

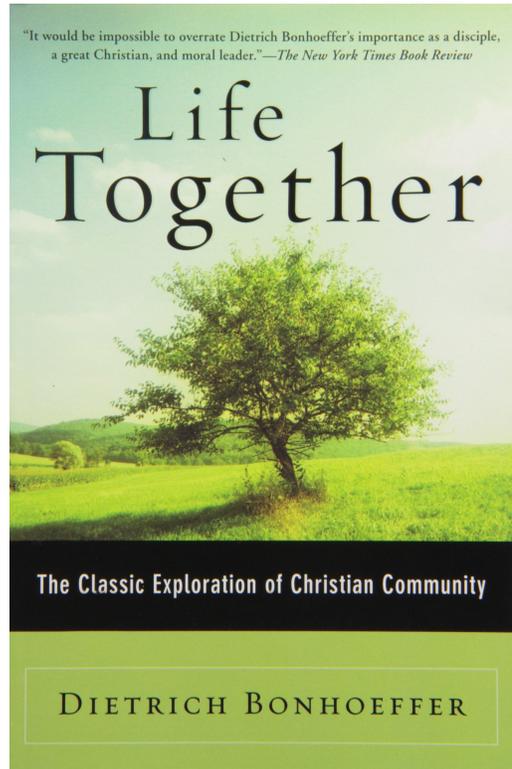
A Review: “Life Together”
Author: Dietrich Bonhoeffer

German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s classic work on Christian community *Life Together* has much to commend it to our attention today. It is essentially a Rule of Life not terribly unlike St. Benedict’s famous Rule for Bonhoeffer’s underground seminary in Nazi Germany. In it he describes in detail how this community ought to function intentionally together, with rules about devotion (both corporate and private), meals, work, relationships, and all the rest.

But quite apart from Bonhoeffer’s genuine insights about these things (his thoughts on praying the psalms have proved decisive for this priest), it is far and away his Rule’s overwhelming Christological focus that stands out as remarkable and irresistible. He writes:

“Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it is a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. What does this mean? It means, first, that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that in Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and united for eternity” (*Life Together*, p. 21).

The rest of the work is a diligent and very practical outworking of these principles. For Bonhoeffer, the church is no mere human contrivance, no merely natural association of like-minded individuals like other human societies. It is fundamentally and irreducibly a gift of grace in Jesus. Our own pastoral work ought to be defined—even in its practicalities—by this crucial insight Bonhoeffer has to offer us. His *Life Together* is well worthy of our attention for this reason, especially in these fraught times when the church needs to choose to live together in a way which highlights our difference from the surrounding and hostile culture.



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