The Cost of Discipleship*, published in the fall of 1937. For the seminarians, following Christ "Bonhoeffer's way" meant beginning each day with a period of meditation for which they were ill prepared. Some read, some slept, some smoked their pipes, some let their minds wander. Some voiced their resentment over being the butt of jokes from other preachers' seminaries about their "unevangelical monasticism."

All of this became the center of one particular evening discussion, which happened to come on the heels of a lengthy absence by Bonhoeffer from Finkenwalde. Instead of wavering about continuing the practice, Bonhoeffer listened sympathetically to their complaints, then suggested that once a week they have a communal meditation on given texts of Scripture. This proved helpful. Gradually their opposition gave way; most continued the practice after their seminary days. It brought home to them that their faith was in God's Word as a word given to them—not just something they doled out to others in their preaching. Bonhoeffer also introduced them to the practice, more customary with the communities of the Church of the Brethren, of meditating on the *Losungen*, or brief daily texts drawn from the Scriptures. In circular letters, even during the war years, he called his seminarians' attention to the *Losungen* appropriate for the time. And, in prison, he wrote that meditation on these texts opened up to him a world of meaning.

Until the time of his arrest, through circular letters that contained the weekly texts for their reflection, Bonhoeffer continued to remind his seminarians of the importance of this practice of

meditation. At the height of the war years, in response to requests for help in meditation from his "Finkenwaldians" now in harm's way at the front, he sent the following exhortation:

> So even today I will do no more than say a few words once again about the precious gift which is given us in meditation.… Daily, quiet attention to the Word of God which is meant for me, even if it is only for a few minutes, will become for me the focal point of everything which brings inward and outward order into my life. In the interruption and fragmentation of our previous ordered life which this time brings with it, in the danger of losing inner discipline …, meditation gives our life something like constancy. It maintains the link with our previous life, from baptism to confirmation, to ordination. It keeps us in the saving community of our congregation, of our brothers and sisters, of our spiritual home.[13]

That reminder from their seminary director brought back memories of Bonhoeffer's own approach to prayer. He had taught them how to pray as much by example as by instruction.

Bethge recalls the way Bonhoeffer often assumed responsibility for the extemporized prayers. These prayers included thanks for their faith, for their community life, for the gifts of nature; intercession for the Confessing Church, for those in captivity, and even for enemies; and confession of the failings typical of those in ministry and prayers for them. Bonhoeffer prepared carefully for these extemporaneous prayers during these shared periods of meditation. His own ability to concentrate exercised a great influence on the seminarians. "Such an indirect teacher of prayer we had never had before," Bethge remarked.[14] As much as possible, Bonhoeffer modeled his prayers on the Psalms and attempted to harmonize his petitions with that "prayerbook of the Bible." His enthusiasm for the community's reading the Psalms together, as a vital expression of their communal prayer, can be seen in large portions of the section "The Day Together." Bonhoeffer's word to the seminarians was direct: to pray the Psalms was to adopt as their own the prayer of Jesus Christ himself.

Even more problematic for many of the seminarians than the period of meditation was the practice of personal confession of sins. Just before he and the seminarians were to celebrate the Lord's Supper together on the sixth Sunday after Easter of 1935, while they were still at Zingst, Bonhoeffer announced that the celebration also required some form of reconciliation. He suggested that they might want to confess their sins privately to each other or else to him as the director of the community. This surprised them and, for some, even stirred up resentment, since it was not considered the "Protestant" thing to do. It cast a shade of gloom on their Saturday evening, though that evening was spent in reading aloud and in recreation. Gradually, however, the seminarians began to accustom themselves to the monthly celebration of the Lord's Supper. Some among them gradually began the practice of private confession during the summer. Bethge relates how the atmosphere changed, without in any way becoming inquisitorial. One day Bonhoeffer himself asked one of the brothers to hear his confession, thus setting an example for the others and helping the practice gain widespread acceptance.

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[13] Bonhoeffer, "Letter of March 1, 1942," in *TF*, 457, trans. altered.
[14] Eberhard Bethge, *Bekennen und Widerstehen*, 163.

Bonhoeffer writes at length about the private confession of sins both in the section "Confession and the Lord's Supper," and in his short treatise *Spiritual Care*.[15] In the latter work, echoing Luther's subsumption of confession under the graced exercise of the freedom of the Christian, Bonhoeffer situated confession squarely in the faith that recognizes God in the confessor. Bethge traces Bonhoeffer's enthusiasm for the practice of private confession of sins to several converging events, beginning with his first trip to Rome and his positive reaction to observing people of all ages going to confession in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. Bonhoeffer's own appropriation of the private confession of sins was not, however, a mere carryover from that encounter with the widespread Catholic practice. And even in Rome, Bonhoeffer had reservations, similar to those of Martin Luther, about the Catholic "dogma of Confession." Yet Bethge points out that as early as 1932 Bonhoeffer would speak to his students of "oral confession," not as a mere theological issue, "but as an act to be carried out in practice." For those in the seminary unaware of Bonhoeffer's attitudes toward this practice, however, it came as a surprise that, in conjunction with their preparation for the communion service, he began to recommend the private confession of sins. Bethge reports that the procedure was conducted with neither vestments nor formal ceremony. And in his lectures Bonhoeffer strongly advised that future pastors preach at least annually on the blessings of private confession.[16]

The clearest example of his teaching on private confession and forgiveness of sins is seen in the way he incorporates the practice into his reflections in Spiritual Care. At the heart of the pastoral care a minister extends to parishioners, Bonhoeffer pinpoints the liberating effect of private confession of sins and insists that only in such a liberation can genuine community be formed. "In absolution God receives us once again in order to reign over our whole lives and to set us completely free. Confession is a conversion and a call to discipleship. We have nothing left, not even our sins; they are laid on Christ. He steps toward us and his joy and righteousness become our own. Genuine community is not established before confession takes place."[17] Bonhoeffer did set two conditions to the practice. First, only those who themselves practice confession of sins should act as confessors of another. Second, those engaged in the practice should not regard it as part of a pious act or routine. The essence of the confession of sins lay in the promise of forgiveness in Christ. Bonhoeffer conveyed to his seminarians his own conviction that those who are unreconciled to their sisters and brothers, or whose hearts are filled with anxiety about particular sins on their consciences, should not go to the altar. According to Bonhoeffer, it is the assurance of the forgiveness of sins that should make the day of the Lord's Supper a joyous occasion for the entire community.

The Brothers' House

Bonhoeffer's book is, indeed, a study of Christian community and the practices, some devotional in their nature, some related to mutual service, that can help bond together people who share a common faith and who desire to live in Christian community. It was his desire not only that the seminarians live a common life as the best possible preparation for their ministry, but also that there be a structured continuity in this "experiment." At the end of the first session at Finkenwalde

[15] See Bonhoeffer, *SPC*, 60–65. Cf. the references to this text on 110 below.
[16] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 39–40, 154, 384.
[17] Bonhoeffer, *SPC*, 63.

and just before the August holiday, therefore, he began to discuss with some of the seminarians the possibility of some of them staying on in order to form a more tightly knit community, a Brothers' House, that could be a leaven for the incoming group of new students due to arrive in late autumn. Together they drew up a proposal to be sent to the Council of Brethren of the Old Prussian Union. This body would have to release the young ministers involved in this enterprise from their other duties. Eventually six of the "brothers" received permission to remain at Finkenwalde. Among the six were four who survived the war and became the core of the "Finkenwaldians" each of whom contributed in his own way to keeping alive the Bonhoeffer legacy: Eberhard Bethge, Joachim Kanitz, Winfried Maechler, and Albrecht Schönherr.

The proposal they submitted in September 1935 is informative for understanding the nature of the community life Bonhoeffer was trying to shape for the seminarians. In composing this proposal, Bonhoeffer argued, first, that a community, rather than an isolated individual, added strength and objectivity to preaching the Word. Second, Christian life, he claimed, can never be lived in the abstract. The expression of their faith itself called for community living and sensitivity to one another. Third, the very nature of the church, and in particular the present church struggle, demanded renunciation of clerical privileges and availability for service to people. Such was expected of a group of ministers whose solidarity in community would necessarily focus them on the service that they needed outside the community. Finally, Bonhoeffer pointed out that the provision for such a community would offer pastors a spiritual refuge where they could renew their strength for service in the church. Concerning the details of their daily routine, they envisaged a simple common life, a daily schedule of prayer, mutual encouragement, common theological studies, and worship together. In addition, and in full knowledge of how the members of this community might be needed elsewhere in given circumstances, Bonhoeffer pledged their readiness to answer any emergency call. Admission was to be by common consent. The freedom for anyone to leave the community was also stipulated. Monetary support for the enterprise was to come through pooling their resources but, as Bethge notes, Bonhoeffer invariably paid most of the expenses out of his own pocket.[18]

No description of the community life lived at this Brothers' House[19] or at the seminary itself can match the explanation Bonhoeffer gave to Wolfgang Staemmler, mentor of young candidates for the Saxony province, for permitting Bethge to be a member of this community:

> There are two things the brothers have to learn during their short time in the seminary—first, how to lead a community life in daily and strict obedience to the will of Christ Jesus, in the practice of the humblest and the noblest service one Christian brother can perform for another. They must learn to recognize the strength and liberation to be found in their brotherly service and their *Life Together* in a Christian community. For this is something they are going to need. Secondly, they have to learn to serve the truth alone in their study of the Bible and its interpretation in their sermons and teaching. I personally am responsible for this second duty, but the first I cannot attain by myself. For this, there must be a group of brothers who, without

[18] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 385–86.

[19] This Brothers' House was not a separate building at Finkenwalde. It was, rather, a name given to that community within the community, made up of those who had already trained at the seminary, and who would now be a source of continuity in the spirit of the seminary and who would provide supportive love, encouragement, and good example to the less experienced, sometimes wavering seminarians.

> any fuss, will be able to involve the others through their *Life Together*. That is what the Brothers' House is all about.[20]

The Brothers' House within the seminary began in the autumn of 1935 and lasted until the Gestapo shut down the seminary two years later. As much as possible the brothers stuck to the seminary's own daily timetable. At noon, however, when the seminarians were at singing practice, the brothers would gather for a short discussion and common prayer in Bonhoeffer's room.

It came as a major disappointment to Bonhoeffer when the seminary had to close and the new, clandestine seminaries were unable to continue the idea of a community like that of Finkenwalde. In practice, however, Bonhoeffer would draw on the experience and solace of the prayer life of Finkenwalde to survive the difficult, lonely days of imprisonment. As Bethge has put it, Bonhoeffer "dedicated himself and all that was his to the Brothers' House."[21]

Because much of the community life at Finkenwalde was oriented around a form of disciplined life not common to the Protestant background of the seminarians, as well as a daily schedule that seemed to come more out of Catholic monasticism than out of the Protestant tradition, the Christian community of Finkenwalde, and *Life Together*, have been for some interpreters problematic. Some have called it a detour from the heavy involvement in the church struggle and the evident worldliness of the prison correspondence. At the time of his tenure as director of the seminary, Bonhoeffer had to fend off accusations that he was catholicizing the seminarians, or inducing a hothouse atmosphere that was both esoteric and impractical. He was able to win over his critics and the seminarians who might have chafed at the daily schedule, however, by several counterbalancing aspects of their *Life Together*. First and foremost, the seminarians did experience, many for the first time, the sustaining power for their ministry of life in a faith filled, caring community. Second, they were given a rigorous theological training that helped them distinguish between the task of theology and the mission of pastoral care, related but different aspects of their ministry. Third, their daily routine was also interrupted by periods of recreation, music, and other forms of entertainment, not the least of which was "the wit and imagination" of Bonhoeffer who, as Bethge relates, was adept at organizing these times of renewal.[22] Finally, Bonhoeffer was able to make it clear that their *Life Together* was not a withdrawal from the arena of combat against Nazism in the churches.[23] To the contrary, as Bonhoeffer states in his Preface, their *Life Together* was a unique way of preparing these young ministers to enter that combat and revitalize their church.

The New Edition of *Life Together*

However controversial the community life at Finkenwalde, however limited the scope of Bonhoeffer's description of that experiment in Christian community, *Life Together* has enjoyed an immense popularity, ranking it alongside *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* in its appeal to the general public. In fact, when Eberhard Bethge attempted to complain to the head of a publishing company about the many mistranslations in an early English edition of the book—plus

[20] Bonhoeffer, "Letter of June 27, 1936," *GS* 6:376 [trans. GK].
[21] Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 387, trans. altered.
[22] Ibid., 382.
[23] Ibid.

the failure again to include Bonhoeffer's Preface to the text, while employing a misleading cover photo—he was told not to worry. "The paperback has been out for only four months and we have already sold 40,000 copies."[24] Bethge was, of course, more concerned about the errors of translation and the missing Preface than about any sales figures. Yet, as he concludes: "After more than 40 years, this little book still displays an incomparable ability to attract readers."[25]

Despite its flaws, the success of *Life Together* has indeed been extraordinary. As has been mentioned above, following its initial publication by Christian Kaiser Verlag in the series *Theologische Existenz heute* (Theological existence today), it went through three additional printings in its first year. The publishing house of Albert Lempp supervised the fourth printing in early 1940 and corrected the original typographical errors that had lingered on through the earlier printings. Aside from these typos, the text remained essentially the same from its postwar printing in 1949 through periodic reprints during the next thirty years. The twentieth reprint of 1979 had the added attraction of an Afterword [Nachwort] by Eberhard Bethge that describes the original setting of the book and contributes valuable editorial comments looking back at its impact some forty years after its original publication. This Afterword was retained for the twenty-first reissuing of *Gemeinsames Leben* in 1986. Finally, the new, critical edition, volume 5 of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, was published by Kaiser Verlag in 1987. Since its first publication by Harper and Row in 1954, the prior translation of *Life Together* has gone through twenty-three reprintings.

In each of these reprintings, however, inconsistencies and errors of translation have remained. Both consistently rendering into English Bonhoeffer's German terminology and capturing as closely as possible his style of writing are of course of major importance to this new edition of *Life Together*. To give but two examples, the crucial words *Gemeinschaft* and *Gemeinde* have been subjected to several varying translations in previous English translations. *Gemeinschaft* had been rendered alternately as "community," "fellowship," "communion," "association," or "relationship." In the current text, this word has been translated in every instance as "community." The word *Gemeinde* had translations as varied as "community," "congregation," "parish," and "church." Here, we have rendered the word for the most part either as "congregation" or "community of Christians," depending on the context. Where the words are compounded or do not easily lend themselves to a corresponding English translation, we have attempted to approximate the meaning of Bonhoeffer's German and then have indicated the difficulty by placing the original German word or phrase in brackets immediately following the corresponding English expression.

Among the thorniest of all the problems faced in this book, however, is the issue of gender-inclusive language. We have attempted to resolve this problem in a way that is faithful to Bonhoeffer's German yet conscious of the significant shifts in perspective that characterize the English-language reader today as contrasted with a German reader of *Life Together* in the 1940s. The issue of gender inclusivity has proved, as might well be expected, to be far easier in the case of references to human beings than in the case of references to God and Christ. In previous translations the term "man" was used to translate *Mensch*, although Bonhoeffer clearly differentiated his use of *Mensch*, which we have translated for the most part as "human being," and *Mann*, which he uses only to refer to someone of the male gender. Bonhoeffer's German was more limited, however,

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[24] Bethge, "Afterword," 3.
[25] Ibid., 4.

in references to God; for example, because all German nouns and pronouns have a gender, he could only use *er* ("he") in reference to *Gott* (God). In light of current English practice, however, we have in general avoided assigning any masculine gender to God, unless the reference is to a word that itself has a masculine gender in English, such as "Father" or "Son." And, given the deep historical connection that Bonhoeffer affirms between the man Jesus of Nazareth and the messianic title, Christ, we have retained the masculine pronoun "he" to refer to both.

What is more, Bonhoeffer frequently used the term *Bruder* ("brother") in *Life Together*. This has, in turn, led to an editorial dilemma. Should the expression be translated simply as "brother" with its corresponding pronoun, "he," particularly given the fact that the brothers at Finkenwalde were evidently all male? It is obvious that in a few instances Bonhoeffer was referring specifically to his community of seminarians or the men in the Brothers' House within the community of Finkenwalde. In these cases, we have occasionally retained the English usage of "brother." However, it is clear from Bonhoeffer's heretofore missing Preface, incorporated into *Life Together* for the first time in this edition, that Bonhoeffer was directing this work to the whole church. The experiment in community undertaken at Finkenwalde was "a mission entrusted to the church," "a responsibility to be undertaken by the church as a whole," something that necessitated both "a willingness of the church to assist in the work" and the "vigilant cooperation of every responsible party." It is clear that, for the most part, Bonhoeffer intended his study to be a description of one possibility in the formation of Christian community. Bonhoeffer uses the term "brother" to mean an attitude of looking on our fellow Christians as intimate kindred in Jesus Christ. Hence often Bruder has been translated with the inclusive equivalent, such as "other Christians" or "another Christian."

Life Together is still today a most popular book among those involved in Christian communities of all sorts and among parish study groups desirous of deepening their sense of community within the context of a larger congregation. Bethge's remark in the Afterword to the 1979 German edition is particularly apropos of this attractive volume: "This little book lives on as before and evidently still addresses an area in which there is hardly any practical advice or where practical advice has turned out poorly. Indeed, in terms of its availability around the whole world, it claims a place directly alongside *Letters and Papers from Prison*."[26]

That this new edition of *Life Together* should now be the first published volume of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* is due to the cooperative work of several people. I am first of all indebted to my translator, Daniel Bloesch, who contributed not only his skills in German, but also his patience in our seemingly endless discussions and in his reworking of so many of the problematic translations. John Godsey, himself a Bonhoeffer scholar, contributed a perceptive critical reading of the text in its manuscript form; and Beth Orling Farrera served as an additional consultant. Most of all, I acknowledge here the guiding hand of Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., general editor of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, who worked closely with me in the final editing process and whose numerous suggestions regarding both theological substance and style have enhanced this volume immeasurably.

[26] Ibid.