

**THE DIFFERENT DRUM:  
Community Making and Peace  
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**CHAPTER III  
The True Meaning of Community**

In our culture of rugged individualism - in which we generally feel that we dare not be honest about ourselves, even with the person in the pew next to us - we bandy around the word "community." We apply it to almost any collection of individuals - a town, a church, a synagogue, a fraternal organization, an apartment complex, a professional association - regardless of how poorly those individuals communicate with each other. It is a false use of the word.

If we are going to use the word meaningfully we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to "rejoice together, mourn together," and to "delight in each other, make others' conditions our own." But what, then, does such a rare group look like? How does it function? What is a true definition of community?

We can define or adequately explain only those things that are smaller than we are. I have in my office, for instance, a very handy little electrical space heater. If I were an electrical engineer, I could take it apart and explain to you - define - exactly how it works. Except for one thing. That is the matter of the cord and plug that connect it with something called electricity. And there are certain questions about electricity, despite its known physical laws, that even the most advanced electrical engineer cannot answer. That is because electricity is something larger than we are.

There are many such "things": God, goodness, love, evil, death, consciousness, for instance. Being so large, they are many-faceted, and the best we can do is describe or define one facet at a time. Even so, we never seem quite able to plumb their depths fully. Sooner or later we inevitably run into a core of mystery.

Community is another such phenomenon. Like electricity, it is profoundly lawful. Yet there remains something about it that is inherently mysterious, miraculous, unfathomable. Thus there is no adequate one-sentence definition of genuine community. Community is something more than the sum of its parts, its individual members. What is this "something more?" Even to begin to answer that, we enter a realm that is not so much abstract as almost mystical. It is a realm where words are never fully suitable and language itself falls short.

The analogy of a gem comes to mind. The seeds of community reside in humanity - a social species - just as a gem originally resides in the earth. But it is not yet a gem, only a potential one. So it is that geologists refer to a gem in the rough simply as a stone. A group becomes a community in somewhat the same way that a stone becomes a gem - through a process of cutting and polishing. Once cut and polished, it is something beautiful. But to describe its beauty, the best we can do is to describe its facets. Community, like a gem, is multifaceted, each facet a mere aspect of a whole that defies description.

One other caveat. The gem of community is so exquisitely beautiful it may seem unreal to you, like a dream you once had when you were a child, so beautiful it may seem unattainable. As Bellah and his coauthors put it, the notion of community "may also be resisted as absurdly Utopian, as a project to create a perfect society. But the transformation of which we speak is both necessary and modest. Without it, indeed, there may be very little future to think about at

all."\* The problem is that the lack of community is so much the norm in our society, one without experience would be tempted to think, How could we possibly get there from here? It is possible; we can get there from here. Remember that to the uninitiated eye it would seem impossible for a stone ever to become a gem.

The facets of community are interconnected, profoundly interrelated. No one could exist without the other. They create each other, make each other possible. What follows, then, is but one scheme for isolating and naming the most salient characteristics of a true community.

## **INCLUSIVITY, COMMITMENT, AND CONSENSUS**

Community is and must be inclusive. The great enemy of community is exclusivity. Groups that exclude others because they are poor or doubters or divorced or sinners or of some different race or nationality are not communities; they are cliques - actually defensive bastions against community.

Inclusiveness is not an absolute. Long-term communities must invariably struggle over the degree to which they are going to be inclusive. Even short-term communities must sometimes make that difficult decision. But for most groups it is easier to exclude than include. Clubs and corporations give little thought to being inclusive unless the law compels them to do so. True communities, on the other hand, if they want to remain such, are always reaching to extend themselves. The burden of proof falls upon exclusivity. Communities do not ask "How can we justify taking this person in?" Instead the question is "Is it at all justifiable to keep this person out?" In relation to other groupings of similar size or purpose, communities are always relatively inclusive.

In my first experience of community at Friends Seminary, the boundaries between grades, between students and teachers, between young and old, were all "soft." There were no Outgroups - no outcasts. Everyone was welcome at the parties. There was no pressure to conform. So the inclusiveness of any community extends along all its parameters. There is an "allness" to community. It is not merely a matter of including different sexes, races, and creeds. It is also inclusive of the full range of human emotions. Tears are as welcome as laughter, fear as well as faith. And different styles: hawks and doves, straights and gays, Grailers and Sears, Roebuckers [Note: these latter terms refer to an account of the effect on everyone in one of the groups of which Peck was a member of an ideological split that arose between two very different life-style sub-groups within the group as a whole, creating much exclusionary negativity until its basis in defensive prejudice became apparent to everyone.] , the talkative and the silent. All human differences are included. All "soft" individuality is nurtured.

How is this possible? How can such differences be absorbed, such different people coexist? Commitment - the willingness to coexist - is crucial. Sooner or later, somewhere along the line (and preferably sooner), the members of a group in some way must commit themselves to one another if they are to become or stay a community. Exclusivity, the great enemy to community, appears in two forms: excluding the other and excluding yourself. If you conclude under your breath, "Well, this group just isn't for me - they're too much this or too much that - and I'm just going to quietly pick up my marbles and go home," it would be as destructive to community as it would be to a marriage were you to conclude, "Well, the grass looks a little greener on the other side of the fence, and I'm just going to move on." Community, like marriage, requires that we hang in there when the going gets a little rough. It requires a certain degree of commitment. It is no accident that Bellah et al. subtitled their work *Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Our individualism must be counter-balanced by commitment.

If we do hang in there, we usually find after a while that "the rough places are made plain." A friend correctly defined community as a "group that has learned to transcend its individual

differences." But this learning takes time, the time that can be bought only through commitment. "Transcend" does not mean "obliterate" or "demolish." It literally means "to climb over." The achievement of community can be compared to the reaching of a mountaintop.

Perhaps the most necessary key to this transcendence is the appreciation of differences. In community, instead of being ignored, denied, hidden, or changed, human differences are celebrated as gifts. Remember how I came to appreciate Lily's "gift of Howing," and she my "gift of organization [his wife, also mentioned in an earlier chapter]." Marriage is, of course, a small, long-term community of two. Yet in short-term communities of even fifty or sixty, while the timing and depth are almost opposite, I have found that the dynamics are the same. The transformation of attitudes toward each other that allowed Lily and me to transcend our differences took twenty years. But this same transcendence can routinely occur within a community-building group over the course of eight hours. In each case alienation is transformed into appreciation and reconciliation. And in each case the transcendence has a good deal to do with love.

We are so unfamiliar with genuine community that we have never developed an adequate vocabulary for the politics of this transcendence. When we ponder on how individual differences can be accommodated, perhaps the first mechanism we turn to (probably because it is the most childlike) is that of the strong individual leader. Differences, like those of squabbling siblings, we instinctively think can be resolved by a mommy or daddy - a benevolent dictator, or so we hope. But community, encouraging individuality as it does, can never be totalitarian. So we jump to a somewhat less primitive way of resolving individual differences which we call democracy. We take a vote, and the majority determines which differences prevail. Majority rules. Yet that process excludes the aspirations of the minority. How do we transcend differences in such a way as to include a minority? It seems like a conundrum. How and where do you go beyond democracy?

In the genuine communities of which I have been a member, a thousand or more group decisions have been made and I have never yet witnessed a vote. I do not mean to imply that we can or should discard democratic machinery, any more than we should abolish organization. But I do mean to imply that a community, in transcending individual differences, routinely goes beyond even democracy. In the vocabulary of this transcendence we thus far have only one word: "consensus." Decisions in genuine community are arrived at through consensus, in a process that is not unlike a community of jurors, for whom consensual decision making is mandated.

Still, how on earth can a group in which individuality is encouraged, in which individual differences flourish, routinely arrive at consensus? Even when we develop a richer language for community operations, I doubt we will ever have a formula for the consensual process. The process itself is an adventure. And again there is something inherently almost mystical, magical about it. But it works. And the other facets of community will provide hints as to how it does.

## **REALISM**

A second characteristic of community is that it is realistic. In the community of marriage, for example, when Lily and I discuss an issue, such as how to deal with one of our children, we are likely to develop a response more realistic than if either of us were operating alone. If only for this reason, I believe that it is extremely difficult for a single parent to make adequate decisions about his or her children. Even if the best Lily and I can do is to come up with two different points of view, they modulate each other. In larger communities the process is still more effective. A community of sixty can usually come up with a dozen different points of view. The resulting consensual stew, composed of multiple ingredients, is usually far more creative than a two-ingredient dish could ever be.

We are accustomed to think of group behavior as often primitive. Indeed, I myself have written about the ease with which groups can become evil.\*\* "Mob psychology" is properly a vernacular expression. But groups of whatever kind are seldom real communities. There is, in fact, more than a quantum leap between an ordinary group and a community; they are entirely different phenomena. And a real community is, by definition, immune to mob psychology because of its encouragement of individuality, its inclusion of a variety of points of view. Time and again I have seen a community begin to make a certain decision or establish a certain norm when one of the members will suddenly say, "Wait a minute, I don't think I can go along with this." Mob psychology cannot occur in an environment in which individuals are free to speak their minds and buck the trend. Community is such an environment.

Because a community includes members with many different points of view and the freedom to express them, it comes to appreciate the whole of a situation far better than an individual, couple, or ordinary group can. Incorporating the dark and the light, the sacred and the profane, the sorrow and the joy, the glory and the mud, its conclusions are well rounded. Nothing is likely to be left out. With so many frames of reference, it approaches reality more and more closely. Realistic decisions, consequently, are more often guaranteed in community than in any other human environment.

An important aspect of the realism of community deserves mention: humility. While rugged individualism predisposes one to arrogance, the "soft" individualism of community leads to humility. Begin to appreciate each others' gifts, and you begin to appreciate your own limitations. Witness others share their brokenness, and you will become able to accept your own inadequacy and imperfection. Be fully aware of human variety, and you will recognize the interdependence of humanity.

As a group of people do these things - as they become a community - they become more and more humble, not only as individuals but also as a group - and hence more realistic. From which kind of group would you expect a wise, realistic decision: an arrogant one, or a humble one?

## **CONTEMPLATION**

Among the reasons that a community is humble and hence realistic is that it is contemplative. It examines itself. It is self aware. It knows itself. "Know thyself" is a sure rule for humility. As that fourteenth-century classic on contemplation, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, put it: "Meekness in itself is nothing else than a true knowing and feeling of a man's self as he is. Any man who truly sees and feels himself as he is must surely be meek indeed."\*\*\*

The word "contemplative" has a variety of connotations. Most of them center upon awareness. The essential goal of contemplation is increased awareness of the world outside oneself, the world inside oneself, and the relationship between the two. A man who settles for a relatively limited awareness of himself could hardly be called contemplative. It is also questionable whether he could be called psychologically mature or emotionally healthy. Self-examination is the key to insight, which is the key to wisdom. Plato put it most bluntly: "The life which is unexamined is not worth living."

The community-building process requires self-examination from the beginning. And as the members become thoughtful about themselves they also learn to become increasingly thoughtful about the group. "How are we doing?" they begin to ask with greater and greater frequency. "Are we still on target? Are we a healthy group? Have we lost the spirit?"

The spirit of community once achieved is not then some-thing forever obtained. It is not something that can be bottled or preserved in aspic. It is repeatedly lost. Remember how, toward the end of Mac Badgely's Tavistock group in 1967, after enjoying hours of nurturing fellowship, we began to squabble again. But remember also that we were quick to recognize it because we had become aware of ourselves as a group. And because we were rapidly able to identify the cause of the problem - our division into Grailers and Sears, Roebuckers - we were rapidly able to transcend that division and recapture the spirit of community.

No community can expect to be in perpetual good health. What a genuine community does do, however, because it is a contemplative body, is recognize its ill health when it occurs and quickly take appropriate action to heal itself. Indeed, the longer they exist, the more efficient healthy communities become in this recovery process. Conversely, groups that never learn to be contemplative either do not become community in the first place or else rapidly and permanently disintegrate.

### **A SAFE PLACE**

It is no accident that I relearned "the lost art of crying" at the age of thirty-six while I was in a true community setting. Despite this relearning, my early training in rugged individualism was sufficiently effective that even today I can cry in public only when I am in a safe place. One of my joys, whenever I return to community, is that the "gift of tears" is returned to me. I am not alone. Once a group has achieved community, the single most common thing members express is: "I feel safe here."

It is a rare feeling. Almost all of us have spent nearly all of our lives feeling only partially safe, if at all. Seldom, if ever, have we felt completely free to be ourselves. Seldom, if ever, in any kind of a group, have we felt wholly accepted and acceptable. Consequently, virtually everyone enters a new group situation with his or her guard up. That guard goes very deep. Even if a conscious attempt is made to be open and vulnerable, there will still be ways in which unconscious defenses remain strong. Moreover, an initial admission of vulnerability is so likely to be met with fear, hostility, or simplistic attempts to heal or convert that all but the most courageous will retreat behind their walls.

There is no such thing as instant community under ordinary circumstances. It takes a great deal of work for a group of strangers to achieve the safety of true community. Once they succeed, however, it is as if the floodgates were opened. As soon as it is safe to speak one's heart, as soon as most people in the group know they will be listened to and accepted for themselves, years and years of pent-up frustration and hurt and guilt and grief come pouring out. And pouring out ever faster. Vulnerability in community snowballs. Once its members become vulnerable and find themselves being valued and appreciated, they become more and more vulnerable. The walls come tumbling down. And as they tumble, as the love and acceptance escalates, as the mutual intimacy multi-plies, true healing and converting begins. Old wounds are healed, old resentments forgiven, old resistances overcome. Fear is replaced by hope.

So another of the characteristics of community is that it is healing and converting. Yet I have deliberately not listed that characteristic by itself, lest the subtlety of it be misunderstood. For the fact is that most of our human attempts to heal and convert prevent community. Human beings have within them a natural yearning and thrust toward health and wholeness and holiness. (All three words are derived from the same root.) Most of the time, however, this thrust, this energy, is enchained by fear, neutralized by defenses and resistances. But put a human being in a truly safe place, where these defenses and resistances are no longer necessary, and the thrust toward health is liberated. When we are safe, there is a natural tendency for us to heal and convert ourselves.

Experienced psychotherapists usually come to recognize this truth. As neophytes they see it as their task to heal the patient and often believe they succeed in doing so. With experience, however, they realize that they do not have the power to heal. But they also learn that it is within their power to listen to the patient, to accept him or her, to establish a "therapeutic relationship." So they focus not so much on healing as on making their relationship a safe place where the patient is likely to heal himself.

Paradoxically, then, a group of humans becomes healing and converting only after its members have learned to stop trying to heal and convert. Community is a safe place precisely because no one is attempting to heal or convert you, to fix you, to change you. Instead, the members accept you as you are. You are free to be you. And being so free, you are free to discard defenses, masks, disguises; free to seek your own psychological and spiritual health; free to become your whole and holy self.

### **A LABORATORY FOR PERSONAL DISARMAMENT**

Toward the end of a two-day community experience in 1984 a late-middle-aged lady announced to the group: "I know Scotty said we weren't supposed to drop out, but when my husband and I got home yesterday evening we were seriously considering doing just that. I didn't sleep very well last night, and I almost didn't come here this morning. But something very strange has happened. Yesterday I was looking at all of you through hard eyes. Yet today for some reason - I don't really understand it - I have become soft-eyed, and it feels just wonderful."

This transformation - routine in community - is the same as that described in the story of the rabbi's gift. The decrepit monastery, a dying group, came alive (and into community) once its members began looking at each other and themselves through "soft eyes," seeing through lenses of respect. It may seem strange in our culture of rugged individualism that this transformation begins to occur precisely when we begin to "break down." As long as we look out at each other only through the masks of our composure, we are looking through hard eyes. But as the masks drop and we see the suffering and courage and brokenness and deeper dignity underneath, we truly start to respect each other as fellow human beings.

Once when I was speaking about community to the governing body of a church, one of the members wisely commented: "What I hear you saying is that community requires the confession of brokenness." He was correct of course. But how remarkable it is that in our culture brokenness must be "confessed." We think of confession as an act that should be carried out in secret, in the darkness of the confessional, with the guarantee of professional priestly or psychiatric confidentiality. Yet the reality is that every human being is broken and vulnerable. How strange that we should ordinarily feel compelled to hide our wounds when we are all wounded!

Vulnerability is a two-way street. Community requires the ability to expose our wounds and weaknesses to our fellow creatures. It also requires the capacity to be affected by the wounds of others, to be wounded by their wounds. This is what the woman meant by "soft eyes." Her eyes were no longer barriers, and she did, indeed, feel wonderful. There is pain in our wounds. But even more important is the love that arises among us when we share, both ways, our woundedness. Still, we cannot deny the reality that this sharing requires a risk in our culture - the risk of violating the norm of pretended invulnerability. For most of us it is a new - and, seemingly, potentially dangerous - form of behavior.

It may seem odd to refer to community as a laboratory. The word implies a sterile place filled not with softness but with hardware. A laboratory can better be defined, however, as a place designed to be safe for experiments. We need such a place, because when we experiment we are trying out - testing - new ways of doing things. So it is in community: it is a safe place to

experiment with new types of behavior. When offered the opportunity of such a safe place, most people will naturally begin to experiment more deeply than ever before with love and trust. They drop their customary defenses and threatened postures, the barriers of distrust, fear, resentment, and prejudice. They experiment with disarming themselves. They experiment with peace - peace within themselves and within the group. And they discover that the experiment works.

An experiment is designed to give us new experience from which we can extract new wisdom. So it is that in experimenting with personally disarming themselves, the members of a true community experientially discover the rules of peacemaking and learn its virtues. It is a personal experience so powerful that it can become the driving force behind the quest for peace on a global scale.

### **A GROUP THAT CAN FIGHT GRACEFULLY**

It may at first glance seem paradoxical that a community that is a safe place and a laboratory for disarmament should also be a place of conflict. Perhaps a story will help. A Sufi master was strolling through the streets one day with his students. When they came to the city square, a vicious battle was being fought between government troops and rebel forces. Horrified by the bloodshed, the students implored, "Quick, Master, which side should we help?"

"Both," the Master replied.

The students were confused. "Both?" they demanded. "Why should we help both?" "We need to help the authorities learn to listen to the aspirations of the people," the Master answered, "and we need to help the rebels learn how not to compulsively reject authority."

In genuine community there are no sides. It is not always easy, but by the time they reach community the members have learned how to give up cliques and factions. They have learned how to listen to each other and how not to reject each other. Sometimes consensus in community is reached with miraculous rapidity. But at other times it is arrived at only after lengthy struggle. Just because it is a safe place does not mean community is a place without conflict. It is, however, a place where conflict can be resolved without physical or emotional bloodshed and with wisdom as well as grace. A community is a group that can fight gracefully.

That this is so is hardly accidental. For community is an amphitheater where the gladiators have laid down their weapons and their armor, where they have become skilled at listening and understanding, where they respect each others' gifts and accept each others' limitations, where they celebrate their differences and bind each others' wounds, where they are committed to a struggling together rather than against each other. It is a most unusual battleground indeed. But that is also why it is an unusually effective ground for conflict resolution.

The significance of this is hardly slight. There are very real conflicts in the world, and the worst of them do not seem to go away. But there is a fantasy abroad. Simply stated, it goes like this: "If we can resolve our conflicts, then someday we shall be able to live together in community." Could it be that we have it totally backward? And that the real dream should be: "If we can live together in community, then someday we shall be able to resolve our conflicts"?

### **A GROUP OF ALL LEADERS**

When I am the designated leader I have found that once a group becomes a community, my nominal job is over. I can sit back and relax and be one among many, for another of the

essential characteristics of community is a total decentralization of authority. Remember that it is anti-totalitarian. Its decisions are reached by consensus. Communities have sometimes been referred to as leaderless groups. It is more accurate, however, to say that a community is a group of all leaders.

Because it is a safe place, compulsive leaders feel free in community - often for the first time in their lives - to not lead. And the customarily shy and reserved feel free to step forth with their latent gifts of leadership. The result is that a community is an ideal decision-making body. The expression "A camel is a horse created by a committee" does not mean that group decisions are inevitably clumsy and imperfect; it does mean that committees are virtually never communities.

So it was in 1983 when I needed to make some difficult major decisions in my life - so difficult that I knew I was not intelligent enough to make them alone even with expert advice. I asked for help, and twenty-eight women and men came to my aid from around the country. Quite properly, we spent the first 80 percent of our three days together building ourselves into a community. Only in the last few hours did we turn our attention to the decisions that needed to be made. And they were made with the speed and brilliance of lightning.

One of the most beautiful characteristics of community is what I have come to call the "flow of leadership." It is because of this flow that our community in 1983 was able to make its decisions so rapidly and effectively. And because its members felt free to express themselves, it was as if their individual gifts were offered at just the right moment in the decision-making process. So one member stepped forward with part A of the solution. And since the community recognized the wisdom of the gift, everyone deferred to it so that instantly, almost magically, a second member was free to step forward with part B of the solution. And so it flowed around the room.

The flow of leadership in community is routine. It is a phenomenon that has profound implications for anyone who would seek to improve organizational decision-making - in business, government, or elsewhere. But it is not a quick trick or fix. Community must be built first. Traditional hierarchical patterns have to be at least temporarily set aside. Some kind of control must be relinquished. For it is a situation in which it is the spirit of community itself that leads and not any single individual.

## **A SPIRIT**

Community is a spirit - but not in the way that the familiar phrase "community spirit" is usually understood. To most of us it implies a competitive spirit, a jingoistic boosterism, such as that displayed by fans of winning football teams or the citizens of a town in which they take great pride. "Our town is better than your town" might be taken as a typical expression of community spirit.

But this understanding of the spirit of community is profoundly misleading as well as dreadfully shallow. In only one respect is it accurate. The members of a group who have achieved genuine community do take pleasure, even delight - in themselves as a collective. They know they have won something together, collectively discovered something of great value, that they are "onto something." Beyond that the similarity ends. There is nothing competitive, for instance, about the spirit of true community. To the contrary, a group possessed by a spirit of competitiveness is by definition not a community. Competitiveness is always exclusive; genuine community is inclusive. If community has enemies, it has begun to lose the spirit of community - if it ever had it in the first place.

The spirit of true community is the spirit of peace. People in the early stages of a community-building workshop will frequently ask, "How will we know when we are a community?" It is a needless question. When a group enters community there is a dramatic change in spirit. And the

new spirit is almost palpable. There is no mistaking it. No one who has experienced it need ever ask again "How will we know when we are a community?"

Nor will one ever question that it is a spirit of peace that prevails when a group enters community. An utterly new quietness descends on the group. People seem to speak more quietly; yet, strangely, their voices seem to carry better through the room. There are periods of silence, but it is never an uneasy silence. Indeed, the silence is welcomed. It feels tranquil. Nothing is frantic anymore. The chaos is over. It is as if noise had been replaced by music. The people listen and can hear. It is peaceful.

But spirit is slippery. It does not submit itself to definition, to capture, the way material things do. So it is that a group in community does not always feel peaceful in the usual sense of the word. Its members will from time to time struggle with each other, and struggle hard. The struggle may become excited and exuberant with little, if any, room for silence. But it is a productive, not a destructive, struggle. It always moves toward consensus, because it is always a loving struggle. It takes place on a ground of love. The spirit of community is inevitably the spirit of peace and love.

The "atmosphere" of love and peace is so palpable that almost every community member experiences it as a spirit. Hence, even the agnostic and atheist members will generally report a community-building workshop as a spiritual experience. How this experience is interpreted, however, is highly variable. Those with a secular consciousness tend to assume that the spirit of community is no more than a creation of the group itself; and beautiful though it may be, they will leave it at that. Most Christians, on the other hand, tend toward a more complicated understanding.

In the latter frame of reference the spirit of community is not envisioned as a purely human spirit or one created solely by the group. It is assumed to be external to and independent of the group. It therefore is thought of as descending upon the group, just as the Holy Spirit is said to have descended upon Jesus at his baptism in the form of a dove. This does not mean, however, that the spirit's visitation is accidental or unpredictable. It can fall upon and take root only in fertile, prepared ground. Thus for those of Christian orientation the work of community building is seen as preparation for the descent of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of community is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

This does not mean that community is solely a Christian phenomenon. I have seen community develop among Christians and Jews, Christians and atheists, Jews and Muslims, Muslims and Hindus. People of any religious persuasion or none whatever can develop community. Nor does it mean that a belief in Christianity is a guarantee of community. It is reported that some men saw Jesus' disciples casting out demons in his name, and they thought that this was an easy formula. So with no more thought, they went up to some demoniacs and shouted, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." But absolutely nothing happened, except that the demons laughed at them.

So it is with groups. A group of Christians who are not prepared can sit around shouting "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus" until they are blue in the face, and nothing will happen. They will move no closer to community. On the other hand, any group of people (no matter what their religious persuasion or whether the word "Jesus" is ever spoken) who are willing to practice the love, discipline, and sacrifice that are required for the spirit of community, [the spirit] that Jesus extolled and exemplified, will be gathered together in his name and he will be there.

My own frame of reference is Christian, and for me, therefore, the spirit of community, which is the spirit of peace and love, is also the spirit of Jesus. But the Christian understanding of community would go even beyond this. The doctrine of the Trinity - of three in one - holds that Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit, while separate in one sense are the same in another. So when I

talk of Jesus being present in community, I am also speaking of the presence of God and the Holy Spirit.

In Christian thought the Holy Spirit is particularly identified with wisdom. Wisdom is envisioned as a kind of revelation. To the secular mind we humans, through thought, study and the assimilation of experience, arrive at wisdom. It is our own achievement. We somehow earn it. While Christian thinkers hardly denigrate the value of thought, study, and experience, they believe that something more is involved in the creation of wisdom. Specifically, they believe wisdom to be a gift of God and the Holy Spirit.

The wisdom of a true community often seems miraculous. This wisdom can perhaps be explained in purely secular terms as a result of the freedom of expression, the pluralistic talents, the consensual decision making that occur in in community. There are times however, when this wisdom to be more a matter of divine spirit and possible divine intervention. This is one of the reasons why the feeling of joy is such a frequent concomitant of the spirit of community. The members feel that they have been temporarily - at least partially - transported out of the mundane world of ordinary preoccupations. For the moment it is as if heaven and earth had somehow met.

## Footnotes

\* Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1985), p. p. 286.

\*\* M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

\*\*\* Trans. Ira Progoff (New York: Julian Press, 1969), p. 92.

\*\*\*\* J. W. Mackail, ed., *The Greek Anthology* (1906), Vol 111, *Apology*, p. 38.