



Community is one of the most valued gifts that God has bestowed on humanity. Every church I have ever encountered has wanted to be a healthy, supportive, Christian community. The term, after all, is built from the New Testament word *koinonia*, which means “close association involving mutual interest and sharing, association . . . fellowship, close relationship”<sup>1</sup>—a description every church claims for its

identity. *Koinonia* was brought over into the Latin as *communio*, transferred to late Middle English as the cognate *commuyone*, and finally adjusted into modern English. In Spanish it became *comunidad*, in French *communauté*, describing a group of people living together.

Readers may remember a few issues ago we reviewed Royce Gruenler's important book *The Trinity in the Gospel of John*, which is a close study of the perfect community in the Godhead.<sup>2</sup> We Christians try to reflect that mutual love in our homes and in our ecclesiastical bodies, but, as fallen creatures, sometimes we fail.

What makes a good community? This issue looks at some of its elements, opening with a clear call from longtime CBE mentor Gilbert Bilezikian to reject the “overbearing leadership” in many churches that compels church members into “leaderolatry.” This, he points out, is not the New Testament model, where churches made joint decisions in a mutual submission that promotes healthy community. He then expands these views in an interview with Glen Scorgie, whose book *The Journey Back to Eden* was reviewed in our summer issue. Next, last year's Evangelical Theological Society President Edwin Yamauchi explores the parameters of how unlovable Christian community members can get and still be accepted as he opens up for us the significance of Paul's observation that some in the Colossian church community

were Scythians. After reading about them and their habits, we may find that the “dragons” in our churches do not appear so intolerable to us. Trust is the adhesive that holds any community together, and Jennie Dugan takes us on a thorough and fascinating exploration of trust through an innovative application of psychologist Jack Gibb's seminal approach to analyzing traits. Her article is the natural follow-through of our spring issue on gender justice. The beleaguered British politician Benjamin Disraeli, an object of great prejudice for his Jewish roots, once observed that “justice is truth in action.”<sup>3</sup> Jennie shows us how an environment of truth produces positive traits that together forge trust. Another great promoter of community is the collective arts. Poet Anita N. Kobayashi Sung presents two poems from her outstanding work. Then, Christine Cos reviews John Stackhouse's *Finally Feminist*, a volume that strives to generate dialogue rather than contentiousness on the gender issue. KeumJu Jewel Hyun wraps up our community issue with an analysis of Peter Cha, Steve Kang, and Helen Lee's careful examination of how to grow healthy diasporan Asian American churches, while Deb Beatty Mel's cover photo shows a prayer circle of the House of Prisca and Aquila (August 20, 2007).

A central factor that makes a Christian community work or fail is whether we can truly love and trust each other. That fact was an underlying common denominator that ran through our previous issue on submission and subjection. In an unhealthy home, church, or state, even Christians can seek to subject other healthy people's wills when deceived by the interests of power, breaking faith for some supposed “higher good.” The betrayers of trust and love can be identified as abuse and lust. All of us know that the misuse of sex, money, and power are three classic traps that can ensnare and destroy our churches, our ministries, our homes. In *Priscilla Papers* this past year, we have been examining the abuse of power as it oppresses women and children the world



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over, nullifies the priesthood of all believers that God intended for both women and men, lifts up a few to elitist prominence of prestige and wealth, subjecting other Christians by pushing the will of the one or the few over the will of the many.

Since the founding of the church I help pastor, our body has resisted the pressure from so many to name a head pastor. We share power by gifting between several pastors of equal authority, a lay eldership with whom all decisions are made, an active diaconate, and a congregational membership that can ratify or reject all major policy changes. The constant criticisms levied at us have been that we have “no clear structure.” We need a single person’s “vision” to unite all. A “clear chain of command” creates more clarity of “accountability.” We reply endlessly that having each pastor in charge of an area, the care of parishioners distributed among pastors and elders, all decisions made by consensus of the pastors and eldership, and all policies submitted to the will of the congregation make very clear lines of accountability. The “vision” is shared. And, we are a living, international being helping God reconcile the world, not a multinational corporation producing cars. Certainly, one strong leader can cast a vision and help unify a divided church community, but, if that leader is not careful, can also become the end of community and the beginning of tyranny. All cults I have studied are single strong-leader driven. The church collective is supposed to be the body of Christ with one head—Jesus Christ. The rest of us comprise the custodial community.

United States President Woodrow Wilson, who dreamed of a cooperation of governments, championing the League of Nations as his attempt to bring such global community about, warned the United States Senate on January 22, 1917, “There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.”<sup>4</sup>

A “balance of power” within the church realizes Jesus’ ideal that church ministers be servant leaders, not “lording” their power over others. Such abuse of position is a form of idolatry. Paul counseled the Thessalonians to follow him (2 Thess. 3:6–15), but what example did he set? Keeping away from idlers (3:6–7) and paying for what he consumed by his labor day and night (3:8), as he worked making tents for a living, then putting others in charge of churches he founded, collecting relief funds to give to the starving, doing without comforts so others could have sustenance—his was a servant model. The church forged on that model becomes an exemplary community that sets a standard for all other communities.

Jamaican national hero and devout Trinitarian Christian Marcus Garvey realized the power of the church to serve as an example, when he wrote:

The Church is the most beneficent institution, the greatest civilizing agency; the institution which is begetter and ward

of the rights and privileges, the freedom and liberty, not only of the community, but of the individual. It is the power protective of life and property. It is positive in its effect and of a potency unequalled by any other service of which our civilization boasts. We often hear of the power of education, of the law, and of the courts of Justice, and of the significant part these play in the life of the community; while we cannot disparage these, while they are always of immense benefit, yet there is no comparison between these and the Church. In the first place, and the only one to which we may refer today, the influence and power of the Church is positive, and in a sense creative, its potency is inherent. . . .

Many atrocities are committed in the name of the Church—shameful scenes of persecution have been enacted and executed thereby, but the man who is prepared to isolate himself and live in open disregard of the Church, is inviting the greatest disaster that can possibly befall him. . . . He is creating the conditions that will eventually overwhelm himself and others like him in dire destruction.<sup>5</sup>

Our Lord Jesus once asked his early disciples a provocative question: “Nevertheless, when the Son of Humanity returns, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8b author’s trans.). Sadly, the Greek construction Jesus uses employs the interrogative particle *apa*, which expects a negative answer. The context, Luke 18:1 tells us, is that he is teaching his followers to pray always and not become discouraged. But, what is germane to our present topic is that the parable concerns a judge who is abusing his position and oppressing a widow. What we might ask is: Do our churches in their leadership look more like this oppressive judge, abusing our positions of power, than like our Lord who demonstrated a servant leader model? In addition to our faith, will our churches be recognizable to Jesus? Will they look like his ideal? Will our lives be lived out on his model? Will we have true Christian community when Christ returns? In our small way, we hope this issue of *Priscilla Papers* will help us all to forge a positive reply to our Lord’s full question: Will he find a recognizable faith on earth?

Blessings,

## Notes

1. BAGD: 552
2. See *Priscilla Papers* 19:3 (Summer 2005): 29–30.
3. John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, 11th ed., ed. Christopher Morley and Louella Everett (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown: 1937), 419.
4. From a speech delivered on 11 Feb. 1851, Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations*, 725.
5. Marcus Garvey, “The Spiritual in Man,” *More Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey* (Totowa, N.J.: Frank Cass, 1977), 5–6.

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