


A  
FLEXIBLE  
FAITH



RETHINKING WHAT  
IT MEANS TO  
FOLLOW JESUS TODAY

BONNIE KRISTIAN

FOREWORD *by* DR. GREGORY A. BOYD, AUTHOR *of* ACROSS THE SPECTRUM



“In a culture that increasingly asks us to draw lines in the sand, **A FLEXIBLE FAITH** is a timely reminder that the church has always made space for disagreement and debate on many matters of belief and practice. Bonnie Kristian has created a thought-provoking guide to cultivating diversity instead of division. This is an eminently practical resource for the believers, seekers, and the spiritually skeptical.”

—Jonathan Merritt, author of *Learning to Speak God from Scratch*

THE STREAM OF CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY is wide and deep, but most Christians never leave our own little pool. We fail to realize there are many ways to follow Jesus, convinced our tradition is the *one* alternative to nonbelief.

A FLEXIBLE FAITH is written for the convinced and confused believer alike (as well as the simply curious!). It’s a readable exploration of the lively theological diversity that stretches back through church history and across the spectrum of Christianity today.

Bonnie Kristian shows that the faithful multiplicity within the body of Christ is a strength of our faith, not a weakness. As she shares her own wrestling with core issues, Bonnie teaches us to walk courageously through our tough questions, learning from our fellow followers of Jesus and discovering new depths of faith that can stay secure through the storms of life.



**BONNIE KRISTIAN** is a theological and political writer with a national following. She has columns and bylines at publications including *The Week*, *Rare*, *Time*, *CNN*, *Relevant*, *Politico*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Hill*, *ReKnew*, and *The American Conservative*. Bonnie is on the teaching team at her church, a Mennonite community, and is a graduate of Bethel Seminary with a master of arts in Christian thought. She lives with her husband in St. Paul, Minnesota.

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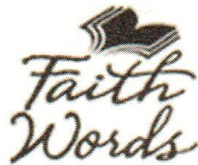
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# A FLEXIBLE FAITH

*Rethinking What It Means to Follow  
Jesus Today*

*Foreword by Dr. Gregory A. Boyd*

BONNIE KRISTIAN



Nashville New York



## *Q&A: Common Purse Community*

**M**eeet Clare Stober. She is a member of the Bruderhof, an Anabaptist common purse community of more than 2,700 people living in twenty-three settlements on four continents. Clare lives at the Fox Hill community in Walden, New York.

1. If we were on a thirty-second elevator ride and I said, “Hey, what does it mean to live in a Bruderhof community?” what would you tell me before the elevator stopped?

Living in a Bruderhof community means I share everything I have—money, time, and talents—and that the others in the community do the same. The result is that in our communities there are no rich or poor, and everyone is cared for and belongs—people of all ages and capabilities. Exactly what this looks like on a day-to-day basis is a little different depending on which Bruderhof someone is living in—urban or rural, Europe, the United States, or Australia—but what it comes down to is

## Q&A: COMMON PURSE COMMUNITY

that from food to children's education to medical care, we are served by our brothers and sisters in the church. In return, each of us works to the best of our abilities at the job we've been asked to do. Often, it is a task that best fits our unique talents, whether it is in the factory, school, or, in my case, our publishing house.

**2. How did you come to be a Bruderhof community member? Or, if you were born into this context, was there a time when you wrestled with leaving?**

I was on a journey of faith for fifteen years. I wouldn't have described it as a search for community, but I left my first Christian fellowship and a very successful marketing career in search of an all-encompassing way of living for Christ in real fellowship. In retrospect, the search and what I had to unburden myself of reads a lot like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. At last I came to the Bruderhof and thought I was done with my quest. After a few months, I realized here was a life of discipleship that was far deeper, more demanding, and more satisfying than I had ever imagined possible. In a way, it's cost me everything, but it's been worth every minute.

**3. If you could clear up a single common misconception about Bruderhof communities, what would it be?**

The idea that a communal life like that at the Bruderhof represents a withdrawal from the world into an insular community is something I find quite confounding. In my experience, the opposite is true. Living the promise of God's kingdom here on earth demands we put love of God and love

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of neighbor into practice, which means doing the works of mercy demanded by Christ. That's why you'll find us serving at local food pantries, volunteering in fire departments and EMT squads, sitting on school boards, and visiting jails and prisons. We also donate to and volunteer with local, national, and international charities. Our communities welcome visitors.

### **4. What is the Bruderhof communities' unique strength in or contribution to the Church universal?**

The Bruderhof provides a powerful force of example. We try to show that it is possible to peacefully live in full community, sharing all things in common in the spirit of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 2 and 4). Our life is also a witness that following Jesus' demanding, down-to-earth teachings in the Sermon on the Mount can be practically done with the support of brothers and sisters. With a history of almost one hundred years of living in community, we know that living by the Spirit is not easy and has nothing to do with our native abilities or goodwill. True church community is a gift from God, one that we believe is offered to everyone who seeks to follow Him.

### **5. For readers who want to learn more about the Bruderhof communities, what resources would you recommend?**

- Living in community is a radical choice and difficult to imagine in practice, so visit [www.bruderhof.com](http://www.bruderhof.com) and then please try visiting in person.

## Q&A: COMMON PURSE COMMUNITY

- *Foundations of Our Life and Calling*, available on our website, explains the basis of our faith and way of life.
- Visit [www.plough.com](http://www.plough.com), the website of our publishing house, to read or subscribe to *Plough Quarterly*, a magazine inspiring faith in action, as well as books and ebooks.