universalize these commandments by suggesting that all human persons are our neighbors, and the example of his own life makes clear the depth that this love may attain.

The term also refers to the overall dimension of expectation and challenge that is part of the Christian life. One can speak of God's commandments to all people. One can speak of the commandment of Christ, in the sense both of words spoken by him and of the challenge implicit in his very person.

Finally, one can seek to articulate the personal commandment that is experienced concretely in one's own life. In any case, there is a dimension of "ought" that inevitably follows as a consequence of the gift of love.

See also AUTHORITY; CHRIST; COVENANT; DECISION, DECISION-MAKING; DISCIPLESHIP; GOD; LAW; LOVE; OBEDIENCE.

Bibliography: T. O'Connell, *Principles for a Catholic Morality,* rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990). R. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith* (New York: Paulist, 1989).

TIMOTHY E. O'CONNELL

COMMON GOOD

See BODY OF CHRIST; COMMUNITY.

COMMUNION

See COMMUNITY; EUCHARIST; EUCHARISTIC DEVOTION.

COMMUNITY

The largest meaning of *community* is found in the Latin roots of the noun *communitas*. Com- (*cum*) means "with" and implies "severalness," while -*unity* (*unus*) means "one." The -*tas* ending of the word gives it an abstract notion, i.e., the character of any "severalness" that is together in some way that makes us want to say that it is also a one, a unit. In this sense

we can speak of a neighborhood as a community (geographical oneness); of a Hispanic or black or Anglo community (ethnic oneness); of a Catholic or Lutheran or Baptist community (oneness from a religious tradition); of the community of Western nations (a political and cultural oneness), etc. The focus of this article is upon the nature and behaviors of a Christian community. That narrows the meanings we will consider but still leaves a breadth.

The examination will begin with a biblical reflection on community, followed by a look at the earliest Christian community experience. Our attention will then be upon the ancient rites of initiation and their restoration, for what they say about community. Then follows a brief interlude while we consult the social sciences and social philosophy. Next our attention will be directed to the basic Christian community movement in our own time. Finally, we will locate the small community movement within the context of U.S. culture, with specific attention to the spiritual rhythms of these communities.

Biblical Community in the Hebrew Scriptures

In the Hebrew Scriptures the root metaphor for the binding of many people into one people is "covenant." The literal meaning in which the biblical metaphor is grounded is the sort of treaty agreement that was typical in Middle Eastern culture during the two millennia before the Common Era. In those ancient days there was no question about whether one was answerable to a ruler—it was only a question of which ruler. When a ruler made a treaty with a people, the ruler agreed to take care of their needs, and they in turn entrusted all they were and had to the ruler. A treatied people's loyalty had to be undivided; it had to be given to one ruler alone and it had to be total.

We know from extant treaty texts that when several lesser lords were connected by treaty with the same king, the treaty

brought into existence a new relationship between the lesser lords. They had to honor and not violate one another. That was part of their obligation to the covenanting ruler.

This relational treaty between a nation and a king is the metaphor for the relationship between Yahweh and the Hebrew people. The Shema ("Hear!") of Deuteronomy is its most precious expression: "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. . . . You shall not follow other gods . . . for the LORD, your God, who is in your midst, is a jealous God" (Deut 6:4-5, 14-15). This text was so important that a written copy was ritually affixed to the hand, to the forehead, and to the doorpost at the entrance to the home. Covenant with Yahweh, binding people in a single movement to God and to one another, was the basis of community in the Hebrew Scripture.

The covenant that Yahweh made was with a people and with all those who made up the people. It was not with individual Hebrews one by one. Individuals were covenanted because they belonged to a covenanted community. There was a radically social sense of individual reality. There were no private covenants with Yahweh.

Just as the secular notion of covenant developed different forms, so too, and often concomitantly with cultural changes, the covenant between Yahweh and Yahweh's people underwent developments: Yahweh's agreement with Adam and Eve, the revised covenant with Noah, an intensified promise to Abraham, another development with Moses, a revision with David, and still another new covenant announced by Jeremiah.

The spirituality generated by this community's covenant with Yahweh involved becoming holy in the same way that Yahweh was holy. The best clues to Yahweh's holiness were Yahweh's *sedeq* and *hesed*, feebly but not inaccurately translated as "justice" and "mercy," respectively. *Sedeq*

is a loving concern that all people have what is needed for a decent, fulfilling human life. It has a distributive quality but is based on God's care and is not "merely" legal. *Hesed* is mercy animated by extraordinary compassion. *Sedeq* is so precious to Yahweh that when it is violated, it is *hesed* that tempers God's anger and lets the world continue.

To summarize, there was a oneness to Hebrew "manyness" that was rooted in covenant. The covenant required the total presence of a people to Yahweh. The fidelity of individual Hebrews was profoundly rooted in the fidelity of a people to God and to one another. All covenanted people were to be holy like Yahweh. Justice and mercy were the structural mettle of this spirituality of holiness. To be in covenant with Yahweh was to be required to be just and merciful, and to make a world that was just and compassionate.

Biblical Community in the Christian Scriptures

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he cited Deuteronomy 6, as any faithful Jew would have done: Love God with all you have and are. Also in keeping with his tradition, he indicated that how we treat one another is integral to our relationship with God (the second commandment is like the first!). In the great judgment scene of Matthew 25, *sedeq* and *hesed* are the qualities by which we are judged.

In Matthew 5:48 Jesus is quoted as telling us to be perfect as God is perfect. The word *perfect* does not exist in Hebrew; it is a Greek interpretation in Matthew's text. More probable is the same account in Luke in which Jesus tells us to be compassionate as God is compassionate (probably *hesed*). In a word, the community of Jesus presumes all that community means in the Hebrew Scriptures. How, then, is the covenant initiated by Jesus a new covenant (*testament* is the same word as *covenant*)?

The covenanting king is not the only metaphor for Yahweh in the Hebrew Scriptures, but it is a major image. Jesus' insistent message about the immanence of the kingdom of God is consistent with his Jewish heritage. But Jesus picks up a minor theme and moves it to center stage in the new covenant. While the Hebrew Scriptures sometimes use "parent" metaphors for God, God is directly called "Father" only about a dozen times.

"Father," however, is the controlling metaphor for God in the Christian Scriptures. While "Father" occurs less often in Mark (the earliest Gospel) than in the other Gospels (over 30 times in Matthew, over 170 in John), Mark twice preserves the Aramaic word *Abba,* which most scholars think testifies to its authenticity on the lips of Jesus.

For some time Christian scholars supposed that the use of the very tender, colloquial word *Abba* was unique to Jesus. Jewish scholarship indicates that while the use of the word was not widespread, it did not originate with Jesus. Rabbinic sources indicate that combining "King" and "Father" in prayer address was already occurring in second-temple Judaism: *Abbinu-Malkenu,* "Our Father and our King," was probably gaining prominence as a prayer formula in Jesus' time.

One important new covenant motif, therefore, was modifying the covenanting-king image by juxtaposing it to a Father/parent image. That softened the notion of covenant. This development occurred not through the logic of reason so much as through the poetry of root metaphors. The root metaphor of Christian community arises, of course, from Jesus' own experience of self as God's child. It is no surprise, then, that Jesus taught his disciples to pray "Our Father," and that the Our Father has been from the beginning the titular prayer of Christian communities. Even as we note this, we affirm the historical connection of the "Our Father" to the Judaism of Jesus' time.

Thus, while Jesus speaks centrally of the kingdom of God, he gives the parenthood of God an equally central role in showing the character of a new covenant. He draws out the full implication of God's universal parenthood. What the parenthood of God does is make sisters and brothers of all men and women. The only parent figure allowed is God (Mt 23:8-12). We have one Father, and that one is in heaven. We are not to have father figures in our relational structures on earth. We are always and only siblings. Only God is always parent. A discipleship of equals is the character of the oneness of the many who are the community of Jesus Christ.

There is a further implication of the parenthood of God: it relates us, with or without our choice, to one another. Siblings cannot choose whether to be related as siblings; their only choice is whether to live the relationship redemptively or destructively. That is a perception that goes against the grain of mainstream U.S. culture. In *Habits of the Heart,* Robert Bellah and his co-researchers note a strain of individualism that is widespread in U.S. culture. We tend to believe that we are all autonomous individuals who only become related when we choose to. But that is not the biblical anthropology at all. Biblically, we find ourselves related from the nascent moment of existence. We already belong to one another. Autonomous individuality is a fiction, albeit widespread, popular, and embedded in the U.S. economic system. What baptism into Christ does to our "already relatedness" is transubstantiate us into the Body of Christ. The Eucharist is the primordial concelebration of transfigured community.

The equality that characterizes the discipleship of equals in the communities of Jesus Christ is not an anarchy. Power is an issue whenever two or more persons engage in social interaction—neither good nor bad, just there. What we do with it makes it function creatively or destructively. Christian community is no exception. There will

always be in Christian community some structured way that power and leadership function. While Jesus gives no precise structure, he proposes three images for how power is to function among his disciples: steward, shepherd, and servant.

The steward image affirms that the community does not belong to the leader. The community is God's people, and the leader has temporary responsibility on God's behalf.

The shepherd metaphor also emphasizes that the leader does not "own" the community. But Jesus picks out two further characteristics of the shepherd that are displayed in his own life as well: inclusivity and care for the stray. Jesus shocked his contemporaries by his table fellowship with sinners as well as saints. Unlike the exclusive table fellowship of the Pharisees, Jesus' table fellowship was open to all. The shepherd metaphor discloses why the sinner can sit with Jesus. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep and goes after the stray. A particular concern for the outcast, the marginalized, the stray commands the attention of the leader and the resources of a Christian community.

Finally, the servant metaphor reminds the community leader that his or her agenda comes from the community and is not imposed by the designated leader. Pagan leaders lord it over their communities; leaders in Christian communities lead, as it were, from below. Rank and privilege and caste are wholly inappropriate for power operations in the communities of Jesus Christ.

Thus there is a particular way that power must function in faithful Christian communities. Power does not mean only having effects; it also means receiving effects. A servant's agenda is fashioned out of what the servant receives from the community. Power is to be a relational, interactive function, never a unilateral, dominating function. This, too, is an essential trait of Christian community.

New Testament studies note that there were two social forms of discipleship. The first was the smaller group of people who traveled with Jesus—the itinerants. The community characteristics of this group were specific to it: they traveled light, they were willing to be dependent upon those whom they served, they did not worry beyond today. Christian art has regularly depicted Jesus with twelve itinerant male companions, ignoring the testimony of the Gospels that a number of women were itinerant companions as well (Lk 8:13). Disciples following a master teacher was not surprising to Jesus' contemporaries, but the inclusion of women among them surely was. The logic of a discipleship of equals is apparent here in the makeup of the itinerant community.

There was also a resident form of disciple-community: the followers who lived, and continued to live, in the villages where Jesus preached the Good News. The norms for these communities were different. They remained with their families (immediate and extended) and their jobs. These local sympathizers were the beginnings of the house-church form of discipleship that is so apparent in Acts and in Paul, and was presaged by the local sympathizers in Jesus' own time.

Whether itinerant or resident, communities attended to the needs of one another. But they also always faced outward as servants, stewards, and shepherds of the larger world and its needs. The needs were defined above all by *sedeq* and *hesed,* which John subsumes under one word: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:16). Ministry to self-need and ministry to mission are essential characteristics of Christian communities. There are many good groups that attend to their own needs (e.g., support groups), and many good groups that are gathered by an external task (St. Vincent de Paul Society), but these are not communities in the full Christian sense. A full community has both characteristics: the gathering in faith of people close to one another and caring for one another, and an inclusivity that faces outward in mission: *Go* and preach the Good News!

Finally, there is the element of invitation and choice. One is not a disciple of Jesus because one is a Jew or a Greek but because one intentionally chooses to say yes to the call. The intentional yes to Jesus is also an intentional yes to community, to corporateness. It is a yes that includes the good of others.

Some Important Early History

The English word "church" translates the Greek word *ekklēsia*. Behind the Greek word *ekklēsia* probably stands the Hebrew word *qahal*. The Greek and Hebrew words both name a gathering of people. When Paul greets the "church" at someone's "house," he is greeting the community that assembles there. Today we easily think of church as a building or as an institution. The early churches did not have church buildings; until the fourth century they met in homes. At that time a church building was not called "a church" (*ecclesia*) but "the house of a church" (*domus ecclesiae*), thus making clear that church is truly a gathered people.

These individual house churches of the early centuries were always interconnected with all the other house churches in the area. It is clear from Paul that the various house-church communities also gathered at times, resembling a parish or a diocese. Multiple house churches networked *up* into a larger church community; this contrasts with today's tendency to break a parish *down* into communities. The small house church was the fundamental unit of Church.

At the time of Paul and of Acts, there were no Gospel texts or canonical epistles. The Great Story, the Wonderful Good News, existed only in an oral tradition. The story was told to the gathered community and beyond the community. The storytelling was from the community and by the community. The people who were the community had the story embodied in their communal and personal lives. What they told was what they had within them, what they had received and kept and refashioned as a living Word. Today we have written scriptural texts, but it still is true that the texts alone, without community living of them, are not yet fully the living Word. The Word of God both enlivens and lives in community. The community is a privileged sacrament of Christ's community-forming News about God. Existentially, therefore, the community-sacrament is the effective Christian school for new members. The rites of the early Church expressed that, and these rites are being retrieved in the contemporary Church.

In the postconciliar Church we have brought back from the early Church the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The profoundly accurate instinct at work here is that Christian identity is formed in a new member through a gradual process of socialization into the community's way of life. The way of life is grasped by the sacred texts. It is reflected in history and doctrine. It is celebrated and acted out in ritual. But finally, all these—texts, history, doctrine, ritual—are in the hands and feet and bellies, in the hearts and minds and nerve endings, of a community. The chief dynamic of initiation in the early Church and again today is that of apprenticeship. A prospective community member is apprenticed to a small Christian community and absorbs and appropriates Christian community through a structured commingling of his or her life with that of a strong community.

Paul Tillich rightly noted that community is the shape of grace in history.

Social Sciences and Social Philosophy

We will invoke several notions from the social sciences and social philosophy to clarify the meaning of Christian community. The first involves the notions of primary and secondary groups. The second has to do with intentionality. The third has to do with how the common bond origi-

nates and holds. Finally, we will address the notion of the commonweal. Christian community cannot be reduced to sociological and phenomenological descriptors. Grace outruns those. Christian community is always more than these descriptors, yet never less than what they name.

In their book *Community of Faith* (especially chapter 3), Evelyn and James Whitehead invoke a helpful sociological distinction to clarify the particular meaning of community in the context of Christian life. A primary group's main reason for gathering is the affective bonding that ties them to one another, e.g., families and friends. A secondary group's main reason for gathering is some external reason: a parish team, a Bible study group, a prayer group, a faculty. People in a secondary group may also care for one another, but they do not continue to gather when the task does not summon them. Members of a primary group may also occasionally address some external concern together, but that is not the fundamental binding element.

Sociologically, a Christian community is a hybrid group. It has some characteristics of a primary group, for members of a Christian community always minister to one another's needs. It has some characteristics of a secondary group as well, for it is always in mission. It must go beyond its immediate life to build a new world with the transforming Good News of Jesus Christ. There are Christian primary groups and Christian secondary groups, and they are good and necessary, but it is helpful to retain the term *community* for the hybrid group that is a fuller response to discipleship.

No one can just start a community. Community is analogous to friendship: if you work at it too hard, too directly, and too self-consciously, it is likely not to happen, for its nature as gift is not honored. The best we can do—and it is a lot—is create the conditions without which it cannot happen. It takes time. A community must have accumulated a pool of significant

shared memories, and it must have forged some compelling shared hopes. A secondary group can add on to its life primary characteristics and become community, but that takes time. And a primary group can intentionally take up mission and become community; that too takes time.

Intentional community is also a social scientific notion. In the looser sense of the word, one belongs to an Anglo or black or Asian or Hispanic "community" for ethnic reasons, but without choice. But membership in a Christian community is a fully intentional, deliberate choice. Christian community is intentional community.

Many of us are born into Christian families, but the full power of community requires, at some point, our intentionality. We must intend to be what our families and friends have been before us. Intentional community is more than a gathering—it is a place where identity is willingly formed. We say yes to the demands of membership. Active community membership is demanding and taxing, even as it is fulfilling and graced. People have the energy to function in multiple groups, but few have the emotional energy to commit intentionally to more than two, or at most three, communities. To be what it is and do what it does, community must be an engrossing and deliberate commitment. That is the difference between a small group that is a community and one that is not. True community is not just an activity; rather, it is an environment for the life of faith and the faith of life.

We must note a characteristic of community that does not come easily to many, namely, its willingness to sacrifice for the commonweal or common good. The pressure point where we feel the call of commonweal is when we must postpone or surrender some personal desire or need for the sake of some good for the larger community.

In Lev 25:23 Yahweh tells the people that "the land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is mine, and you are but

aliens who have become my tenants." Every forty-ninth year, the Jubilee Year, all property was returned to tribal ownership so that large accumulations would not prevent others from having what they needed. The good of individuals always functions within the context of the life of the whole. The possession of goods is not an absolute right. There is a common good on which private ownership may not encroach.

Lavishness is a sacrament of God's own extravagant love. Yahweh prepares for the people a banquet of rich foods, juicy meats, and fine strained wines—vintage bottles, not table jugs (Isa 25:6). The goodness and beauty of the world unveil God. But there is always a proviso: no surplus is allowed until all people's basic needs for a decent life are met. When Pope John Paul II proclaims the priority of labor over capital, he is radically in touch with this biblical expression of the commonweal or common good.

The Anglo-American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead added to Aristotle's notion of society an important insight pertinent to our discussion of community. Not only is membership constituted by some shared defining characteristic (Aristotle), but it is through human interaction that the characteristic is appropriated from one member to another. Whitehead recognizes that a community's defining character lives in the people who make it up. When we say a relational yes to a community of people, the character of the community imposes itself on us. Whitehead is eager to note the aggressive character of this imposition. If an American lives sensitively in Europe, she or he soon discovers many specifically European ways of getting at things. When people deliberately choose to live *in* Europe, Europe will sooner or later live *in* them. This societal dynamic corresponds to the recognition of the early Church that we become members of a community through an apprenticeship in the life of that community. The rites of initiation express and cause the apprenticing.

One is never a community member once and for all. The membership that apprenticeship initiates needs nurturing relationships to continue. After someone becomes a member of a community, the defining characteristic is able to maintain its hold on that person's life through conditions that impose themselves in the mutuality of community life freely chosen. There is a double dynamic: our yes to other Christians is a yes to the Christ-event that makes them what they are; and our yes to the Christ-event relates us essentially to all other yeses from our sisters and brothers.

Baptism celebrates the fact that community membership has happened. But Christian being needs always to be protected by Christian becoming. Becoming Christian is a lifelong community project.

In sum, every community of Jesus Christ not only cares for its own but directs its social energies beyond itself to the challenges of our larger life upon the earth. Out of their internal connectedness with one another, community members understand the claims of the commonweal upon them. Membership is fully intentional, significant in the claims it makes upon human energies, and rewarding in the nurture it offers to life and love. Our identity in Christian community accrues from our apprenticeship.

The relational dynamics that begin identity formation never stop being the matrix for our continual becoming. These are some of the characteristics of the communities that mediate the abundant grace of the Christ-event.

The Spirituality of Basic Christian Communities

Spirituality, the perspectives that energize and drive the life of Christians, is timebound—it always bears the marks of its age. One of the notable spiritualities in the postconciliar Church is that of basic Christian communities.

In Brazil, in the late 1950s, radio was used for catechesis in regions hard to reach

otherwise. Catechists were trained to help local people process the instruction received by radio. The people who met regularly in small groups to process their faith growth often bonded relationally. Not infrequently people became aware of how their own lives suffered from systemic violations of justice—the same justice that they learned was the mark of God's holiness and was meant to be the mark of human history. Energized to bring more justice into being, the faith of these small communities has changed the political and ecclesial landscape of a continent. They have, in the words of Johannes Metz, recognized that there are both mystical and political dimensions to following Christ.

The basic Christian communities of Latin America (*communidades de base*) sometimes call themselves basic *ecclesial* communities. In so doing they are claiming not to be small Church groups but small Church units, not simply groups within a Church but groups that are Church, full ecclesial communities. They appeal to the "dangerous" memory of the early house churches. The memory is not truly dangerous, because it is true remembrance of some other way that it was. But it sometimes feels dangerous because it subverts the notion that the parish structure as we have come to know it is what Church really is—and only that.

Small Christian communities have taken similar but varying shape in many other parts of the world as well: Asia, the Philippines, Africa, Australia, Europe, and the United States. Nowhere do these small communities constitute a majority. But their inner vitality and number are sufficient to bring about a critical mass in many areas. Their presence affects the texture of ecclesial life.

These small Christian communities, wherever they are, tend to share the same dynamic: biblical literacy and social analysis conjoined in community with energy that translates into deepened prayer and effective agency for social change. This rhythm of biblical literacy and disciplined social analysis is a constitutive feature of basic Christian community spirituality. Paul Hanson is clear about this in his study of biblical community: "Word and world continue to relate in the life of religious communities today. Utmost care must be given to both sides of this two-dimensional exegesis. *As much harm can be done by applying an inadequately understood Word to a well-understood world as in applying a well-understood Word to an inadequately understood world.* In an increasingly complex society, biblical interpretation can be carried out faithfully only as an aspect of a community of faith's mission of justice and mercy . . ." (*The People Called*, p. 529, emphasis added). This emphasis upon Word does not exclude Eucharist. When possible, Eucharist remains a precious and central experience. However, presbyters are not plentiful. But these communities find a real presence of the living God in their breaking open of God's Word in the detailed presence of their own lived experience.

For over a century and a half, informed commentators on the U.S. experience have noted a cultural commitment to individualism that makes commitment to community very difficult. In so doing, this same individualism also creates a cultural loneliness that makes community almost as desperate and strong a need as is the drive toward privatism.

Robert Bellah and those who worked with him on *Habits of the Heart* feel that small biblical Christian communities are one of the possible ways in which U.S. culture might recover some of the soul that it has lost to the ravages of unchecked individualism. The intentional nature of commitment is redemptive of the U.S. cultural loneliness, for it asks of us a responsible connectedness to one another. God is our parent, Jesus is our brother. We are a sibling discipleship of equals, and the primary group dimension of community has huge graced potential. That is a perspective

from which a Christian life can be lived. In other words, a spirituality awaits us here. The small Christian community has some needed gifts to make to the American experiment in individualism.

Within U.S. culture there is a second crucial call to basic Christian community spirituality, one that plays upon its secondary group nature, i.e., its call to mission and social transformation, a call issuing specifically from the details of our own economic reality.

In the two-century period following the American Revolution, there has been a patterned (i.e., systemic) redistribution of wealth (P. King et al., *Risking Liberation*, p. 95). In 1776 the top 20 percent held about 68 percent of the nation's wealth, the middle 50 percent had 30 percent, and the lowest 30 percent of people had 2 percent of the wealth. Today the upper 20 percent have increased their share from 68 percent to 85 percent, the middle 50 percent have gone from 30 percent to 15 percent, and the bottom 30 percent have lost even the 2 percent they once had.

The consumerist habits that drive the continuing impoverishment of the already poor and the growing powerlessness of the middle are systematically promoted by the media and by advertising. Advertising beguiles people in the middle into purchasing the symbols of upward mobility. But these purchases, in fact, increase the downward mobility. The statistics from the last half century demonstrate the regularity of this systemic pattern in our own times as well.

Biblical literacy (informed biblical interpretation) reminds us of the justice and mercy that define God in the Old Testament and the message of Jesus in the New Testament. Social analysis reveals the shape and systemic nature of poverty and powerlessness in our culture. Prayerful conversation between them, conducted in the heart of small communities, provides a perspective from which Christian life calls out to be lived, i.e., a spirituality.

This call to address systemic injustice suggests abundant reasons for alliances, for shared community, between the poor and the increasingly disempowered middle. The same dynamics that create poverty at the bottom disempower the middle and send more and more of them to the bottom. But it is not in the interests of a consumerist economy, as it functions in the U.S., for those alliances to be made. Individuals are truly powerless to transform a megasystem. But networks of mediating structures, like small Christian communities, can marshal a critical mass. It is here that the secondary-group characteristics of a community, its sense of mission to remake the world according to God's intentions, are able to ground a community's spirituality. There is always a secondary-group mission to community, and the interplay between Scripture and social analysis is the most likely dynamic of spirituality for disclosing the nature of the mission.

In a word, Christian life is profoundly social. It is communitarian. It happens in and to community. Christians are no less personal persons, but they are always communal persons, never radically private persons, never autonomous individuals. Our spirituality, like our identity, emerges from relationships, of which community is a major, enduring, and necessary form.

See also AUTHORITY; BODY OF CHRIST; CHARISM; CHURCH; COVENANT; EARLY CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY; KINGDOM OF GOD; MISSION, SPIRITUALITY FOR MISSION; POWER; SAINTS, COMMUNION OF SAINTS; SELF; SERVICE; SOLIDARITY; STORY; WORLD.

Bibliography: L. Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis 1986). P. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987). P. Hanson, "The Role of Scripture in Times of Crisis," *Word and World* 1 (1981) 116–127. D. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1969). P. King, K. Maynard, and D. Woodyard, *Risking Liberation: Middle Class Powerlessness and Social Heroism* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988). B. Lee and M. Cowan, *Dangerous Memories: House Churches and Our American Story* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1986). G. Lohfink,

Jesus and Community (New York: Paulist, 1984). J. Segundo, *The Community Called Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973). R. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977). E. and J. Whitehead, *Community of Faith: Models and Strategies for Developing Christian Communities* (New York: Seabury, 1982).

BERNARD J. LEE, S.M.

COMPASSION

Modern usage of the term in Christian spirituality, no doubt influenced by ecclesiastical Latin, identifies compassion with mercy, pity, and tenderness. This can obscure the depth of meaning with which Israel invested this word. Though akin to these terms, the meaning of *compassion* is distinct. The term refers to the very core of one's deepest feelings, much as the term *heart* does today.

The Hebrew word for compassion (*rahamin*) expresses the empathetic attachment of one being to another. This feeling of attachment, in Semitic thought, has its origin in the experience of maternity, in the bowels, the entrails, or, as in common parlance, the "guts." Etymologically the Hebrew word for compassion means "trembling womb" (Trible, pp. 31–59). Thus the mother's intimate physical relationship with her newborn is the prime image for understanding the nature of compassion. The implication here is that the mother's physical and psychological bond with her child provides the basis for the development of the less concrete, indeed more abstract, notions of compassion, pity, mercy, and tenderness.

In this light, compassion may be understood as the capacity to be attracted and moved by the fragility, weakness, and suffering of another. It is the ability to be vulnerable enough to undergo risk and loss for the good of the other. Compassion involves a movement to be of assistance to the other, but it ineluctably entails a movement of participation in the experience of the other in order to be present and available in soli-

darity and communion. Compassion requires sensitivity to what is weak and/or wounded, as well as the vulnerability to be affected by the other. It also demands action to alleviate pain and suffering. One's deepest inner feelings should always lead to outward compassionate acts of mercy and kindness.

Though the prime image for understanding compassion is a maternal one, this quality is not exclusive to mothers or to women. Compassion also springs from the heart of a father (Ps 103:13) or a brother (Gen 43:30). It is tenderness readily moved to action. It is remedial action in the face of tragedy (Ps 106:45) or forgiveness of offenses (Dan 9:9).

In the New Testament, Jesus exemplifies God's compassion in his preaching and healing (Mt 9:36; 14:4), in his concern for lost humanity (Lk 19:41), and in his self-sacrificial love on the cross (Rom 5:8). The followers of Jesus are to live lives of compassion as an expression of the love that Jesus enjoined (Mt 5:4-7; Jn 13:34; Jas 2:8-18; 1 Jn 3:18). Jesus provided paradigms of compassion in the parables of the good Samaritan, who had compassion on the wounded traveler (Lk 10:33), and the prodigal son, whose father saw him in the distance and, "moved with compassion," ran to meet him (Lk 15:20).

In the history of Christian spirituality, where preoccupation with pain and suffering has not been uncommon, the term *compassion* has sometimes taken on connotations of a sentimental, pious romanticization of the negative factors in human life and of the tragic reality of Jesus' suffering and death. Even when grounded in a strong Christological base and understood as participation in the redemptive suffering of Christ, approaches to compassion in Christian spirituality have often lacked a keen sense of the importance of compassion as a practical response to suffering and to the consequences of social evil and sin. By and large compassion has been understood as an instinctive movement of the

heart in the face of the pain or suffering of other individuals. This has been done in such a way that the individual's feeling of compassion has been untethered in theory and practice from a realization that the compassion which exists preeminently in the heart of God, as this is disclosed in Jesus' outreach into human history, calls for active participation in the work of compassion as a response to the divine initiative.

Contemporary approaches to compassion in Christian theology and spirituality give greater attention to God, Christ, and Christian praxis as foundational in reflection on the nature of compassion. Whatever is to be said of compassion must begin with the recognition that it resides in its fullness in God who is present in creation, participant in history, entering into the human experience in solidarity with human suffering, history, and destiny. From a Christian perspective, the fullness of compassion is known in and through Jesus, who discloses the compassion of God. In his person, God truly enters into creation, into the fabric of human life in all its contingency, frailty, and tragedy. Following Jesus entails an invitation to the praxis of compassion. Christian discipleship brings us face to face with human suffering and pain of enormous proportions, caused in part by social systems and structures born of sin and evil in our world.

The Christian's responsibility to act compassionately does not derive from divine injunction to pious sentiment, though it certainly is rooted in an appeal to the human heart. As a feeling and as appropriate action based on this feeling, compassion entails nonviolence, solidarity, and communion, as well as the activities by which pain and suffering are alleviated, depersonalization is combated, and oppression and injustice are overcome. Finally, it is the response of the human heart which knows its own pain and suffering, which does not stand outside the experience of suffering and instruct like the false

consolers in the Book of Job, but which seeks to strengthen and empower through a relationship of identification with what is weak and wounded.

See also AFFECT, AFFECTIVITY; FRUIT(S) OF THE HOLY SPIRIT; HEART; HEART OF CHRIST; LOVE; MERCY; PRAXIS; SOLIDARITY; SUFFERING; WEAKNESS AND VULNERABILITY.

Bibliography: M. Hellwig, *Jesus, the Compassion of God: New Perspectives on the Tradition of Christianity* (Wilmington, Del.: Glazier, 1983). P. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 31–59. J. Nelson-Pallmeyer, *The Politics of Compassion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986) 7–16.

MICHAEL DOWNEY

COMPUNCTION

The term *compunction* (Latin *compunctio,* from *cum-pungere,* "to puncture with") is found in the works of the Fathers of the Church in a number of different patterns, e.g., compunction of fear, compunction of desire and compunction of the heart. In its original profane use the word is a medical term, indicating attacks of physical pain. The first ecclesiastical usage, toward the end of the second century, transposes the meaning to signify pain of the spirit, a suffering due to the actual existence of sin and human concupiscence, and as a result of our desire for God. The theological connotation is closely parallel to the biblical idea of *metanoia,* rendered in English as "penitence."

In the Scriptures the idea of compunction corresponds to the biblical notion of *katanyxeis,* from the two Hebrew words *tar'êlâ* (Ps 60:5) and *tardêmâ* (Isa 29:10), indicating a lethargic inebriation resulting in spiritual blindness. In the NT the Pentecost speech of Peter (Acts 2:37) employs the notion to express the supernatural shock that leads to conversion, translated in the Vulgate as *compuncti sunt corde.* To this extent, the most common use associates the idea of compunction with a change of heart.