

Peter Walpot: 'True Yieldedness and the Christian Community of Goods' (1577)

The Lord commanded Israel: Above all, there should be no poor among you (Deuteronomy 15). How much more should this be fulfilled in the full community of goods among the New Testament people...the Jubilee Year of the Lord...was to be a model of the time of the New Covenant in Christ. For that was the true Jubilee Year, the acceptable year of the Lord. As the apostle of the Lord himself understood it, they would be freed who all their lives had been held in the slavery and power of the devil. Therefore, out of Christian love, we also should hold all goods which God has bestowed upon us in common enjoyment with our neighbors, brothers and families and not hold them as private. For now is an even more glorious, nuptial feast proclaiming the year of redemption than it was in the Old Testament. Yes! It is the year of Grace!...

John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, also taught community. For when he came and was asked by the people, "What shall we do, then?" he told them that whoever has two coats should give one coat to another person who has none, and whoever has food, do the same (Luke 3). See how clear it is!...

The Lord called as his disciple Simon Peter and his brother Andrew; also James, son of Zebedee and John his brother. And he said to them, "Follow me!" (Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 5). And they left their nets, their boats and their father and followed him. See then how Christ places demands on one's possessions and how these men left their parents and friends and followed him in the way he led, the path of yieldedness and community...

Community is also taught in the Lord's Prayer. Christ taught us not to ask for our own bread. Not "give me my bread," but "give us our bread," that is, the communal bread. It is a false supplicator who prays give us our bread, but then treats the bread received as his own!...

Whoever lives in wealth is false in his confession of faith. For the Christian faith sets up a holy Christian Church and a community of saints. Where there is no community of saints there is no true and worthy Christian Church. Therefore all lie who say that community is unnecessary and has no foundation in doctrine (Acts 2 and 4). For it is indeed an article of the faith and instituted by Christ and the Holy Spirit and his teaching. Therefore, just as it is necessary to hold to the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and Holy Communion, it is also necessary to hold community of goods. Community is no simple oddity, which the apostles tried out for novelty. Rather, it is divinely earnest and just as right and proper now as it was in Jerusalem and elsewhere...

Christ also taught community by example. He fed first the five thousand and then the four thousand who came to him in the wilderness. He sat them down on the grass and broke bread with them in common and fed them the bread and fishes (Matthew 14 and 15; John 6). That the disciples, who had very little - just five loaves and two fishes and then seven loaves - were very willing to share with others is a lesson to us that when we forsake house, country and friends to follow the word of God into the wilderness, that even today we should hold all of our temporal goods in common and lay them out for common use out of love for our neighbors...

"This is my commandment," said Christ, "that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15). He loved us so much that he left behind his glory with the Father and for our sakes became poor and a servant, to share everything with his followers. This is how we should love each other, he said. Out of his great love he has made us inheritors of heaven. Therefore, we ought to make our brothers heirs to our earthly possessions with us. He has made us fellow subjects with the angels and companions with God. Therefore we ought also to take our brothers in under our roof and shelters, demonstrating love in both external as well as spiritual matters. That is why John said in his letter: If anyone has worldly possessions and sees a brother in need and closes his heart to him, how can the love of God be in him? (1 John 3)...

When the Holy Spirit was sent and came, the perfected Christian community was established (Acts 2 and 4). The three thousand and five thousand in Jerusalem, indeed, all who had come to the faith, were together and held all things in common. They sold their goods and possessions and divided it all with each among them who was in need. Therefore the apostle called this a community of the Holy Spirit. For where the Holy Spirit truly dwells, this community is worked and established (Philippians 2; 2 Corinthians 13).

Luke wrote of this again in the fourth chapter of Acts. The great crowd who believed were of one heart and mind. No one claimed that his possessions were his alone, but they shared all that they had in common. There were also none among them who were in need, for those who had fields or houses sold them and brought the money from the sales and laid it at the feet of the apostles. And it was given to each who was in need. It does not say that each took whatever he wanted. And so it should still be today, God willing and if God grants a place, that all things which serve to praise God should be held in common. Whoever does not do this betrays and mocks the footsteps of the earliest apostolic church...

That community among them did not dissolve and was not abandoned is proven repeatedly. For Paul said there was community in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 16). There was also community in Laodicea in the house of Nymphas, for Paul sent them greetings (Colossians 4). Archippos, the fellow worker of Paul, also had a community living in his house (Philemon 1). Did they live in community in these houses? Surely they did. They show that they did live communally, just as was done in Jerusalem. They did not do as the world today and the false brothers, who without shame sit at a separate table and eat, one better and the other less, according to the means of each...

The mystery and meaning of baptism also teaches us true community. For Paul said that we are all baptized into one body...We are baptized into just such a spiritual body, that we may demonstrate just such community in spiritual graces and gifts, but also in the lesser things, in temporal gifts and possessions...

In the same way the communion bread and wine is a teaching for us, in admonition and witness, to Christian community. Christ used bread and wine exactly for this beautiful correspondence and comparison. For regardless of how many grains of corn there are, each is a separate entity. But as each is ground together, losing what was its own, the result is the loaf of bread...In the same way, although there are many grapes and berries, they are crushed in the press and their juices all become one fluid. Therefore, the faithful should practice true unity and community, not only in the higher spiritual things but also in the simple temporal possessions, in honor of God and in service to the neighbor. Whoever does not stand within this community is yet a separated and unground piece of corn...

Community means nothing else than to have all things in common out of love for one's neighbor, to have everything equal and for no one to have private property. There is nothing higher, better or more perfect than someone presenting himself and his wealth for the common good and from that point on sharing with each other both sickness and health, love and suffering, each one wanting to be the others' neighbor, debtor, fellow member and loyal comrade. That is the Christian Church and the community of saints, which is neither forced nor unnatural, nor impossible to do, so long as love is there...