

S A N Y A S A Journal of Consecrated Life

COMMUNION FOR MISSION
(Joyful Fraternal Religious Community for God's Kingdom)



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SANYASA

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EDITORIAL

There are three pillars of consecrated life. Three Greek words amply express these realities: *kerygma*, *koinonia* and *diaconia*; spirituality, communion and mission. *Perfectae Caritatis* states: Fraternal or sisterly life in common is a constitutive element of religious life (15). Even the members of the secular institutes, who do not live permanently in a community-house, have a strong sense of community, when regularly all the members gather in the same place, or *oikos*. For us, consecrated people, our communities are our *oikos*, our household, the space of our extended families. Our community-house offers us economical security, nourishment, habitat, a project of spirituality and mission. In fact, community life is indispensable for religious life and mission.

Religious communities are a living sign of the primacy of the love of God who works wonders, and of the love for God and for one's brothers and sisters as manifested and practiced by Jesus Christ (*Fraternal Life in Community*, 1). Hence, there has to be a serious commitment from every member to build this communion gracefully.

Religious communion has a purpose; is built for mission. No religious community exists for itself. No religious community is the end in itself. It is the means to reach the end, i.e. mission. The challenge now is how our institutes, communities and persons may be transformed into missional congregations, communities and persons and how to move from religious institutes shaping missions to being mission-shaped religious institutes. Though community life is not the end of consecrated life, good community life is the first apostolate and good community enables, enhances and enriches our missionary life.

At the same time, religious communities are made of ordinary human beings who are often limited, fragile and broken. So, it is natural that some difficulties arise while living together in communities. Problems of relationships arise among us. We have not chosen our companions. They were given to us. And we experience how difficult it is to create harmony among us always. But in fact, community life is not a problem, but a miracle, a blessing and a gift for its members, and for the Church, and the society.

Being convinced of the importance of religious communities for mission and the difficulties faced by religious in being committed missionaries mainly because of the

drenching of energy and time in solving community problems arising out of ego clashes and relationship problem, Sanyasa arranged three day seminar on the theme “Communion for Mission – Joyful Fraternal Religious Community for God’s Kingdom” from 2nd February, a special day for consecrated persons to 4th February 2017. Scholarly papers on different aspects of community life and its impact on the missionary commitment of the members were brought out. As the practice is, the July issue of *Sanyasa: Journal of Consecrated Life* brings out those articles.

The first two articles are presented by Jose Cristo Rey G. Parades, CMF eminent theologian on consecrated life from Spain. In his first article, titled “Mission-shaped Communities: Biblical Inspiration”, he asserts that without communion, our communities are mere houses of indifference or even battles fields and with communion, our communities are real symbols of a better world to come. Then, he goes on explaining the biblical and theological perspective from the magic element (communities at the image of our Trinitarian God) and the human element (communities with the fire of the new beginning: the first Christian communities), love in religious communities as the first and most necessary gift and the symbolic mission of the communities at the service of communion and reconciliation.

In his second article titled, “Mission-shaped Communities: towards a «Missionary Conversion»”, Jose Cristo Rey challenges consecrated persons to enter into a new paradigm of mission and consequently in a new paradigm of missional community. According to him, we need to re-invent communities in mission, to dream and welcome a new paradigm of community and mission. We are at a time to enter into the path of the “missionary conversion” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*). He questions, “How can you have unhappy community but happy and satisfied missionary life? Why is this rupture between community and mission?” He invites the consecrated persons to dream, to design and to deliver a new and update vision of communities in mission. He points out powerfully that without communities in mission or shaped by mission, our institutes and our provinces lose their very reason of being and they become conflictual fields and areas of protection of all kind of individualism.

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF with his immense experience in formation and ongoing formation in his article titled “Founders’ Missionary Vision: The Essence of a Religious Community” brings out the intrinsic relationship between communion and mission in reference to the founders of religious families in the Church. He explains vividly how religious communities were founded by listening and responding to the call. He is categorical that mission is impossible without communion. Then, he goes on explaining the elements which do not constitute a genuine religious

community though apparently they look like. He also presents interestingly the essential elements which really constitute an authentic religious community. Finally, he proposes certain implications for our personal and community life as we begin to initiate the process of rediscovering and implementing the original vision of our founders in continuous dialogue with our times and situations listening to the call of the Spirit in them.

“Eucharist and the Word of God – Two Pillars of Religious Community” is the title of the fourth article of this issue presented by Alex Kalathikattil, SDB. Quoting Vatican Council II, he points out that “the more serious errors of our age” is the “split” between the faith we profess and our daily lives. According to the author of this article, this is exactly the problem of consecrated life today: lack of integration. How can this lack of integration be overcome? How can we become authentic consecrated persons living the faith that we profess? How can we as consecrated persons live our life with optimism and joy? Alex is convinced of the solution to the problem of the consecrated life. Consecrated persons should be with the Lord, being with Jesus. How can we be with Jesus always? We can be with Jesus through the Word of God and the Eucharist. Hence, our genuine dedication, commitment and devotion to the Word and the Eucharist can make us authentic consecrated persons.

The fifth article of this issue is titled “Religious Community – A Place for Becoming Real Brothers and Sisters: Formation for Fraternal Life in Community” by V. Bhyju, CMF. He points out that the real issue in religious community is the psycho-socio-spiritual unity of minds and hearts in Christ. New members in religious institutes must before all else, be interiorly formed for community life in all its theological, spiritual, social, ministerial and affective density. Quoting *Potissimum Institutioni*, the author points out that assisting men and women religious to realize their unity in Christ through the Spirit by means of the harmonious fusion of its spiritual, apostolic, doctrinal and practical elements as the goal of formation. Quite interestingly, V. Bhyju explains that community is entrusted with the task of formation. He also elucidates how formation happens in the community and it is for the life and mission of the community that the person is formed. His paper also brings out the mediating role of the formator, methods of formation, different models of community, community dynamics, elements affecting community development and competencies and skills to be fostered during formation. He concludes with certain practical tips for better formation programme in religious communities.

Olinda Sequeira, UFS analyses the challenges involved in living together and the possible ways to minimize the difficulties of religious community life. She points out systematically human limitations, faulty upbringing and education, faulty mindset and faulty beliefs, broken self-image and lack of self-esteem, non-fulfillment of basic human needs as some of the reasons for the brokenness of community members. Then, she illustrates the different ways of responding to the broken situation by the members. Finally, the author proposes some practical tips towards the path to wholeness and fullness of life. She feels that members who learn to relax and be still, cultivate self-acceptance, learn to reconnect to God, others and the reality around us, grow in faith and prayer, forgive, cultivate to be other-oriented, become nature oriented can easily overcome brokenness and grow more and more as integrated and matured members. Once this is achieved, religious communities can focus more on the mission.

The next article titled “Intimacy and Friendship in Religious Communities” is presented by George Kallampally, CMF. He begins explaining friendship, different forms of friendship, intimacy and different types of intimacy. After explaining these concepts clearly, he illustrates how intimacy is achieved in religious communities. Then, he elucidates the relationship between friendship and intimacy and how friendship and intimacy is experienced in religious communities. He concludes by bringing out the characteristics, the challenges and helps to foster friendship and intimacy in religious communities.

Anselmus, CMF speaks of the compassionate care for the elderly and the sick members of the community. He states that the elderly and the sick members do not need mere compassion if it means only sympathetic pity and concern for their sufferings. Old age is not to be understood as misfortune or bad luck. The aging process is really a change, a normal human process. It is to be welcomed joyfully and gracefully. Aging has its own glory and beauty. Quoting the Church document *Fraternal Life in the Community*, the author presents the teaching of the Church in taking care of the elderly members. Basing from the healing ministry of Jesus, he brings out the obligation of the members in taking care of the sick. He also points out certain practical difficulties present in the communities in taking care of the elderly and sick and concludes with very practical helps in being good and compassionate community members towards the elderly and the sick.

The last article is on “Joyful Community Life – The First Apostolate: Community for Mission” by Mariola D’Souza, BS. She begins explaining the real meaning of communities in communion. She also elucidates different theological models of communion in community life. Then, she proposes different means for the

nourishment of community life which can make our communities as mission shaped communities. The author feels that prayer, Word of God and Eucharist are the essentials for a joyful religious communities that itself is the first apostolate of the consecrated persons.

So, totally there are nine scholarly articles on the theology of consecrated life; each one focusing on one aspect of communion for mission. I hope that you find these articles interesting and enriching. Have a pleasant reading!

M. Arul Jesu Robin, CMF

(Chief Editor)

COMMUNION AND LOVE-SHAPED COMMUNITIES BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

INTRODUCTION

The mystery and the beauty of a religious community

I invite you to change your outlook on the religious community. I dare to ask you to open your mind to a deeper understanding of community, and to be available to collaborate in the birth of communities for a new beginning. For that, it is necessary a conversion of mind: *meta-noia* to be open to a new consciousness. Change begins in consciousness.

Consecrated Life, as a vocation in the Church is, above all, a phenomenon of communion and catholicity.

Although in its beginnings, monasticism was eremitical, soon there arose the need to live in common. The monks called this way of life: *koinonia*. The appeal of such a way of life was such that communities of hundreds of people centered - men or women - were formed living together, forming a single family. The *koinonia* has reached to us in many forms and expressions, according our institutes, our collective charisms

At the present time, the configuration of our Institutes maintains the community structure. The main purpose of this phenomenon is not sectarian. We are at the service of catholicity, that means, at the service of humanity. For that, we talk about inserted communities, incarnated community.

Communion and community are two interrelated concepts, absolutely necessary to explain in this time our way of life. Without communion, our communities

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become houses of indifference, or even battle fields. With communion, our communities are real symbols of a better world to come. We shall analyze this subject from a biblical and theological perspective.

This paper will reflect the following:

- *The magic element:* communities at the image of our Trinitarian God
- *The human element:* communities with the fire of the new beginning (the first Christian communities).
- *The first and most necessary gift:* love
- *The symbolic mission:* Communities at the service of communion and reconciliation

I. THE MAGIC ELEMENT:

Communities at the image of our Trinitarian God

Some people in consecrated life could think that what I will tell now, does not belong to this world. Is it not mad to compare our communities with the Holy Trinity? However, do not marvel at it. Our communion comes from God. We form a community in which God is not absent, but really present. Call to mind these two texts, taken from the Gospels of Mathew and John:

“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I” (Mt 18:20).

“Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (Jn 14:23)

Often we look only at the visible side of our communities. But, there is also an invisible side, what allow me to call, the “magic of community life”.

1. The invisible side of our communities

The first community is not human. The first and primary community is God himself: the Abbá, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity are different, but at the same time One. The theologians of the Ortodox Church like to call our God, the Tri-une God (Sergei Bulgakov¹). Our God is love, communion of persons, the most intimate union we can imagine².

The communion of love between the Abbá and the Son is revealed to us, in special way, in the fourth Gospel. In it we learn that the Son Jesus, totally depends in his doing from the Father:

“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (Jn 5:30).

“and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me” (Jn 16:32).

There exists a perfect mutual understanding and accord in mission between them:

“everything yours is mine and everything mine is yours” (Jn 17:10).

The letter to the Hebrews deepens the communion of the Father and the Son from a sacrificial point of view:

“You did not desire sacrifice and offering; but you have given me a body; you were not please with burnt offerings and sin offerings; Then, I said: ‘Here I am. It was written of me in the scroll. I will do your will, Oh Lord’ (Heb 10:5-7).

The Holy Spirit is one person in two: She is the mutual Love of Father – the lover – and of the Son – the Beloved. In the bosom of the Holy Trinity, there is a permanent movement of love, that theologians have called *perichoresis*, that means: like an eternal dance of mutual Love.

The love of God became visible through the Son, Jesus, who came to fulfill the will of the Abbá: our redemption from division, enmity, and irreconciliation:

“For so loved God the world that he gave up his only Son” (Jn 3:16).

The cross is an integral part of the communion between the Father and the Son with us. It is not, then, a pacific communion, but a communion that, in certain moments, emerges as a dramatic, difficult communion, to the point of pouring the blood.

Communion comes from God. It is like a river in whose flow we are introduced and maintained by the Holy Spirit. We, men and women religious are called be experts of communion and to become symbols of communion and reconciliation in the midst of the people of God and of society.

The Spirit of the Father and the Son has been sent to us so that this communion might be possible, in order that all of us become one in Christ (Gal 3:28)³. When “we come together” we make credible the mission of Jesus, we show that the mediation of the Spirit, poured down in us as love, is efficient. The will of Jesus, who chose us for the mission, is that we would be one among us, as the Father and he are one (Jn 17:11-19). The religious community does not have another objective than to live and constantly revive this mystery.

2. The “magic” of a religious community

The religious community:

- is not a mere human foundation; it is not the result of an intelligent method of organization;

- is not built from the ideals of community that each member brings with himself;

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in his famous book *Life in Community*: we do not enter in community to achieve our dreams of community but to accept the community God gives us. The invitation to participate in the communion with God and among ourselves is a great privilege, an unimaginable gift. This is the magic of a religious community.

In the universe, all creatures are interconnected. There is a cosmic harmony, and, at the same time, a passionate longing for unity. Communion is threatened by sin. The Sin blocks all the dynamisms of love. Sin is diabolic, divides, disintegrates. Diabolic forces are dynamisms of death.

Salvation comes as encounter, reconciliation, communion.

II. THE EXAMPLE:

at the image of the first Christian Community (pre- and post-pascal)

Religious Life —from its monastic origins until now — has placed his eyes in the primeval Christian Community: the community of the disciples with Jesus and the community of the first Christians in Jerusalem⁴.

1. After the steps of the community of the itinerant Jesus (first model)

The community of disciples — men and women — was during the time of his messianic mission the permanent companion of Jesus. All of them were chosen by Him “to live with him and to be sent to announce the Kingdom of God (Mk 3:13-14).

In a nation, colonized by the Romans, what would be the reaction of the people in front of this itinerant group around a charismatic leader? Would the heads of the families allow their sons and daughters (in that familiar regime always under their own jurisdiction) to leave their own families behind and to follow Jesus? And what about the cases in which the followers were married people, as Simon Peter or Johanna, the wife of Cusa? It is necessary to make these and other similar remarks in order to better understand the prophetic meaning and the provocation of this pre-paschal community of Jesus.

The purpose of this community around Jesus was amazing: to become a living symbol of the New People of God: the twelve and the women followers⁵.

Jesus knew that in order to interpret the symphony of the Kingdom of God, was necessary not only a group of soloist instruments, but a real polyphonic choir, and

a real orchestra of very different instruments. For this reason, the different calls of Jesus to self-denial (*ego*), to forgiveness and reconciliation, and to mutual love were so challenging:

“Love one another, as I have loved you. In this everyone will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another” (Jn 13:34-35).

Religious Life, in its different forms, wants to follow this evangelical model. Today, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are called to re-interpret how to be successors of that pre-paschal community of apostles and women around Jesus. This is a very interesting hermeneutical task.

- How our communities do manifest that they are communities of followers of Jesus, living memory of his way of life from the specific point of view of their own specific charism? The supreme norm of a religious community is the following of Jesus as it is presented in the Gospel and as it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The rules and norms of a religious community should never hide the primacy of the Gospel values and the style of life of Jesus with his followers.
- How our communities can be a symbol of a new paradigm of extended family, of a new people, of global understanding and interconnections, without exclusion and marginalization?
- How our communities are places, not only for living together, but primarily to be sent in mission as partners of Jesus and of his Spirit. Our communities must not become, self-referential, zones of comfort, of security, but launch pads, like airports in which all airplanes are waiting to be sent to the most unexpected destinations (*Airport-communities*).

2. After that community with “only one heart, one soul and everything in common” (the second model)

The Christian community of Jerusalem exerted from the beginning and enormous attraction for monastic life:

“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common”.

The monks believed that this text was not an idealization of the past, not a dream or utopia, but a real challenge. That style of life was for them the new version of the main commandment, but now not God-oriented, but neighbor-oriented. The main commandment of the covenant “love your God with all your heart, all your soul

and possessions” finds its extension in the Christian community in which all have one heart, one soul and everything in common.

Love is the heart of community. Jesus said once:

“To you who are listening to me, I tell you: Love...” (Lk 6:27).

This love would have to be extended to the enemies, to bad people, to the foreigners. The disciple of Jesus:

- has to master his wrath against those who treat them badly (Lk 6:29),
- has to be patient in front of insults and those who hate them (Lk 6:27), to those who strike them, they have to answer with tenderness and goodness (Lk 6:29,31);
- has to bless those who curse them and pray for those who treat them badly (Lk 6:28);
- should even be ready to die for those he loves.

Loving in this way, the disciple becomes perfect as the Father, as Jesus, who are merciful and full of compassion (Lk 7:13).

The message of Jesus about love found in the post-paschal community of Jerusalem, a paradigmatic realization:

“Do this and you will live” (Lk 10:28).

Those who share life with us in the missionary community are certainly neighbors. The neighbor has to be loved with all our heart, our soul and our strength. How can a religious say that he/she loves the invisible God without loving the visible brothers or sisters? In Christ we are members of the only one body. United with him we can reach the utopia of having with our brothers and sisters only one heart and one soul.

III. LOVE, THE FIRST AND MOST NECESSARY GIFT

1. Love and communion

Paul mentions “love” (agape) many times in the contexts of prayer⁶. Love cannot be bought:

“if someone will offer all the possessions of his house for love, will receive contempt” (Song 8:7).

Love is a divine gift that we cannot get by our own efforts. The only thing we can do to obtain this gift of love is to pray for it. We must open ourselves to the Spirit who is the one pouring it down in our hearts. Love is God’s gift:

- “Charity which comes from God the Father” (Eph 6:23) is the gift we must pray for.
- “The fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal 5:22).
- The Spirit is the one who pours down charity in the highest part of the human person, in the *pneuma*, there where the communion with God takes place: “The charity of God has been poured down in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).

The most important and necessary gift to grow as a community of followers of Jesus and to build communion among us is love-agape. Community is a fruit and a result of love.

To learn the “art of love” we have a Master, God himself:

“regarding your mutual love, you do not need that I will write about it, because all of you have been instructed by God to love mutually one another” (1 Thes 4:9).

God has destined us to reproduce the traits of his Son (Rom 8:29), his feelings (Phil 2:5), for this reason, we must be “imitators of God, as beloved children and walk in charity as Christ” (Eph 5:2). In any vital situation, we Christians must try to reproduce the agape of Jesus or *act in Christ Jesus*. Agape is the love of Jesus in us. Every Christian receives and lives it out from Christ, as a member who partakes in the vital current of the head (Eph 4:15-16). If Christ has given up his life for us, we have to give up our lives for him and for our brothers and sisters:

*“Agape, which is in itself an active love and tends to manifest itself, has found in Jesus its natural medium of expression: to die to oneself, as Christ died, in honor of God and for his brethren”.*⁷

We must constantly pray to God for this gift which is absolutely necessary to be a community of followers of Christ. Love imprints in us a trait which makes us appear as disciples of Jesus.

2. Reasons to love the brother, the sister

a) The first reason to love our brothers is to look at them as images of God.

Each one of our brothers or sisters is image and likeness of God. Even though he/she has to become what he/she is: from transformation to transformation until becomes Jesus like (Col 3:10; 1Cor 15:49).

The individual persons are the richest treasure of each community or religious Institute. Each one is worth for what it has of unique and in-transferable. Each one

is the image of God (2 Cor 3:3.18), a wonderful newness of the Spirit, a grace for the world.

The one who contemplates with sacramental eyes each one of his brothers or sisters will not find any difficulty in loving them, rather, love for them will naturally flow. We cannot create confusion between love and the human effort to love what is not amiable. On the contrary, love merges as a gift from the contemplation and brings to contemplation because it allows us to look at persons with different eyes.⁸

b) Another reason: all of us form one body

To love our brothers or sisters, is intimately connected with the previous one, is that all of us form only one body. All those united to Christ Jesus form only one body with him: “because we are members of his body” (Eph 5:30) and no one has ever hated his own body. To understand and to experience this reality is a gift of the Spirit. Frequently our vocational experience — both Christian and charismatic — is a fragmentary one. We feel more the vocation than the convocation; we feel ourselves more as members than as body. This individualism of our times accentuates even more this situation. To have the experience of the Body of Christ is a grace of the Spirit, a grace of contemplation. It is to discover that we are images of God, *images according to the Image, which is Jesus Christ*, by being Church. This was the gift with which Paul himself graced in his way to Damascus: the vital understanding of the identification of the community of Jesus with his Body.

c) Third reason: this is the new commandment

Finally, we love our brothers or sisters because this is the law of the Spirit, the new commandment of the Lord Jesus (Jn 15:12). The internal law of God is love. That is also the internal law of all those who have been called to become in freedom living images. Without love we degrade ourselves, we lose our capacity of immortality and permanency. Because, the one who does not love, remains in death. This interior law motivates us to love even in the most difficult and contradictory situations. The one who has a deep love for Jesus and feels himself in covenant with him, is able to perceive in himself, in his own consciousness, the law of the spirit which seduces him to love, up to the last consequences, even when it appears impossible.

3. Love which implies all the virtues and builds the community

Charity is dynamic. The one who loves is full of zeal, ardor (2 Cor 8:7), and fervor (Rom 12:11). Christian vocation is a call to live in love. The evangelical ethics are ethics of love and gratitude to the God of love. The disciple feels himself

called and habilitated to love the neighbor without expecting anything in return and to show him a spontaneous and sensitive love, which is shown in service and care ((Mt 5:42). Paul demands from the Christians that they “walk in charity” (Eph 5:2) or “according charity” (Rom 14:15). And he intercedes to God for them so that they will live in that way (1 Thes 3:12; Phil 1:9-11). Charity never ends and subsists in heaven; it transcends time. Charity guarantees the definitive possession of God (1 Cor 13:12). We have been destined to be “holy and pure in his presence *by love*” (Eph 1:4), i.e., by a communion in love. Christian life is the unfolding and actualization of charity: “being truthful in love” (Eph 4:15).

There are certain attitudes which are essential to build community: the humble word full of charity, friendship, not to judge others, mutual forgiveness.

The word is a great medium of communication and communion: above all, the word full of humility and charity. Deep relationships demand the communication of something deep within us. There is communication when our words are able to transmit not only ideas, but rather our feelings and our faith. The word is the instrument, the privileged symbol through which we donate each other and create the great mystery of communion. For this reason, it is so important that our words will be full of humility and charity at the same time. Through arrogant words we do not communicate our *I*, rather we try to subjugate other to our *ego*. God denies the grace of communion to the arrogant people. The one who closed to the vitality of the community life separates himself from the torrent of life. A religious closes himself to the community life when he hides his affectivity and devalues it. For this reason, isolation and solitude are not necessarily a problem of lack of capacity to relate, but a question of humility. The one who is too arrogant to open himself to his neighbors, he isolates himself. The one who is humble never remains alone. The one who is sufficiently humble as to open him to others, will find in the community an efficient help for his integration and to achieve the right balance.

Another constructive attitude is to avoid hurting mutual friendship among the brothers and sisters. If the communitarian ideal is to reproduce among ourselves the *cor unum et anima unam* of the primitive Church, it is proper that the community would be understood as an space of friendship. The one telling us: “I do not call you servants, but friends” demands from us that we would be able to affirm the same thing in relation to our own brothers and sisters in the community. Friendship is a gift of God which is sown among us and that we should cultivate and never prevent its growth. Augustine gave a great leap forward when he introduced in the understanding of the monastic community the value of friendship⁹. There are diabolic attitudes separating the hearts called to be “one heart”, for this reason we

should always try to avoid discord, confrontations, criticisms and backbiting among the members of the community.

Community is built when we have a deep respect and veneration for the persons and the mystery of our brothers and sisters. The popular saying: “think badly about a person and you will be right”, expresses a very low vision of the human person, because the human person is not only what she is, but, above all, that what she could be. It is very true the affirmation: “the one who believes you creates you”. The building of the community demands that the members would never become judges of their own brothers, following the words of the Lord: “Do not judge and you will not be judged” (Lk 7:37); besides, it is necessary to believe and trust our brothers and never have about them fixed and unchangeable criteria. Christian hope leads us to hope the best of our brothers and sisters, because everything is possible for those loved by God as his own children. Love brings us to excuse the intentionality of our brothers, when we cannot excuse what they have done. The excommunications in our hearts make impossible life in communion and reveal a great self-sufficiency and an anti-evangelical pharisaic attitude in those who act in that way. It is very good to make an effort to understand the different levels in which our communitarian life is realized. We are not angels but human beings who live in the dimension of the spirituality, of the existence, but also of the in the animal, vegetal and mineral dimension, as we have seen at the beginning of this theological reflection. Many reactions of our brothers and sisters which are estrange and unacceptable, would be more acceptable if we would know better from what dimension of our human existence come.

We should neither forget that each religious community is a *community of sinners*. We are a community of poor sinners touched by the compassion of Jesus and called by him to discipleship: “I did not come to call righteous ones but sinners”. For this reason, it is natural that sin would be present among us, that we would fall into sin once and again and that we would hurt each other. Jesus taught us that in his community the fraternal correction and forgiveness should be ordinary things: “seventy seven times” (Mt 18:22).

IV. RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IN COMMUNION WITH OTHER FORMS OF CHRISTIAN LIFE: ANTHROPOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

When the founders and foundresses of Religious Life feel the need of gathering brothers or sisters and forming with them *monastic communities, convents, fraternities, communities, houses*, they are not only answering to an evangelical demand, but also to a creatural and anthropological movement, which humanizes

and mundanizes in the best sense of the word. This form of Religious Life is valid because, above all, is authentically human and because it answers to the quest of every being for *life in common*.¹⁰

1. None of the forms of Christian life could be defined by itself

None of the forms of Christian life (religious, secular, matrimonial, ordained ministry) exists for itself, subsist by itself and consists in itself. Each one demonstrates which is an special *mode* assumed by life; and, as a *mode*, implies that the reality of life is much wider and it is only lived out when the person places itself in front of this wideness without enclosing in its own modality. The communitarian phenomena which are partial, particular, the groups, the correlations, the interactions, are only moments or realization of the unstoppable dynamism. The great final objective of all the vital phenomena is the grand communion of all living persons, which in our faith we call *communio sanctorum*.¹¹

None of the forms of life could be defined by itself. Not even *Christian life*. This is a singular and utopian variant of *human life*. Neither *human life* finds in itself an absolute definition. Human life is an amazing emergence of life. In the double spiral of life, we start from the undifferentiated and seminal unity to reach to the unity of total communion after passing through the totality of the differences. For this reason, the process cannot be understood without correlation and interaction.

There is no life without communion, there is no life without relation. There where the obstacles are overcome, or the walls of in-communication are transverse, there the possibility of life starts. The more communion and relation we have, the more life will be manifested. Without context or vital environment, without biogenesis, without biosphere, without ecosystem, everything will be reduced to a mere lifeless juxtaposition. Without interactions and reactions, there will be no movement, no *vital élan*. Life requires interaction, interrelation, counteractions and the overcoming of the counteractions.

Religious or Consecrated Life is a form of Christian and human life. It is a stable form of life, socially and ecclesialogically recognized. It enjoys its own statutes within the Church. Though the different forms of Christian religious life have as their point of reference their own *founders*, however, it is only the social and traditional recognition which guarantees and legitimates them. It is not only the process of institutionalization that gives social legitimacy to a form of religious life, it is much more important the process of the tradition.

So that the first initiatives and realizations of Abbot Anthony or Pacomius would become a stable form of monastic life, it was necessary the testing of time,

the integration in that project thousands of men and women, the validation of this lifestyle: only the great monastic tradition and its institutions demonstrate its anthropological validity. The same happens with the ordained ministry and laical Christian forms of life. This aspect of traditional validation of a stable form of Christian life is surrounded in the Church by a very peculiar importance. The unitary understanding that we have about the Church, as a body and as the Body of Christ, makes that any important event within her, would have repercussions in the whole Church and demands that the whole Church will have enough time and experience to recognize that event as an adequate, healthy and vital one.

2. The charismatic and individual originality as the starting point

To speak about communion and community does not imply to forget the individual person with its unalienable rights. Our experience teaches us that human life, before any type of classification or communitarian integration, is individualized and singularized. It is unrepeatable and unclassifiable. It is not only matter of an external configuration, but interior one: it is the form of life born out of the deepest dimension of every human being.

a) Affirmation of the Christian and religious individuality

A necessary pre-condition for communion is the existence of the individual personality. Life has in each person a very unique manifestation. In that matter, we must follow into the footsteps of Paul, who in the 1 Cor 12-14 presents the great charismatic communion by clearly defending the charismatic individualities and the relation and complementarity of each one of the members of the body. An alert theology of the forms of Christian life knows very well that when the individuality is downgraded in favor of the group or the community, is forgetting the singularity of each one of the components, the indivisible identity of each person, preventing, in that way, the authentic communion of life.¹² The mystery of human generation is, at the same time, mystery of genesis. Each human person surprisingly overcomes the automatic result of a mathematic programming. The individual life emerges as a *novum* which has to be welcome and recognized with veneration and wonder. Its integration within a communitarian whole, does not eliminate its transcendence or sublimity, that dimension which makes human persons beings which cannot be classified.

This is not an obstacle to affirm also that “no one becomes human if he/she remains alone: we become brothers and sisters when we mutually inter-relate”.¹³ Human individuality acquires meaning and identity in correlation with other

human individualities and with all the other creatures. The masculine recognizes itself in relation to the feminine and vice versa; the secular in the religious and vice versa; some realities illumine the reason of being of others. We confess the universe has a cosmic vocation, even if its initial state was chaotic. Only correlation brings things out of themselves, out of their nothingness.

We are living organisms and, as such, we discover within us tendencies of life which bring us towards our mother nature, towards others, towards the transcendent, in order to survive, to nourish ourselves, to procreate. We are realities deeply in need of communion and community. There is no individuality which is self-sufficient. For this reason, it is proper to us to live in biogenesis, in community of life. As human beings, we experience ourselves deeply incomplete, because we are endowed with a social nature. We are essentially social beings.

b) The Unalienable Rights of the Person

The affirmation of the community and communion cannot lead us to forget something basic, as it is the affirmation of the fundamental rights of each woman or men religious. Each person is called to freedom and, for this reason, she is supposed to use its freedom in conformity with the gift received from the same and only Spirit for the welfare of all. It is unusual in the traditional context of the Religious Life an imperative invitation to *use our own freedom*, when the normal traditional way was to demand only obedience. However, our cultural sensibility as the key to interpret the Gospel, shows us that it is fidelity to the Spirit to develop our own personal charisms. It is a congregational and communitarian responsibility to create spaces in which the personal charisms could be developed in all their force and richness. The mortification of the personal charisms only should take place by grave reasons and superior order.

The giver of all charisms, and obviously of all the charisms of our brothers and sisters in the community, is the Holy Spirit. The liberation of personal charisms in the environment of our communities avoids inhibitions and laziness which impoverish and deprive us of life. However, after creating an environment of freedom, it is necessary that each religious person would dear to pursue the responsible path of freedom and the commitment with the gift received, without allowing to be carried out by the fear to freedom. The Spirit who grants the seed and the growth of the communion and solidarity is, at the same time, the Spirit who makes us free and builds us our wonderful originality. It does not come from the Spirit to live inhibited, with fear, renouncing to any initiative and creativity. The Spirit demands from us to assume our own responsibility and to unfold our gifts to the fullness.

However, the horizon of our personal realization is the service, the building of the communion, not otherwise. Precisely because the Spirit of freedom is at the same time the Spirit of communion.

Every member of the community has to acknowledge, welcome and nourish its own charisms and has the right that its charisms would be recognized, welcome and promoted by the other members of the Congregation. The communities in which the richness of the personal charisms is not shared, unfortunately, they are gradually impoverished.

The pluralism is also ambiguous because it has a negative part: it could lead to dispersion, individualism, confrontation and competition. This is the perspective of a bourgeois and individualistic understanding of freedom. Occidental liberal culture thought that to grow in age –this was promoted by the Illustration- it was necessary to affirm the individual rights, without taking into consideration the collective ones. The bourgeois understanding of freedom has led to a pernicious individualism and has created great unbalances in humanity.

Authentic freedom, however, is not the alternative to communion or solidarity. Further, the human person grows and reaches its fulfillment by opening itself to communion, by inserting itself in history. For this reason, only in the communion and in the communitarian mission are we able to develop our personality as religious. Freedom is never an individual event. Freedom emerges where there is a movement of communion, because only in the interpersonal relations the person grows as a free one: “You have been called to freedom... serve one another with love” (Gal 5:13). Community is built from the personal freedom open to solidarity in the way of thinking, feeling and acting.

When freedom is understood in an individualistic perspective, we fall into a bourgeois understanding of freedom. A Christian and messianic understanding of freedom is to understand it as a movement of personalization in the horizon of solidarity and communion: freedom germinates in the fertile soil of love.

Endnotes

¹ Cf. SERGEI BULGAKOV, *The Comforter*, Grand Rapids 2004.

² This communion should not be understood as a loving triangle, understanding the three divine persons as three equal realities. The Abbá and the Son are two personal realities, or two mysterious realities to whom we can access with our human concept of person. However, to affirm that the Spirit of God is person is much more complex. Herbert Mühlen and other specialist in pneumatology have given us some insights about how to understand the Spirit as a person. He is the person of two persons, a person in two persons. He is the reality unifying and identifying them: “The “Love” of the

“Lover” and the “Beloved”, used to say Augustine; “the Conception” and the “one who conceives” and “the Conceived”, affirmed Maximilian Kolbe.

³ The Spirit manifested itself in the history of Jesus as the *mediation* of communion between the Father and the Son. The Abbá generates the Son in the Spirit and the Son existentially claims Abbá and lives his filiation-mission in the Spirit. And when the Spirit was given, i.e., affirmed-exhaled by the father and Jesus together, then, it became the one who gives testimony of the Father and the Son in and through the Church: “When the helper will come, that I will send you from the Father, he will give witness about me... When he comes, he will vindicate the truth in face of the world with regard to sin, to the way of righteousness, and to the judgment... When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into the whole truth... He will glorify me because he will receive of what is mine and will announce it to you (Jn 15:26; 16:7-14).

⁴ This inspiring outlook to the first Christian Community is always present in the documents of the Church about Consecrated Life, starting with *Perfectae Caritatis*: Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 13: “Following the example of the primitive Church, in which the multitude of the believers had only one heart and one soul, life in common in prayer and in the communion of the same spirit has to be maintained, nourished by the evangelical doctrine, the sacred liturgy and most especially by the Eucharist”; and going through the document *Fraternal Life in Community*: CIVCSVA, *Fraternal Life in Community*, n. 1; and the apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata: Vita Consecrata*, n. 41. However, it is rather striking that no one of these documents makes any reference to the presence of women both in the community of Jesus, as well as in the apostolic community. This is very important to give a biblical foundation to the feminine religious life in community, or for the mixed form of men and women religious.

⁵ The parable of the Twelve was the context which was making credible the reunion of the splintered People, i.e., the coming of the reign of God; it was internally bonded by an intense personal relationship of each one of them with Jesus and by a demand of mutual gratitude, in which they have to give mutually the best of themselves: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34).

⁶ 1Thes 1:2-3; 2:12; 2 Thes 1:3; 2 Cor 13:11-13; Col 1:3-4; Plm 4-7; Eph 1:3-4; 3:14-19; Phil 1:9.

⁷ C. SPICQ, 728

⁸ SCRIS, *Contemplative dimension of religious life*, n. 15: “The religious community is in itself a theological reality, object of contemplation: as *a family united in the name of the Lord* is by its own nature, the place where the experience of God could be attained in fullness and could be shared with others”

⁹ T. VIÑAS ROMAN, *La amistad en la vida religiosa: Interpretación agustiniana de la vida en comunidad* (PIC 1995).

¹⁰ TODOROV, *La vida en comun*, o.c.; F. SAVATER, “Vivir juntos”, en *Las preguntas de la vida* (Ariel, Barcelona 1999) 191-218

¹¹ This expression signifies, first of all, the communion of the chosen ones, the consecrated, the ones sent. From the middle ages, the *communio sanctorum* started being understood as a community of sacred things (*sancta*). The community of things is a consequence of the community of persons.

Here on earth there are goods which could enter into the communion (sacraments, ecclesial services, economic and material goods, space, habitat...). It is an expression which we could understand as ecology of sanctity in its highest degree. The forms of life are born in the alpha point and they unfold towards the plenitude in the omega point, in the *pleroma*.

¹² N. TELLO INGELMO, *Teología despierta de la vida consagrada*, Madrid 1994; Id., *Y la Palabra se hizo grito. Susurros de Dios en el clamor de la historia*, Madrid 1991, 59-76: these are very interesting reflections about communication or *a community well related*.

¹³ F. SABATER, "Vivir juntos", en *Las preguntas de la vida* (Ariel, Barcelona 1999) 193.

MISSION-SHAPED COMMUNITIES: TOWARDS A “MISSIONARY CONVERSION”

Communities for a “new beginning”

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

Many of our institutes are now reflecting about the theological and practical meaning of mission. And they state that, in this liquid and postmodern society, we need to enter into a new paradigm of mission, and consequently in a new paradigm of missional community. It is the time to *re-inventing communities in mission*, and to *dreaming and to welcoming* a new paradigm of community and of mission. It is the time of missional communities for a new beginning. We need to enter into the path of the “missionary conversion” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*).

In the life of some religious “community” and “mission” are disconnected. They complain easily about the “community life”. They are proud of their own work or apostolate. They are unhappy in community but happy and satisfied in their own mission. Why this rupture between community and mission?

In fact, when our original charisms enter into a process of routine, then our understanding and practice of “community” and “mission” becomes a poor copy of its genuine theological meaning.

Let us dream, design and deliver a new and update vision of communities in mission¹. Let us re-invent our communities in mission. Thanks to God, there are groups in consecrated that have achieved it: their communities are entering into “the dance of mission”. They are provoking a new awareness and initiatives worth of our attention. They may seem utopian but they just might be real! For this what is needed is a dose of fantasy, audacity, and availability to let oneself be led by prophetic imagination. It is already happening!

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Of what use are dreams if they do not come true? What do we want new models of community for if we do not know how to give them form, how to make them a reality? Let us offer in this article some suggestions.

I. MISSION, THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITIES

Our communities are in a cardiac crisis. The heart of our communities is “Mission”. Arul Jesu Robin says, “Mission is the core of Consecrated Life”². When the heart is healthy, we can listen constantly the heartbeats: “Mission, Mission, Mission!” But when these heartbeats are too weak, our communities need a pacemaker jolt in order to recover the energies of the heart. This pacemaker jolt is given to us by the Holy Spirit when we gather, when we bring about processes of transformation and missionary conversion: “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:5).

1. Mission is a spontaneous outcome of receiving the Spirit

The common understanding of mission reduces it purely to strategies and activities for the success of an institution. The vast majority of our communities think that our primary identity is related to being responsible to *accomplish something*³. The “agenda-anxiety” characterizes many ministries in our communities:

“an acute sense of obligation to do something, somewhere, to someone”

But that has little or no impact upon the core of the community, or upon all that goes on in the community, including its worship.

What we do, leads us to believe that we are the main actors of mission. Frequent expressions like “building the kingdom,” or “extending the kingdom” betray “an imperial or even a triumphalist approach” to mission⁴. In this sense we have interpreted almost exclusively in Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations”.

But pay attention to another text: Acts 1:8. The Risen Jesus promises his disciples that they “will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come” upon them, so that they may be his witnesses “to the ends of the earth.” Here mission is understood

- as the *fulfillment of a promise*;
- a gift of grace;
- a *spontaneous outcome of receiving the Spirit*;
- and as only a *response, and a witness shaped by the discernment of the presence and action of the Spirit*.

When the Spirit comes upon us, we cannot but follow, stepping behind the Spirit who always goes ahead. *Mission is a way of being in the Spirit*; a style of life, before it is expressed in concrete missional actions.

Witnessing Jesus to the ends of the earth by the power of the Holy Spirit is the heart, the core, of each community. A community that is not missionary, is not the community of Jesus. We are called – as community – to be partners and accomplices of the *Missio Dei*⁵, what in this stage of the human history is the Mission of the Holy Spirit⁶, who is sent by the Father and the Risen Lord.

The mission of the Church is subordinate and totally dependent from the *missio Spiritus*. The Spirit is not our assistant. We are assistants of the Spirit in his mission. Our community is missionary by an attentive following of the Spirit who goes ahead of us. There is always room for surprises. The Spirit moves afresh in changing contexts, there is little room for fixed order and set strategies⁷.

2. “Missio Dei” embraces also God’s activity in creation (the Asian theological perspective)

It was usual among us a paradigm of mission (in the theology and in the practice) in which the Church was at the center: ecclesio-centric understanding of mission! Or also, community-centrism in religious life.

Asian Christian theologians help us move away from this narrow interpretation of Mission⁸:

“Start with the church and the mission will probably be lost. Start with mission and it is likely that the church will be found”.

- The *missio Dei* embraces also the work of God Creator and God’s activity in creation. The Reign of God is the inclusive and sovereign movement of God in the processes of creation as a whole. God’s mission therefore cannot be exhausted by the Christian story.
- *The main consequence* is that the Church has not the monopoly of mission, she is not the sole partner with God in mission, but also all men and women of good will. The Holy Spirit works and calls forth witnesses even outside the limits of the visible church¹⁰.
- *Another consequence* of this consists that the starting point for God’s mission is not the church but rather God’s creation. Creation and redemption are seen as two interactive moments in a single continuum of God’s relationship to the world¹¹. P. Chenchiah, an Indian lay theologian, states, the birth of Christ is “the birth of a new order in creation. Jesus is “an outburst or inrush into

history, . . . a new creative effort of God in which the cosmic energy or *sakti* is the Holy Spirit, the new creation is Christ, and the new life order is the Kingdom of God”¹².

Asian theologians are convinced that *God has been present and active in the revolutionary changes taking place in Asia*¹³. And also, that “God is already active through the movement of God’s Spirit in the events of our time”.

3. Consequences for Consecrated Life

Emil Brunner coined this famous sentence:

“The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning”.

Note the preposition *by* and not *for*, since the latter reduces mission to only a function! Religious community exists *by* mission, not only *for* mission! Mission is not a function of the community, but rather, the community is a function in the already up-and-running mission of God in the world.

This concept of the *missio Dei* is revolutionary in common reflection and practice of mission in our communities and Congregations. It shifts the agency in mission from the Church, from our communities and persons, to God.

This new theological paradigm will facilitate the birthing of mission-shaped communities and build up leadership, shaped by a vision of the priority of God’s already up-and-running mission in the world¹⁴. The community derives its self-understanding from the *missio Dei*, the ongoing mission of God’s love to the world.

II. COMMUNITIES OF DISCIPLES AND MISSIONARIES

Our God is in mission now, in every place. The Holy Trinity is taking care of the human beings, of nature, of the whole creation; She is answering to all our needs and aspirations in concrete ways. The Holy Trinity is in a permanent mission, not alone, but in covenant with human beings who have been called to be partners in mission. Our communities are called to be partners of our missionary God. For that reason, our communities should be vigilant in order to know the needs and aspirations of humanity, and of creation; we must be affected by the local and global context in which we live.

1. The Shift from the Culture of Membership to the Culture of Discipleship and Mission

*“There is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world”, says Wilhelm Richebacher*¹⁵.

A community has not to be primarily organized around developing and maintaining its own inner life, its comfort, its security¹⁶. We are called to a radical shift from the "*culture of membership* to the *culture of discipleship*"¹⁷. The culture of discipleship is fundamentally a way of being, a lifestyle. We are called to a fundamental reorientation of our communities to be a "community inside out".

a) The Culture of Membership

When this culture is established in our institutes, it consumes much of the energy and attention. The religious community has been defined, over the centuries, primarily in terms of its *inner life*: prayer (liturgical and personal), common life obediently followed, obedience to those who rightly govern us, and diligent work entrusted to us.

No wonder that mission is seen as just "one more thing to do" among others and therefore is often conveniently left to be carried out in proxy by a few enthusiasts in the community. Nothing to do with a community shaped by mission!

b) The Culture of the Discipleship and Mission

A "religious community" is what happens when people encounter the Risen Lord Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other and with other people outside of religious community. A "religious community" is also what happens when disciples of Jesus are anointed with the energies of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of diversities and of communion, integrates everybody in a common dream and project: To make memory of Jesus community and Jesus mission.

The culture of a community of disciples-missionaries: The community life is not an end in itself and mission is not an optional extra to its being. "Mission is the center stage." God's mission is our reason for existence. The passion of our master Jesus was and is to fulfil the dream of God of a reconciled creation and humanity. We are meant to be partners in building that reality, throughout creation¹⁸.

As a consequence of this, all the structures of our communities must become resources for God's mission. There is plenty of theological room for diversity of rhythms and styles of a community shaped by mission. We have ways of identifying the same living Christ at the heart of every expression of Christian life in common. A community is a body for *mission* through different services, ministries and means.

2. **Communities Shaped by the Challenges of the World, and the People in Whom God Is Lovingly Active**

How can religious community rethink its mission? Following the pattern of the incarnation! To be with people where they are, how they are. “How” is a pronoun that suggests connection beyond geography and locality — connecting with people’s culture, values, lifestyle and networks, as well as with their location.

There is among us *an addition to the normal territorial community system*. We plant a community in a certain geographical space — normally for attending some challenges and needs. But with the passing of time we fall into the temptation of remaining there until exhaustion, even if the circumstances and challenges have totally changed. Mobility is one of the main traits of our societies.

In our present world, our geographical communities need to recognize that their boundaries are permeable. For this reason, we need to welcome a partnership with other communities, and with network communities. Religious community has to be planted also into networks. Only *a mixed community of local community and network* —collaborating together over a wider area — can both adequately fulfil the incarnational principle and demonstrate the universality of Christ’s lordship in all expressions of society.

The changing cultural atmosphere we are living, constitutes for us a call from God. The gospel must be proclaimed afresh within these different structures (family, job, leisure, politics and education). They present a moment of opportunity, a challenge to confidence in the gospel, and a call to imaginative mission. But this is also a moment for pastoral and missionary conversion.

We need to outline some aspects of the cultural, social and spiritual environment in which our communities minister in the new millennium. It explores how we are called to be and to do “community”. Our aim is to be a community for everyone in our country and being truly among them as Jesus was with the people. So, we can see how the Spirit of Jesus and the context will shape our communities.

III. “OIKOS”-COMMUNITY: MEDIATION AND PURPOSE OF MISSION¹⁹

Oikos is a Greek word used in the New Testament to refer to “households,” which were essentially extended families who functioned together with a common purpose. This was the image of the *oikos* in the New Testament.

The word *oikos* is present in our global culture in different expressions: “oikology”, “oiku-menism”, “oiko-nomy”, “par-oikia”. We talk about the planet as our

“home”, *oikos*. *Oikos* is not only the material “house”, it is the “household”, it is the extender family in a space.

This is another look at our communities as *oikos*.

1. **Oikos-community**

In the early Church, discipleship and mission always were centered around and flourished in the *oikos*. The *oikos* was the instrument facilitating the relational dynamic that allowed the church to thrive in the midst of persecution and hardship for hundreds of years. *Oikos* still helps the church thrive today, even in places where persecution is quite severe.

Only in the last hundred years or so in the West we have lost this sense of being extended families on mission. For a whole number of reasons, we have unwittingly embraced the fragmentation of the extended family and tried to live primarily as individuals and nuclear families. Loneliness and depression are rampant. We are more stressed and busier than ever.

A community *oikos* is about rediscovering that we form an extended family on mission where everyone contributes and everyone is supported.

Those of us who follow Jesus have the opportunity to rebuild society by reforming “extended family” *oikos* communities centered not on blood and ancestry, but on Jesus.

Our mission is to compassionately reach out to those around us, invite them to join us in community, share the story of the gospel, make disciples, and gather them into families to follow Jesus together. That is really what stating a missionary community is all about: learning to live as *oikos*, extended families functioning together on mission with God. We believe *oikos* is something the Spirit of God is doing in this time to restore our communities.

The goal is to learn how to function as an extended family on mission. We really believe this is something everyone can learn to do.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people, can change the world”.

A community in mission is a local expression of the church. It exists to see God’s Kingdom come to their friends and neighbors. This means that when they meet, where they meet, with whom they meet, and what they do when they meet are highly contextualized, determined by the vision and missional context of the community.

A community “small enough to care but also big enough to dare”. A community bringing the good news of Jesus to the people who live or work in a particular geographic area, or a network.

2. Leadership of the “Oikos”: A Clear Vision

Vision is the magnet that draws people to the community and the engine that keeps the community moving. Missional vision means we have a desire and passion to share the good news of Jesus with a specific group of people through our words and our actions. This vision can be expressed in the specific name given our community: a name related to our vision.

Leading a missionary community shouldn't be a heavy burden on a leader.

- This is about building an extended family on mission together, so let the idea of “family rhythms” guide your thinking. It's about learning to live a missional lifestyle together and not attending a series of missional events.
- A community in mission center their rhythms on growing in relationship with God (UP), with one another (IN), and with those they are reaching out to (OUT). This is a community life centered on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength (UP), Love your neighbor as yourself (IN), Go and make disciples of all people groups (OUT). We need rhythms that connect us with God in worship and prayer (UP), with each other in deeper community (IN), and with those in our mission context in love and service (OUT).

Those of us who follow Christ have the remarkable opportunity to literally rebuild society by re-forming “extended family” *oikos* communities centered not on blood or ancestry, but on Jesus.

Our commission is to compassionately reach out to those around us, invite them to join us in community, share the story of the gospel, make disciples, and gather them into families to follow Jesus together. That's really what starting an missionary community is all about.

IV. THE SEVEN TRAITS OF A COMMUNITY IN MISSIONAL TRAINING

How to identify a mission-shaped community? I present here seven traits of missional training, inspired in biblical texts²⁰: Communal, conversational, contextual, cross-cultural, Character forming, contemplative and congregational

- *Communal*: “Jesus appointed the twelve and called them apostles: to be with him and to be sent out to preach” (Mk 3:14). Community is essential for

discipleship and mission. And learning at its best is not just an individual but a communal exercise. Jesus and Paul trained their disciples in community, and did that while ministering to others. Learning communities, not only individuals, for a essentially “shared mission”!

- *Conversational*: “While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them” (Lk 24:15). It is a basic principle of adult education that the best learning is active learning. The best lectures will have space at least for questions and feedback. Information is not enough, nor is practice. Conversation is also needed as an active way of learning to work together in important topics on experiences. Jesus is present in the conversation.
- *Contextual*: “Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some” (1 Cor 9:22). The community is called to integrate into the local context. Theological education centred around mission and the local church will also be contextual. God loves the whole world but places people in their local culture and neighborhood. Theology and ministry develops in response to challenges in local churches, neighborhood and society. To share the Mission of the Spirit in today’s world, our communities have to grapple with the influence of Christendom, postmodernism, post-colonialism, the digital age and generational differences, poverty, injustice and violence.
- *Cross-cultural*: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The world is becoming cross-cultural. Going to the peripheries, cultural frontiers fall within the missionary vocation. God shows his love and desire to include people of all nations throughout Scripture — from the calling of Abraham to bless the nations (Gen 12:1-3) through to Revelations vision of heavenly worship with people from “every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev 7:9). The Kingdom of God is inherently multicultural.
- *Character forming*: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). The best theological education will involve character formation as well as intellectual development. Our chief aspiration is to become more like Christ and to model that for others. “I may wonder what kind of mission God has for *me*, when I should ask what kind of *me* God wants for *his* mission” (Christopher Wright).
- *Contemplative*: “Be still and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!” (Ps 46:10). Henri Nouwen appeals for theological education to lead students into greater communion with God and

with other people, for which we need to reclaim the silence of the monastery²¹. The best classes will make space for contemplation, including silence, and teach students to pray.

- *Congregational*: “Well, my brothers and sisters, let’s summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you. (1Corinthians 14:26). Part of re-envisioning community ongoing formation in mission in reference to the local church is doing more theological formation at the local church level. Theology and mission are not just for theological students or overseas missionaries. Theological education and mission-training extends into the role of the church, in order for the church to re-envision itself as a missional community which prayerfully engages its context and forms people into the character of Christ

CONCLUSION

It is not the same a “community with a mission” than “a community in mission” or better “shaped by mission”. Without “communities in mission” or “shaped by mission” our Institutes, our provinces, lose their own reason for being and they become conflictual fields, and areas of protection of all kind of individualisms.

“Communities in mission” are not identified with “mission teams” or “working groups”. “Communities in mission” have a live consciousness of being partners of the Holy Spirit in his Mission. These communities do not shape mission; on the contrary, it is the Mission that shapes them. The Holy Spirit is the main protagonist and the community a partner, a collaborator²². In such communities, ministries and services are many, mission only one. The members are many but one body.

Endnotes

¹ Pope Saint John Paul II insisted so much on the profound mutual interconnection between communion and mission: “they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: Communion gives rise to mission, and mission is accomplished in communion” (*Christifideles Laici*, 32). On another occasion, he says: “The effectiveness of religious life depends on the quality of the fraternal life in common. Even more so, the current renewal in the Church and in religious life is characterised by a search for communion and community”: JOHN PAUL II, address to plenary session of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Nov. 20, 1992, No. 3, *L’Osservatore Romano* (English ed.), Dec. 2, 1992. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, he speaks of “communion for mission” and “mission for communion” and insists that communion and mission should go

hand in hand (*Ecclesia in Asia*, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, n. 24). And the document of CIVCSVA, on *Fraternal Life in Community*, n. 54: “All must be reminded that fraternal communion as such is already an apostolate; in other words, it contributes directly to the work of evangelisation. The sign par excellence left us by our Lord is that of lived fraternity: “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13:35)”.

² Cf. ARUL JESU ROBIN, “Mission: the Core of Consecrated Life”, *Sanyasa* 12/1 (2017), 57-78.

³ CRAIG VAN GELDER, “From Corporate Church to Missional Church: The Challenge Facing Congregations Today”, *Review and Expositor* 101 (2004), 426.

⁴ “In the Gospels, the most repeated and emphatic verbs directing our response to the reign of God are ‘to receive’ and ‘to enter’. They come at times intertwined. . . These two verbs represent two image clusters that, taken together, provide a portrait of the identity of a Christian community and the nature of its mission”: GEORGE R. HUNSBERGER, “Is There a Biblical Warrant for Evangelism?”, quoted in D. Preman Niles, *From East and West: Rethinking Christian Mission*, St. Louis 2004, 117-118. According to Luke’s gospel, when the seventy returned from their first missionary adventure and joyfully reported their successes, Jesus’ response was, “Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (10:20). It is this central vision of the priority of the reign of God breaking in and God’s invitation to participate in that *missio Dei* that gives rise to a mission-shaped church.

⁵ See RICHEBACHER, “*Missio Dei*.”

⁶ A christocentric theology of mission inevitably tends to become exclusive and unable to respond to the challenge of dialogue with other religions. A Christocentric theology of the church and its unity is always in danger of developing a “triumphalist” conception of the church as the continuation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, thus considering the church as the exclusive mediator of salvation. KONRAD RAISER, “That the World May Believe: The Missionary Vocation as the Necessary Horizon for Ecumenism,” *International Review of Mission* 88/350 (1999), 192.

⁷ Philip, the evangelist who was preaching successfully to a large crowd in the midst of a city, is suddenly led away along a desert road to meet a lonely individual (Acts 8). A reluctant Peter is sent to a God-fearing gentile. Peter learns, to his surprise, that the Spirit acts in totally unheard of ways for which Peter and the Jewish Christians were in no way prepared.

⁸ See WATI LONGCHAR – JOSEF R WIDYATMADJA – M. R JOSEPH, eds., *They Left by Another Road: Rerouting Mission and Ecumenism in Asia*, Chiangmai 2007; DANIEL PREMAN NILES, *From East and West: Rethinking Christian Mission*, Chalice Press, 2004; KEN CHRISTOPH MIYAMOTO, *God’s Mission in Asia*, Eugene 2007; LALSANGKIMA PACHUAU, ed., *Ecumenical Missiology: Contemporary Trends, Issues and Themes*, Nagalore 2002; CHOAN SENG SONG, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction: An Asian Analysis*, Maryknoll 1977; and M. M. THOMAS, *Salvation and Humanization: Some Critical Issues in the Theology of Mission in Contemporary India*, Madras, 1971. Another significant collection of provocative reflections is G.V. JOB – al., *Rethinking Christianity in India*, Madras, 1938.

⁹ *Mission-Shaped Church*, 124.

¹⁰ RAISER, *That the World May Believe*, 193

¹¹ As C. S. Song argues in *Christian Mission in Reconstruction*, “When salvation gets divorced from creation, it is bound to lose its universal dimension and significance. This leads inevitably to the impoverishment of Christian understanding of history and culture [and, we may add, “mission”] and has proved to be detrimental to the wholesome appreciation of Asian history and culture in God’s revelation.”: SONG, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction*, as quoted in NILES, *From East and West*, 140, with Preman Niles’s own addition in brackets.

¹² P. CHENCHIAH, *Rethinking Christianity* in NILES, *From East and West*, 139.

¹³ “I do not believe in an invalid God who was carried piggy-back to Korea by some missionary. God was already active in history long before the missionaries came” as quoted in NILES, *From East and West*, 53.

¹⁴ The Trinity models diversity as well as unity. Creation reveals God’s affirmation of diversity. Mission to a diverse world legitimately requires a diverse Church. Catholicity should not be interpreted as monochrome oneness. Election and incarnation reveal God daring to be culturally specific within diverse contexts.

¹⁵ From the closing statement of the meeting of the International Missionary Council, WILLINGEN, 1952; cited from the official report in WILHELM RICHEBACHER, “Missio Dei: The Basis of Mission Theology or a Wrong Path?”, *International Review of Mission* 92/367 (2003), 589.

¹⁶ “The most vigorous forms of community are those that come together in the context of a shared ordeal or communities who define themselves as a group with a mission that lies beyond themselves — thus initiating a risky journey. Over-concern with safety and security, combined with comfort and convenience, have lulled us out of our true calling and purpose”: ALA HIRSCH – MICHAEL FROST, *The Forgotten Ways*.

¹⁷ Cf. JOHANNES HOEKENDIJK, *Church inside out*, Westminster – Philadelphia 1966.

¹⁸ A paraphrasis of a sermon of Presiding Bishop Jefferts Schori at the Opening Eucharist at General Convention 2009, given on July 7, 2009: www.episcopalchurch.org/78703_112035_ENG_HTML.htm.

¹⁹ Inspiration taken from Mike Breen and the EDM Team, *Leading Missional Communities*, Blake Berg 2013.

²⁰ I was inspired by DARREN CRONSHAW, “Revisioning Theological Education: Mission and the local Church”, *Mission Studies* 28 (2011), 91-115.

²¹ Cf. HENRI NOUWEN, *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry*, San Francisco 1991, 46-48 .

²² Cf. JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, *Cómplices del Espíritu: el nuevo paradigma de la Misión*, Madrid, 2015.

FOUNDERS' MISSIONARY VISION: THE ESSENCE OF A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF

It is evident that the communion that we build is essentially in view of mission. No authentic religious community exists for itself. Why is it so? What is the rationale? There could be many reasons. My concern in this article is to search for the reasons especially in reference to the founders of different religious families in the Church.

1. ORIGINS OF A COMMUNITY: HEARING THE CALL AND A DISCERNED RESPONSE

Whether we realize it or not, at the heart of every religious community lies a Call and A Response. A religious community emerges in history not purely out of human initiative and purely for humanistic motives. The religious community is born of a call, a call from God and response to Him in a particular, historical, social and ecclesial milieu. The document *Fraternal Life in Community* states: The love of Christ has gathered a great number of disciples to become one, so that like him and thanks to him, in the Spirit they might, throughout the centuries, be able to respond to the love of the Father, loving him “with all their hearts, with all their soul, with all their might” (cf. Deut 6:5) and loving their neighbors “as themselves” (cf. Mt 22:39).¹

A religious community is born not “of the will of the flesh,” nor from personal attraction, nor from human motives, but “from God” (Jn 1:13); it is born from a divine vocation and a divine attraction, felt initially in the heart of a few individuals. When we respond to the signs of the times and cries of the Spirit, no activity is private or individualistic. The fire that is ignited is contagious; it radiates and shares

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itself. From such an fiery attraction is born a union of hearts. Throughout out the history of the Church, there have been the living and concrete symbols of the primacy of the love of God who works wonders, and of the love for God and for one's brothers and sisters as manifested and practiced by Jesus Christ.

The religious community, therefore, is a theological reality, but evolved through our concrete way of living and responding to it. It is fruit of a dialogue between God and human beings. Both its profoundest origin and ultimate goal are theological.

If a religious community is born of a call and response, how does it come about? What is the process of its birth and growth? Providentially, we are at the dawn of a new year when God offers us new possibilities, new directions and new ways of looking at reality. Things that are so old and so familiar can be seen in a new light. So let us ask the basic question: what are the dynamics at work in the birth of a new congregational family? How is born a mission-shaped communion?

2. EMERGENCE OF A FOUNDING CHARISMATIC VISION

William James, the author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* speaks of what he calls, the *strenuous mood*, a foundational life energy, (the *eros*), the *libido* or a fundamental desire that lies slumbering in every human being.² This *desire* needs to be awakened or aroused. To be awakened from its slumbering mode, the *eros* requires the wilder passions like, the big fears, loves, hates, indignations or the appeal of one of the higher fidelities like, justice, truth, or freedom. This awakening can vary from person to person. It could be more difficult in some than in others and can also vary in the level of intensity and depth.

The founders of religious families are among those people whose strenuous mood was awakened in this way. But in their case this awakening happened because of two factors: a diligent and faithful contemplation of the Gospel and a deep sensitivity to their own social milieu.³ In fact, they read and meditated on the Gospel and allow its practical implications fall on their social milieu, which moved their hearts to respond to the problems of the world around them in a genuinely Christian manner. These men and women were fascinated by the person of Christ, felt drawn to him, intrigued and captivated by him, and felt deeply the ramifications of his life in their hearts. They felt the Christ-event, not just as a historical event in the world's past, but as a dynamic reality penetrating, subsuming the present, and challenging them to both mysticism and social action. They were all drawn to the person of Christ, particularly, to one or the other aspects, traits, sayings or deeds from his life, which gave them an impetus to follow him, conform their existence to him and mediate him in the world of their own time and context.

Their following of Christ, therefore, had also elements that are both, mystical — as it began in a contemplative vision — and also political as the vision overflowed into expressions of love and compassion. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was stranger and you made me welcome, lacking cloths and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me” (Mt 25:35-36). These two dimensions, the mystical and the political, that the founders experienced and expressed, constitute what we call the founding charism. This charism is distinctive and involves a particular style of sanctification and apostolate, giving rise to a “particular tradition, with the result that one can readily perceive its objective elements.”⁴

Pope John Paul II, speaking to the General Superiors of men congregations, writes: “Each of your founders, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit promised by Christ to his Church, was a man who possessed a particular charism. Christ had in him an exceptional instrument for his work of salvation which, especially in this way, is perpetuated in the history of the human family. The Church has gradually assumed these charisms, evaluated them and when she found them authentic, thanked the Lord for them and tried to put them in a safe place in the life of the community so that they could always yield fruit.”⁵

Therefore, the Christ-story, with its enormous range and depth, were dealt with by focusing on particular aspects and got reflected in the social milieu in which the founders lived. They saw areas of human life, where there was a crying need for the Christ-story to be retold. They went into the dark places of human existence, into its brokenness, poverty, illness, ignorance, degradation, misery, and retold the story in words of proclamation and deeds of compassion. So there was a necessary relationship between the mystical vision and its political and social enactment; it was a kind of boiling over, a welling up from the inner depths and overflowing into something external as well. In short, there was born in them, because of the awakening of the *strenuous mood*, a missionary vision that combined elements that are both mystical and political.

They went in with the “mind of Christ” as described by St. Paul. “So if in Christ, there is anything that will move you, any incentive in love, any fellowship in the spirit, any warmth or sympathy, I appeal to you, make my joy complete, by being of a single mind, one in love, one in heart and one in mind. Nothing is to be done out of jealousy or vanity; instead, out of humility of mind, everyone should give preference to others, everyone pursuing not selfish interests, but those of others. Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:1-5).

The soul of a religious community is this *mind of Christ*, recognized by the founder and still being communicated, discovered and created within the experience of the community. The mind of Christ, then, is the enkindling experience. The missionary vision that is born of it will be felt in the unity of central convictions, giving a common purpose or impulse to action, stimulated by the core vision.

3. BIRTH OF A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

As individuals and later a group of individuals, come under the spell of these charismatic men and women (founders and foundresses), and respond to the call of the Spirit who is the prime mover of mission, religious communities are born. Every religious vocation is also, therefore, a con-vocation. It is the Spirit of God that brings these individuals together with their founder and forms them into a community. Mission is impossible without communion. The one who makes the mission possible is the Spirit of God who also makes the communion possible, that wonderful bringing together of many in one. “We can say that religious life does not exist without community and communion. Vocation to this kind of life has as its objective the following of Jesus in community. It is in such a way that vocation to religious life is an authentic convocation.”⁶ God raises up men and women who drawn by the appeal of the Gospel and sensitive to the signs of the times, give life to new religious families that are “new ways of living out the one single communion in a diversity of ministries and communities.”⁷ A collective charism calls for an intense experience of communion which generates a peculiar communitarian phenomenon we call order, congregation or institute. It is from this founding community that the actual local communities derive their sense and meaning. Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes speaks of this founding community as the

charismatic community *par excellence*. That original community was paradigmatic because it reflected the spiritual face of the order or congregation. Only this first community of the monastery, order or congregation, has a universal and at the same time, a particular character. It is universal because it is the principle of identification of successive communities. It is the mother and matrix community where in itself is concentrated the immense possibilities of a multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic and multi charismatic congregation. It is from it that the congregation historically emerged and the particular communities born. No other community or supra-local communitarian institution has pre-eminence over the mother community.⁸

A religious community, in its very essence, is this process of becoming united through the common experience of a core missionary vision. It means sharing the contagion, catching that strenuous mood, burning with the same fire that was burning in the heart of the founder. This is what we should call charismatic fidelity.

It means standing within the same story of the founder, looking at life from there — sharing, catching, burning, standing and looking. It is a call to join in his or her own way of being in the world. Community is this *process*, not a thing. It means being caught up in a movement, rather than creating a social structure. Listen to the missionary exhortation of Jesus: “Be on the move.” There is always a danger when we confuse the “essential binding vision that constitutes community with the structures meant to nourish it.”⁹ We may end up canonizing the structures at the expense of the relationship with the vision. It is especially so when we treat the community as a spatial entity rather than as a process of increasing union in a common story.

Our vocation, then (especially as the awareness of it deepens), is not to imitate but to join this journey, to become part of the story: This usually happens through a creative dialogue between and among four factors: our inherited understanding and experience of the founder’s vision, the plurality of our own insights, talents, and social consciousness, and the contemporary needs of the broken world and wounded humanity; from such a dialogue emerges invitations to ministry and our earnestness in responding to them. “The very charism of the founders appears as an ‘experience of the Spirit’ transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the body of Christ continually in the process of growth.”¹⁰

4. GOAL OF A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

The aim of a religious community is to facilitate the process of life based on the original vision and on being moved outward by that vision. It is this fiery vision that unites the members. Let us listen to what the Document, *Fraternal Life in Community* states:

The foundation of unity, however, is the communion in Christ established by the one founding gift. Reference to the institute’s founder and to the charism lived by him or her and then communicated, kept and developed throughout the life of the institute, thus appears as an essential element for the unity of the community. To live in community is to live the will of God together, in accordance with the orientation of the charismatic gift received by the founder from God and transmitted to his or her disciples and followers.¹¹

The quality of the bonded-ness among the members in sharing this vision and translating it timely and contextually is the essence of the community. A deepened understanding of this charismatic vision leads to a better affirmation of one’s own identity, around which it is easier to build unity and communion. Clarity concerning

one's own founding charismatic vision allows creative adjustment to new situations and this leads to positive prospects for the future of the institute. In this process, there could be new and original moments for which there may not be ready-made answers or responses. A lack of clarity in this area can easily cause partial or one-sided approaches concerning goals and blind acceptance of passing cultural currents surrounding religious life, and uncritical responses to various apostolic needs, in addition to the obstacles it raises regarding adaptation and renewal. Another danger could be a kind of generic approach to mission, which lacks the specific mediation of one's own charism. There could also be a certain adjustment to a lay mentality by the religious. "Instead of offering their own religious witness as a fraternal gift which would encourage Christian authenticity, they [religious] simply imitate the laity, taking on their way of seeing and acting, thus weakening the contribution of their own consecration."¹² Lack of clarity concerning the charismatic vision may also lead to excessive accommodation to the needs of the family, ideals of a nation, race or tribe or pressures of some social groups, thereby adulterating the charism to suit particular positions or interests.

5. THE THRUST OF A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

As we reflect on the way we live and organize ourselves as members of a religious community, it is good to ask: What are the criteria that should guide us? On what basis do we structure our life and its styles? In other words, what should be the major thrust of a religious community? Perhaps, it is better to begin by stating what it is not.

5.1. What it is not:

The major thrust of a religious community cannot be creation of structures, rules and regulations or insistence on laws. Neither can it be simply a community-centeredness, nor a leveling collectivity without dynamism or inspiration where the emphasis is on "being in community" and neglect evangelical responsiveness to the world around. Religious communities cannot also be "task-oriented companies" or action-oriented corporate presence, like multi-national corporations where work and efficiency in execution are the prime values. Wherever work is important, activism can dominate and individuals could be sacrificed to the fulfillment of the work. Members can slip into careerism and professionalism, driven by cravings for status, power, glory and reputation. It is possible that a religious community structures itself in ways that aim primarily at the assertion of its own status, power, and reputation and removes itself and its members from the self-forgetful service of God in the world.¹³

At the same time, religious community cannot also be just a “bread and breakfast place” where the emphasis is on personal ministries at the cost of the common living. Members legitimate it by stating reasons of space, location, travel convenience without addressing to the aspect of “being in community.” Is ministry all that counts? Are all our obligations outside? Is apostolate the only factor that counts? Have we no obligations to each other?¹⁴ Are we not called to live in community as others are called to live in marriage which entails not only obligations outside but also obligations to one another?

It could also be that a community can structure itself on gratification of members with too much of caring, sharing, need-satisfaction and, thus, can become a “sentimental crowd.” If we are always looking for our own equilibrium or for our own peace, we will never find it, because peace is the fruit of love and service to others. We should be concerned about the needs of the members and on the quality of the relationships that exist among members. But the fulfillment of these needs and the relationships exist not merely for our satisfaction. They must impel us forward to the fulfillment of our vision and mission. We can easily build a closely bonded group with very heavy emphasis on loving and mutually satisfying relationships, and at the same time fall into a corporate loneliness or a bourgeois clique that forces us huddle together in the dark for comfort. A community can also build itself on safety and security becoming a kind of enclave for the weak and needy with all fortification and protective measures.

5.2. What it is:

The major thrust has to be on fueling the charism of the founders not only by translating it from the context where they were born but also through inculturating it in the social context of our own time and countries. We need to initiate a process of rediscovering and implementing the original vision in continuous dialogue with our times and situations so as to listen to the calls of the Spirit in them. It is the duty of the community to awaken in the members, the same “strenuous mood” of the founder and encourage them to live it along with others who are similarly awakened; every member needs to burn with the same fire and be caught up in a movement of the Spirit. The concern has to be to formulate a shared vision, emerging from the original vision of the founder, which calls each member to worship and witness to the presence of God in the broken areas of human existence, according to each one's personal talents and aspirations. A religious community must strive to become a “visible and concrete manifestation of the communion which is the foundation of the Church and at the same time, a prophecy of that unity towards which she tends as her final goal;”¹⁵ it is called to be a prophetic sign of the intimate union with God

who is loved above all things and of fraternal fellowship through communion of life, prayer and apostolate.

As a religious community brings together people of diverse background, cultures, languages and temperaments, there dawns an opportunity for it to be a “sign of the possibility of living christian fraternity and of the price that must be paid to build any form of fraternal life.”¹⁶ Besides, in this globalized world and in the context of the diverse cultures and societies of our planet, wounded as they are, by divisive forces of passion and conflicting interests, there exists a yearning for unity, though unsure of what path to follow. In such a context, religious communities can show the way as it brings together people of different ages, languages and cultures who meet as brothers and sisters and remain united despite the inevitable conflicts and difficulties inherent in common life. Thus they become signs that bear “witness to a higher reality and points to higher aspirations.”¹⁷

6. IMPLICATIONS

1. What really forms the heart of a religious community is the mystical dimension that binds the religious community to Christ, a mystical vision that emerges from a faithful and diligent contemplation of the Gospel. Devoid of this we inevitably come to forget the profound reasons for making a community and for patiently building fraternal life. This life and can sometime appear beyond human strength and a useless waste of energy, especially to those intensely committed to action. Hence prayer, both personal and communitarian, has to be considered the foundation of community life as it starts from contemplation of God’s great and sublime mystery, from wonder for his presence in the most significant moments as well as the humble and ordinary realities of our communities.

How fascinating has been our contemplation of the Christ story in its enormous range and depth? How faithful have we been to prayer, both personal and communitarian as a source of nourishment of our community and mission? If it has not been so, what are the reasons?

2. As a community, we, though different, come together in unity — a unity of central convictions. There is a merging of individual stories, without losing them, into a larger story. At the same time, it is unwise to think of the unity of a religious community univocally. The history of religious life witnesses to a variety of ways of living out the one communion, even within an institute. The wondrous variety of religious existence enriches the Church and equips her for every good work.

Are we prepared to merge without losing our individuality? Are we prepared to give and receive from one another as we are “differing gifts?” How do we feel about our abilities of listening to and acceptance of others? Are we ready to envision together?

3. The quality of community life is affected, positively or negatively, by two kinds of diversity in the institute: that of its members and that of its works. In both, the diversity is a variety of gifts which is meant to enrich the one reality. The criterion for accepting both members and works in a religious institute, therefore, is the building of unity.¹⁸ “It is a mistake to try to make the founding gift of the institute to cover everything. At the same time, a gift which would virtually separate a member from the communion of the community cannot be rightly encouraged. Nor is it wise to tolerate widely divergent lines of development which do not have a strong foundation of unity in the institute itself. Diversity without division and unity without regimentation are richness and a challenge that help the growth of communities. It is a particular responsibility of superiors and of those in charge of formation to ensure that the differences which make for disintegration are not mistaken for the genuine value of diversity.”¹⁹

Do we experience a unity of the members and of the varied works undertaken by the members in our congregations? Do God’s gifts in this person or project or group make for unity and deepen communion? Is this a criterion that we apply in accepting new members and in the discernment of new apostolate that we take up?

4. If community is this process of increasing union in a common story, “all under the same roof” type of living (geographical or physical togetherness) is not a must. Important is communion and not community and there could be different forms of celebrating communion. Moreover every charism must lead us to sharing it with others and build communion.²⁰

Can we let go of the physical nearness and take the risk of loneliness and personal and individual responsibility for our lives as carriers of community? Can we create new ways of celebrating relatedness in community? How disposed are we to living in smaller, inter-congregational or inserted communities, forming more inclusive communion with those whom we serve?

5. We must constantly live the tension between fixity and mobility. The gospel view of discipleship frequently mentions a kind of nomadic detachment.

The disciple is one who travels from one place to another, accepted in some, rejected in others, carrying neither purse, not scrip, not shoes, constantly in exodus, because the Word is to be taken to the ends of the earth.

How do we resonate with the above view of discipleship? What are its implications for our lives as the members of my community? How flexible have we been in relation to the members, works of apostolate and the places and cultures where the communities are situated?

6. To envision and travel together, we must be able to deal with pluralism within and without and refuse to accept a single way of looking at reality. Are we ready to ask the question: How else might we be in our world so that we can be more effective in responding to the mission entrusted to us?

Do we have symptoms of a tunnel vision? What are they? Can we think new thoughts, take risks, and delight in our diversity? What prejudices have we, perhaps, institutionalized? What stubbornness cries out for conversion? In another 5 or 10 or 20 years, what will this group look like?

7. As we are in a process, we need to build structures that nurture our vision. We need to seek ways of protecting the values inherent in the vision, of keeping them alive and central. Structures, therefore, may change, adapt, develop, outgrow their usefulness and relevance, and can be, sometimes, need to be replaced. The vision will remain, finding new challenges to meet, more dark places to illumine, new stories in which to express itself.

Are we prepared for flexibility with regard to the structures of our community? Can we restructure our membership requirements so as to include those who are probably not ready for a long term commitment? Should perpetual profession be a necessary requirement for full membership? Are the structures of the communities (time schedule, rules and norms of community living, leadership models and styles of governance) life enhancing, dialogical and participative? What needs to be changed?

8. We do not have to over-sacralize the past. The present is holy too. Taking account of the tradition does not mean institutionally hamstrung or getting stuck, ignoring the influences that impinge on us now and which our founders never envisaged. Neither does the need to be a meaningful presence now necessarily mean ignoring our inheritance. Our evolution, personally and communally, must take into account of all that we hold dear and holy in our past, all those learning from the past that need to be surrendered now

as non-essential, and the invitations to novelty that call us out of the “then” into the “now.”

Communally we are all lit from the same candle, and then on, every moment of our life derives light from that first spark. But the height, color, heat, and intensity of the flame depend on present conditions and our situations. Our fidelity to our common bond must take account of both.

What does this image evoke in us? How does the multi-religious-cultural context of India challenge us? Are we open to study and research on more incultured expressions of the charism of the founders who may have lived in a different historical period and cultural context? Can we not go beyond the *missio ad gentes* to *mission inter gentes* model, looking for more incultured forms of living like, *ashrams* that provide space for a more meaningful dialogue of faith and life?²¹

9. When we seek unity, we should not look for a monolithic unity, but a dynamic unity where, in spite of our differences on many things, we work constantly at the preservation of our central unity and the resolution of conflicts arising from our differences — personal, historical, social, psychological and intellectual. One of the most critical witnesses the world looks for from religious life today is evidence of people who do not hide in the enclaves of natural similarity, but who can find in our many differences a graced unity of love focused in a shared vision.

Can we disagree and still feel united? Can we be comfortable with differences? Do differences become an opportunity for us to receive and give? Even as we affirm our uniqueness and abilities, are we also ready to accept the uniqueness of the other and appreciate the other's abilities? Can we rise above our enclaves of natural similarities, based on region, caste and language and share the common vision?

10. In our journey forward, loyalty to the kingdom of God might perhaps be good substitute to loyalty to the Church. This is simply because, all institutions, including the institutional church, tend to assume unilateral power that can slow and even deaden responsiveness. Blind conformity disguised as loyalty to Church may, at times, shield us from being a continuous and living reminder to the institutional Church of its original purpose. This does not mean an angry criticism against the Church, but a sensitive thirst for gospel values that registers unworthy attitudes and refuses to adopt them. A religious community can be inserted in a particular Church and enrich it

with its charisms and at the same time, should open it to a more universal dimension; it should counter the forces of parochialism and regionalism of the local churches and see that its mission is simply reduced to pastoral functions.

Do I experience any conflict between loyalty to the Church and loyalty to the Kingdom? How do I resolve it? Are all our organizational structures, both internal and external more participatory, inclusive and gender sensitive?

11. We must seek new insights into the charism in order to discern new directions that are faithful to the deep story in which we are communally grounded. Returning to the roots must have a direct impetus for our present life together and its overflow in ministry. It calls for refined sensitivity to the times in which we live. This is especially so, because, in the words of J.B. Metz, religious life is meant to be a “kind of shock therapy instituted by the Holy Spirit for the Church as a whole” as it is called to offer prophetic criticism, avoid creeping passivity, bourgeois prosperity and dubious provincialism.²²

Are we prepared for these new directions, to enter into new dimensions of human existence where there is brokenness and pain? What about our “in-touchness” with the times we live? Do we know where the marginalized are whose plight demands from our part hunger and thirst after justice? Are we brave enough today to take the raw and unpopular initiatives of our founders in new situations? Are we so comfortably settled within our own territory that we are so satisfied with what is instead of being constantly uneasy about what-is-not-yet-and-should-be?

Endnotes

¹ CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Fraternal Life in Community*, Rome 1994, 1.

² William James, Address to the Yale Philosophical Club, 1891.

³ EVELYN WOODWARD, *Poets, Prophets & Pragmatists*, Notre Dame 1987, 46-47.

⁴ SACRED CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS AND SCRIS, *Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church*, Rome 1978, 1.3.

⁵ *L'Osservatore Romano*, To the Superiors General of Men, November 24, 1978, 3.

⁶ JOSE CRISTO REY GARCIA PAREDES, *Theology of Religious Life: Communion and Community*, Manila 2006, 3.

⁷ *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1

⁸ *Ibid.*, 45

⁹ WOODWARD, *Poets, Prophets and Pragmatists*, 51.

¹⁰ *Mutual Relations*, 12; Also see *Fraternal Life in Community*, 1.c, and 45.

¹¹ *Fraternal Life in Community*, 45.

¹² *Fraternal Life in Community*., 46.

¹³ It is always important to see how a community structures itself: need for sharing and meaningful relationships, needs of everyone, and needs of the ministries undertaken, thus community becoming a base for doing personal ministries. Diversification of ministries may coincide with diversified forms of community living so much so that we lose a sense of unity in the midst of a plurality of work and life styles. Please refer MARY JO LEDDY, *Reweaving Religious Life: Beyond the Liberal Model* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990), 64-65.

¹⁴ BARBARA FIAND, *Living the Vision*, New York 1989, 78.

¹⁵ *Fraternal Life in Community*, 10.

¹⁶ *Fraternal Life in Community*, 56.

¹⁷ *Fraternal Life in Community*, 56.

¹⁸ *Mutual Relations*, 12.

¹⁹ SCRIS, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life*, Rome 1983, 22.

²⁰ One of the most striking phenomena in religious life of our time is the awareness of a "shared charism." We have become intensely aware how the gifts that give shapes to the various religious institutes are not only "charisms" for the religious life to be lived and explained within it but also charisms to be shared with other forms of christian and even non-christian life. Please see "Theological Reflection on Mission Today," a Paper presented by Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes at the Mission Congress organized at Colemenar, Madrid from September 02-07, 2012, pages 35-38.,

²¹ In contrast with the "mission ad" model, the Federation of the Conferences of Bishops from Asia aims to transcend the model of *mission ad gentes* and establish the model of *mission inter gentes* (mission among nations) in order to provide a more incarnate model which is less deductive and linear. It would encourage recognition of religious pluralism not as something that must be fought against and overcome but as something that defines the picture or landscape of Asia. This does not imply the renunciation of the proclamation of the Gospel. "The mission is not to be understood as confrontational but as a relationship and the building of relationships as dialogue and consensus, harmony and solidarity. The aim is for the Christian gospel and the Local churches to really immerse themselves in the realities of Asia and to commit themselves to a three-way dialogue concerning cultures, religions and the poor":JOSE CRISTO REY GARCIA PAREDES, "Theological Reflection on Mission Today," in *Theology for Our Mission. Workshop by Claretian Missionaries*, 64.

²² JOHANAS BAPTIST METZ, *Followers of Christ*, London 1978, 12-13. See also *Vita Consecrata*, 15, 87.

EUCHARIST AND THE WORD OF GOD – TWO EYES OF A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Alex Kalathikattil, SDB

INTRODUCTION

Pope John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* wrote, “The changes taking place in the society and the decrease in the number of vocations are weighing heavily on the Consecrated life in some regions of the world.”¹ Addressing the men and women religious of the Archabbey of Brevnov in Prague on April 26, 1997, he voiced the same concern: “In the new climate of freedom which you are now experiencing and amid profound transformation in culture and mentality, you are realizing, perhaps more than in the past, how the consecrated life meets with resistance and obstacles, and how it can appear difficult and lacking in purpose.”² And again speaking to the participants of the European Congress on Vocations on April 29, 1997 he said, “Everyone knows the problems that make it difficult to accept Christ’s invitation. Among these are: the society of consumerism, a hedonistic vision of life, the culture of escape, exaggerated subjectivism, fear of making definitive commitments, a widespread lack of thought for the future.”³ In a message to the Council of Major Superiors of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life gathered in Czestochowa, Poland, on June 4, 1997, he said, “We live in times of chaos, of spiritual disorientation and confusion, in which we discern various liberal and secularizing tendencies; God is often openly banished from social life, attempts are made to limit faith to a purely private sphere, and in people’s moral conduct a harmful relativism creeps in. Religious indifference spreads.”⁴

The “split” that Christians manage to maintain between the faith we profess and our daily lives, according the Second Vatican Council, “deserves to be counted

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among the more serious errors of our age” (GS 43). This is a rather amazing statement. Speaking in 1965, one would think the Council would name communism, materialism, secularism, and so on; but no! the worst of errors is the gap we Christians maintain between the lives we live and the faith we profess. Conversely, to integrate our lives and faith into lived Christian faith is surely the clue to our religion becoming a spirituality.⁵ And when we come to think of consecrated life, one may be tempted to ask is there a problem similar to this in the way consecrated life is lived out. Is there a lack of integration of who we are and what we do? How can we bring about this integration?

The readings of the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, reminds us religious of our calling to be the light of the nations as our Lord was. “The Lord God says this: Look, I am going to send my messenger to prepare a way before me.” We are the messengers that He is sending to the world today so that we can bring the light of Christ, the light of hope and mercy to humanity. This we can do if we live a life of contradiction in a positive way? In the Gospel Simeon prophesied, “You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected — so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare” (Lk 2:34). Indeed, as consecrated persons, we are called to live a life of the kingdom as a foretaste of the life that is to come. We are called to live out the Gospel values as enshrined in the beatitudes.

But today, some of us have become a contradiction to the life that we are called to live. Instead of living a life of simplicity, we want to enjoy the world and its pleasures as much as anyone else. We are as much attached to the world and its temptations like the rest of humanity. Instead of living a life of charity, exemplary of a loving, caring and forgiving community, we form cliques and pressure groups within the community. Instead of submitting in obedience to God’s will and that of our legitimate superiors, we expect all superiors to obey us because we believe we know the will of God better than them. It is necessary once again, to reclaim our role in living lives that are contradictory to that of the world. More than fifty years ago, the Second Vatican Council invited Religious Institutes, via the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, to renew themselves in order to reincarnate a more spiritual consecrated life in the contemporary cultural context, closely linked to the Gospel and their charism, keeping pace with the Church and at the service of the world. The invitation and the challenge still remain. We must be prophetic in the way we live our lives if we are to attract others to join us.

CONSECRATED: TO BE WITH HIM AND TO BE SENT OUT

In the Apostolic Letter *Witnesses of Joy*, Pope Francis while pointing out the numerous problems faced by consecrated life — decreasing vocations, aging members, economic problems, threats posed by relativism and other similar issues — exhorts the religious to practice the virtue of hope, a hope that stems from the assurance of the Lord, “Be not afraid ... for I am with you” (Jer 1:8). What is more, echoing the words of Pope Benedict, he would urge the consecrated not to “join the ranks of the prophets of doom who proclaim the end and meaninglessness of consecrated life.”⁶ In the midst of all these the Holy Father, in fact, is asking the consecrated to be witnesses of joy. Borrowing the words of Pope Benedict XVI and applying it to consecrated life, Pope Francis would say: It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction. The antidote to decreasing vocations is, according to Pope Francis, consecrated men and women who are happy.⁷

Now how is it possible for us consecrated men and women to live our life with optimism and joy? *The Professional* is a book that was much discussed. The book was authored, in 2009, by Subroto Bagchi, the founder of *Mind Tree*, one of the prominent software companies in India. By common definition, a professional is anyone who possesses the skills and knowledge necessary for a career—whether as a surgeon, a software engineer, or a plumber. But according to Subroto Bagchi, our increasingly global marketplace demands more. In fact, everyone is called to be a professional, in a world where the foolish, selfish, and unethical decisions of a few have affected the lives of millions. In the book Bagchi presents Mahadevan as the example of a true professional. Although not a professional in the normal understanding of the word, he exemplifies professionalism in the way he carries out work that he is engaged in, giving a worthy burial to the unclaimed bodies in the city of Bangalore. What makes Mahadevan a true professional is the way he goes about this task. He has the ability to work unsupervised; he knows exactly what he has to do and is able to certify the completion of the task; he acts with integrity all the time. Commitment, the ability to choose the important over the urgent and total integrity are the hallmarks of a true professional.

We are living at a time when we value professionalism. Living in such a world, we religious also need to live our religious life in a professional way. It is true even in religious communities today we have lot of professionals. We religious may be professionals in the IT sector, in the medical field, in youth work, in social work, etc. and many of us may be also contributing in our fields as professionals. But a question that used to perplex me is how many of us religious are really professional in our life as religious. As priests and religious, I wouldn't hesitate to say that our

professionalism has to be in the area of the Word of God and the sacraments especially the Eucharist.

Our professionalism is connected with our vocation. Mark tells us clearly what the one called should be and what the task of the one called is. Jesus, Mark tells us, “went up the mountain and called those he wanted and they came to him. So he appointed twelve, whom he called apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach, and to have authority to drive out demons.” (Mk 3:13-15). He/She is called to be with Jesus so as to become like him and thereafter to minister like Jesus the master. In our striving to be professionals in the world sometimes we might lack the professionalism in our lives as religious. “This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new,” is what Tagore says in one of his collection of poems (*Gitanjali*, poem 1). In another poem, however, he states: “The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day. I have spent my days in stringing and in unstringing my instrument” (*Gitanjali*, poem 13). I do not know if I would be accused of reading too much into these poems if I were to say what we see here is a dichotomy between what I am called to be and what I am. My calling is to be a flute on which God plays his melody, but I am so preoccupied with so many urgent things that I am not able to do the one thing that is important to make myself available to God so that he can play his melody through me.

THE DISCIPLE IS CALLED TO BE WITH HIM

Jesus calls the disciples to be with him. Now this phrase ‘to be with him’ has two levels of meaning. At the first and more obvious level, “being with” can be understood as a physical being with. The disciple is to accompany or to keep company with the master. It is a dimension that becomes evident in the call narrative in the Gospel of John as well. On seeing Jesus walking by, John the Baptist tells two of his disciples, “Look there is the lamb of God.” On hearing this we are told the two set out to follow Jesus and Jesus turning back asks them, “What are you looking for?” When they respond, asking “Rabbi, where are you staying?” Jesus tells them “come and see”. They went and spent the rest of the day with him (Jn 1:35-40). Being with Jesus is the criterion used in choosing Mathias to replace Judas. In fact, Peter says, “we must choose someone from among those who were with us during all the time that the Lord Jesus moved about with us, beginning with John’s baptism until the day when Jesus was taken away from us. One of these has to become with us, a witness to his resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22).

There is, in my view, a second and probably a deeper level at which we need to understand the phrase, ‘he called them to be with him’. When someone says,

'I am with you', it need not necessarily mean only a physical closeness. I may tell my friend I am with you even when I am not with him physically. What I intend would be I am in agreement with you. We are on the same wavelength. It is more of a mental closeness than a physical closeness. This being with, I believe, is more important for a disciple than a physical closeness. Physical closeness of course would help the disciple to arrive at the mental closeness; to appropriate the views and mentality of the master and thereby conform oneself to the master.

It is this second way being with that Paul speaks of when he tells the community of Philippi, "let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2, 5) or when he says "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). The same is intended when writing to the Colossians Paul says, live your whole life in accordance with the Christ you have received (Col 2:6-8) and let the message of Christ, in all its richness find a home in you (Col 3:5-17). In other words, Paul wants the Christians to have the same mind of Christ. And it is this which would become the guarantee for the oneness of mind and love in the community. We consecrated men and women as disciples of the Jesus, therefore, are first and foremost invited and challenged to conform ourselves to the person of Christ. So much so each one of us should be able to exclaim along with Paul, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20) and life to me is Christ (Phil 1:21). We are, in other words, invited to live the same kind of life that Christ lived (1 Jn 2:3-11); to live a holy life just as he who called us is holy (1 Jn 3:1-9).

BEING WITH JESUS: WORD OF GOD AND THE EUCHARIST

As we have already stated above, the whole purpose of being with Jesus is to conform ourselves to him. Now how does this become possible? Sacred Scripture tells us that it is by our encounter with him in the Word and the Eucharist. We continue to encounter the Word become flesh, Jesus, daily in the Word proclaimed and listened to and the Eucharist, which is the daily miracle of bread becoming flesh. If the Word becomes flesh in Bethlehem, house of bread, at the moment of the Incarnation, the bread becomes flesh, in the upper room during the Last Supper and the miracle continues every day at the Eucharist. The word and the Eucharist, therefore, could be seen as two sides of the same coin.

The post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* brings out very clearly this link between the Word and Eucharist. Speaking of the relationship between the Word of God and the Eucharist, the document says: "John's Prologue is brought to a deeper level. There God's *Logos* became flesh, but here this flesh becomes "bread" given for the life of the world (cf. Jn 6:51), with an allusion to Jesus' self-gift in

the mystery of the cross, confirmed by the words about his blood being given as drink (cf. Jn 6:53). The mystery of the Eucharist reveals the true manna, the true bread of heaven: it is God's *Logos* made flesh, who gave himself up for us in the paschal mystery."⁸

The document further notes the profound unity of the Word and the Eucharist and this unity, the document says, is grounded in the witness of scripture. The link between the two is beautifully brought out in the story of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the company of the stranger who interrupted their journey and opened the treasures of the Scriptures to them, "the two disciples began to look at the Scriptures in a new way. ... What had taken place in those days no longer appeared to them as failure, but as fulfilment and a new beginning. And yet, apparently not even these words were enough for the two disciples. The Gospel of Luke relates that "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (24:31) only when Jesus took the bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them, whereas earlier "their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (24:16). The presence of Jesus, first with his words and then with the act of breaking bread, made it possible for the disciples to recognize him. Now they were able to appreciate in a new way all that they had previously experienced with him: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Lk 24:32)⁹. What is more, the document affirms the truth that Word and Eucharist are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the Word of God sacramentally takes flesh in the event of the Eucharist. The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist."¹⁰

CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE WORD OF GOD

Jesus makes it abundantly clear that no one can be his disciple without listening to his word and eating his body. "If you live in my word" Jesus says, "you will indeed be my disciples." Listening to the Word and eating the body of Christ are according to John the evangelist indispensable for a disciple of Christ. One is a disciple if he "listens to the Lord and puts His words into practice (cf. Mt 7:24) and it is the observance of his commandments which concretizes love for him and draws the love of the Father (cf. Jn 14:21)."¹¹

WORD OF GOD AND ORIGIN OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Consecrated life is, essentially, a response to the Word of God.¹² With regard to the consecrated life, the Synod on the Word of God recalled that it "is born from hearing the Word of God and embracing the Gospel as its rule of life". A life

devoted to following Christ in his chastity, poverty and obedience thus becomes “a living ‘exegesis’ of God’s word”. The Holy Spirit, in whom the Bible was written, is the same Spirit who illumines “the word of God with new light for the founders and foundresses. Every charism and every rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it”, thus opening up new pathways of Christian living marked by the radicalism of the Gospel.¹³ It was the Holy Spirit who sparked the Word of God with new light for the founders and foundresses. Every charism and every rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it.¹⁴

In his homily on February 2, 2011 Pope Benedict XVI reminded the religious that consecrated life is a living exegesis of the Word of God. Dear brothers and sisters, he said, be assiduous listeners of the Word, because every wisdom of life is born of the Word of the Lord! Be scrutinizers of the Word, through *Lectio Divina*, because consecrated life “is born from listening to the Word of God and accepting the Gospel as its norm of life. To live following the chaste, poor and obedient Christ is in this way a living “exegesis” of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit, in the strength of which the Bible was written, is the same who illumines the Word of God to men and women founders with new light. From it flows every charism and every rule is an expression of it, giving origin to itineraries of Christian life marked by evangelical radicalism.”¹⁵

WORD OF GOD AND SPIRITUALITY

The importance of the word of God cannot be restricted to the origin of consecrated life. The word of God has been central to the living out of religious life at all epochs of history and continues to be so in our times. This is the truth that is reiterated again and again in church documents. The first great principle of renewal of consecrated life, Second Vatican council had already indicated, is a return to the Word of God, a return to the Gospel. The word of God is nourishment for life, for prayer and for the daily journey, the principle which unifies the community in oneness of thought, the inspiration for ongoing renewal and apostolic creativity.¹⁶ And Pope John Paul II in the post Synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, stated: “The Word of God is the first source of all Christian spirituality. It gives rise to a personal relationship with the living God and with his saving and sanctifying will. It is for this reason that from the very beginning of Institutes of consecrated life, and in a special way in monasticism, what is called *lectio divina* has been held in the highest regard. By its means the Word of God is brought to bear on life, on which it projects the light of that wisdom which is a gift of the Spirit.”¹⁷ Holiness is inconceivable without a renewed listening to the word of God. In *Novo Millennio*

Ineunte, we read: “It is especially necessary that listening to the Word of God should become a life giving encounter [...] which draws from the biblical text the living Word which questions, directs and shapes our lives.”¹⁸ It is there, in fact, where the Master reveals himself and educates the mind and the heart: It is there that the vision of faith matures, learning to look at reality and events through the eyes of God, to the point of having “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).¹⁹

THE WORD CONFORMS US TO CHRIST

The synod on the Word of God called for a “faith-filled reading of the Bible.” In fact “the great monastic tradition has always considered meditation on sacred Scripture to be an essential part of its specific spirituality, particularly in the form of *lectio divina*.”²⁰ In continuity with the monastic tradition and in continuity with founders and foundresses the consecrated men and women today are “called to take up the Word of God and to cherish it in their hearts so that it may be a lamp for their feet and a light for their path (cf. Ps 118:105). The Holy Spirit will then be able to lead them to the fullness of truth (cf. Jn 16:13).”²¹ In recent years, within communities and in groups of consecrated men and women as well as in the whole church, pope John Paul II acknowledged in his homily on 2 February 2001, there is a more lively and immediate contact with the Word of God. Resonating with his recommendation in *Starting Afresh from Christ*, he said: “You must not tire of meditating on Holy Scripture and above all on the Gospels so that they can imprint upon you the features of the Incarnate Word.”²²

CONSECRATED TO BE SERVANTS OF THE WORD

It is the task of consecrated persons to be servants of the Word. Consecrated men and women can become authentic servants of the word in the work of Evangelisation only when they have been conformed to the Gospels. For this to happen, they, “in the first place, should have recourse daily to the Holy Scriptures in order that, by reading and meditating on Holy Writing, they may learn ‘the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ’ (Phil 3:8)”²³ and find renewed energy in their work of instruction and evangelization, especially among the poor, the lowly and the least, through the writings of the New Testament, “especially the Gospels, which are ‘the heart of all the Scriptures.’”²⁴ If this is done we will be able to “rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost.”²⁵

CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE EUCHARIST

For Catholics, and indeed for a great many Christians, the Eucharist has always been and is one of the most important and vital aspects of their lives.²⁶ There is a story told of Christians on trial in an early third-century persecution of the Church in North Africa (at Abitina). The judges clearly thought the Christians were out of their minds since they were willing to die for what they believed in, but they showed that they weren't dying for a set of ideas as much as for the Lord himself when they responded, "But we cannot live without what we do on the Lord's Day." In other words, "we cannot live without our weekly celebration of the Eucharist."²⁷

The Eucharist is the heart of the Church and the consecrated life²⁸ and "is the most precious possession which the Church can have in her journey through history."²⁹ Where Eucharistic life flourishes, there the life of the church will blossom. These are words which concern the very essence of the Eucharist. Behold, Christ came into the world to bestow upon man divine life. He not only proclaimed the Good News but He also instituted the Eucharist which is to make present until the end of time His redeeming mystery.³⁰ He perpetuates his presence amidst us in the form of bread and wine so that he can become our food and drink. "My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink" (Jn 6:55). If food and drink are required to sustain our life here on earth, it is the Eucharist that opens the way to our life in Christ, the eternal life. Jesus has given us this assurance in the Eucharistic discourse that we find in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. Jesus presents himself as the bread that came down from heaven. "I am the living bread which has come down from heaven" he says, "whoever eats this bread will live for ever. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (Jn 6:51, 54). By consuming the Body and Blood of Christ, man bears within himself, already on this earth, the seed of eternal life, for the Eucharist is the sacrament of life in God. Christ says: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me (Jn 6:57)."³¹

It becomes all the more important in the life of the consecrated who are called to be with the Lord and thereby to be conformed to him. To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of his body and his blood. The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened.³² And so at the conclusion of the Apostolic Letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, Pope John Paul II invited the consecrated men and women to a more prolonged contemplation of the Eucharist. "Never forget that Jesus in the tabernacle wants you to be at his side, so that he can fill your hearts with the

experience of his friendship, which gives meaning and fulfilment to your lives.”³³ “The presence of Jesus in the tabernacle must be a kind of magnetic pole attracting an ever greater number of souls enamoured of him, ready to wait patiently to hear his voice and, as it were, to sense the beating of his heart.”³⁴

Why is the Eucharist so important for us? It encompasses many facets of our life as religious. The Eucharist is an answer to many of the values that are being lost today: presence, self-sacrifice, communion, thanksgiving, memorial, etc. Our daily participation in the Eucharist should enable us to be conformed into the likeness of the one that we are receiving. Through the Eucharist we become aware of the truth that God is truly with us; We are conformed to him and challenged as we participate in his self-offering to become persons who are capable of breaking our own bodies and shedding our own blood for the sake of others; to overcome the barriers that divide us and become, as Augustine says, what we truly are, the Body of Christ; Remembering all that he has done for us and through us we raise up our minds in humble gratitude.

EUCCHARIST: ‘BEING WITH’, IN ORDER TO BE CONFORMED

Vita consecrata had already identified the Eucharist as “the source of spirituality both for individuals and for communities.”³⁵ In the Eucharist, we could say, all forms of prayer come together, the Word of God is proclaimed and received. Through it, is established once again our relationship with God and with one another. It is the Sacrament of filiation, of communion and of mission. The Eucharist, the Sacrament of unity with Christ, is at the same time the Sacrament of Church unity and community unity for the consecrated persons. These are the elements most necessary for any meaningful spirituality for the consecrated. No wonder Pope John Paul II would say without any hesitation, “giving a priority place to spirituality means starting afresh from the rediscovered centrality of the Eucharistic celebration, a privileged place of encounter with the Lord. There he once again makes himself present in the midst of the disciples, he explains the Scriptures, he warms the heart and enlightens the mind, he opens eyes and allows himself to be recognized (cf. Lk 24:13-35).”³⁶

For Pope John Paul II, one cannot be a disciple of Christ, unless he or she is able to lean on the breast of Jesus like the beloved disciple. “It is pleasant,” according to him, “to spend time with him, to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple (cf. Jn 13:25) and feel the infinite love present in his heart.”³⁷ In a letter, titled *Eucharist: Sacrament to be Adored*, written to the bishop of Liege, on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the institution of the feast of *Corpus Christi*, he spoke along similar

lines. “It is invaluable to converse with Christ, and leaning against Jesus’ breast like his beloved disciple, we can feel the infinite love of his Heart. We learn to know more deeply the One who gave Himself totally, in the different mysteries of his divine and human life, so that we may become disciples and in turn enter into this great act of giving, for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.”³⁸

There are, as we have already stated above, two dimensions to this being with the ‘God who is Word’ and with the ‘Word become Flesh’ who has become bread for us. Christian tradition bears witness to both these ways of being with the Eucharistic presence. In the first place every disciple is invited to be in the presence of the Eucharistic Lord. This first form of ‘being with’ is in view of the second form of ‘being with,’ or rather results in the second way of ‘being with.’ This second form of ‘being with’ is a gradual transformation into the likeness of the one whose was contemplated and whose flesh and blood were consumed. St. Augustine said, “Behold what you are, become what you receive.” When receiving the host and holding it in our hands indeed we have the opportunity to ‘behold him,’ later when I receive him into my body, the possibility of becoming his body is opened up to me.

It is almost impossible for us to separate these two dimensions of being with. In his message for the world day of consecrated life 2005, Pope John Paul II said that the Eucharist is at the heart of the process of renewal that religious and consecrated persons have been living since the Second Vatican Council. “The secret of this spiritual ardour is the Eucharist, inexhaustible source of fidelity to the Gospel, because in this sacrament, centre of ecclesial life, is fully realized the profound identification and total conformation with Christ, to which consecrated men and women are called.”³⁹ In receiving the Eucharist we enter into a profound communion with Jesus. It’s a moment of mutual abiding: “abide in me, and I in you” (Jn 15:4). The disciples on their way to Emmaus say “stay with us Lord” and this request is granted to them. He not only stayed with them, he also found a way of staying in them thus giving them even more than what they had asked.⁴⁰ “Eucharistic communion brings about in a sublime way the mutual ‘abiding’ of Christ and each of his followers.”⁴¹ Summing up, therefore, we could say, ‘following Christ, for us, is not an outward imitation, since it touches us at the very depths of his being’⁴² We are called to learn from him, gradually to be conformed to him, to let the Spirit act within us and to fulfil the mission entrusted to us.

CONSECRATED TO LIVE EUCHARISTIC LIFE

For us consecrated men and women encounter with the Eucharistic Lord in

contemplation and in Eucharistic communion and the consequent gradual conformity with Christ are in view of the mission. *Vita Consecrata* tells us that the mission of the consecrated “consists in making Christ present to the world through personal witness. This is the challenge, this is the primary task of the consecrated life! The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in the world for the salvation of all.”⁴³ What better way to conform ourselves to Christ than the daily celebration of the Eucharist. In the metaphor of the vine and branches, the verb ‘remain’ or ‘abide’ is used 11 times. According to Jose Varickasseril, “this is Jesus’ way of explaining an important aspect of the Eucharist.” Jesus is telling us how through the Eucharist we become one with him. “One is not only attached to Jesus through the Eucharist but he becomes a part of the person of Jesus. An intense relationship is established in and through the Eucharist.”⁴⁴ Eucharist, then, could be seen as the *viaticum* for the life of consecration.

What is more, the need of this bread for the journey of consecrated persons is proportionate to the measure of their commitment in the mission. Closeness to Christ rather than distancing us from our contemporaries is to make us more and more open and sensitive to their needs. “Every commitment to holiness, every activity aimed at carrying out the Church’s mission, every work of pastoral planning, must draw the strength it needs from the Eucharistic mystery and in turn be directed to that mystery as its culmination.”⁴⁵ A passionate invitation of Pope John Paul II in the homily on the *day of the consecrated* in 2001 and repeated again the document *Starting Afresh from Christ* is very revealing: “My dearest ones, encounter him and contemplate him in a very special way in the Eucharist, celebrated and adored every day as source and summit of existence and apostolic action.”⁴⁶

We know that the account of the Last Supper in the Gospel of John does not contain a narrative of the institution of the Eucharist, as the synoptic Gospels do. What we have instead is the account of Jesus washing the feet of the apostles with the subsequent instruction to wash the feet of one another after his example: “I have given you an example: as I have done to you, you also must do” (13:15). Therefore, the injunction of Christ, “do this in memory of me,” repeated at every celebration of the Eucharist, embraces both the breaking of the bread and the ongoing service of others.”⁴⁷

Robert Imbelli would call the self, emerging from the encounter with Christ in the Eucharist, as Eucharistic self. “The deeds that flow from such a Eucharistic self are deeds of service, in solidarity with the neediest members of Christ’s body. The participants in the Eucharist are sent forth to undertake works of justice and peace

that help provide the human conditions for genuine thanksgiving.”⁴⁸ The Eucharistic self that emerges from the Eucharist has to resemble Christ of the Paschal mystery, whose characteristic is self-giving. Much of the in-depth meaning of the Eucharist would be lost, as observed by Joseph Varicksseril, if the self-giving aspect of the Eucharist is lost. “Those who partake of the Eucharist are also invited to re-live this dimension of the Eucharist, namely, to learn to give oneself in the service of others and for the benefit of others.”⁴⁹ “If we truly understand the Eucharist; if we make the Eucharist the central focus of our lives; if we feed our lives with the Eucharist, we will not find it difficult to discover Christ, to love him, and to serve him in the poor” (St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta).

CONSECRATED LIFE: LEARNING FROM THE EMMAUS STORY AND EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The post resurrection narratives recount to us the experiences various persons had of the Risen Jesus. A common feature of these narratives is that the meal or the breaking of the bread becomes the moment of recognition. Moreover, the risen one disappears from the scene once his presence is recognised. Among these the Emmaus story has a unique place. The stranger who joined them on the road is eventually recognised as the Lord at the table in the simple gesture of breaking the bread. It is important to note that the two have been slowly prepared for this through the Scripture and the offer of hospitality. Their hearts as they themselves affirm are set on fire with the Word of God. “Were not our hearts burning within us when he was talking to us and explaining the scriptures?” (Lk 24:32).

As John Nolland observes, “the minds are informed and the hearts are touched”⁵⁰ and the result is an encounter with the Risen One. “When minds are enlightened and hearts are enkindled, signs begin to speak,” notes Pope John Paul II.⁵¹ The breaking of the Word and the breaking of the bread have just one goal, lead one to an encounter with the Risen Jesus, recognition of the Risen One. Ultimately it is this that sets one on the mission. The two disciples, having recognised Jesus, immediately got up and returned to Jerusalem to report what they had heard and seen (Lk 24:33). Celebration of the Eucharist urges the celebrants to move out. The encounter with the risen one in the Eucharist is, as *Mane Nobiscum Domine* suggests, “an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization.”⁵² Paul had already established this principle, when he wrote in the first letter to the Corinthians “whenever you eat of this bread and drink from this cup you are proclaiming the death of the Lord.” (1 Cor 11:26)

We have probably two of the earliest, ideal images of the church in the Acts of the Apostles (2:42; 4:32). In the first we are told, the believers “devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.” Acts 4:32 presents a community of believers who are of one in mind and heart a model for the church in every age. The community of believers devoted themselves to four practices, which can be seen as hallmarks of the early church: fidelity to the teaching of the apostles; fellowship; breaking of the bread and prayer, the four together forming the Eucharist of the early Christian communities. One cannot think of the breaking of the bread without the word, fellowship and prayers. Such Eucharistic celebrations become indispensable for the being of the community. “Without the Eucharist, a Christian community would wither, fade and gradually cease to exist.”⁵³

CONCLUSION

The little prince is on his journey exploring the universe. His journey takes him to a garden all a-bloom with roses. He is overcome with sadness, because on his planet he had a rose flower that had assured him that she was the only one of a kind in all the universe and now before him were five thousand roses, all alike in one single garden. He is dejected and lay down on the grass and cried. Then there appears the fox and the two enter into a conversation, once the little prince invites the fox to play with him.

“I cannot play with you,” the fox said, “I am not tamed.”

“What does that mean – tame?”

“It means to establish ties!”

“To establish ties?”

“Just that!”

If we tame each other I will not be just one of the foxes and you will not be just one of the men for me.

“What must I do to tame you?” asked the prince.

“You must be very patient.” “First you will sit down at a little distance from me — like that in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words you know, are a source of misunderstandings. But you will sit little closer to me every day.”

The next day when they came together the fox said,

“It would have been better to come back at the same hour. If for example, you come at four o’clock in the afternoon, then at three o’clock I shall begin to be happy. I shall feel happier and happier as the hour advances. At four o’clock, I shall be already worrying and jumping about. But if you come at just any time, I shall never know at what hour my heart is to be ready to greet you. One must observe proper rites.”⁵⁴

The vocation to be a religious is a call to be tamed by the Lord; to be tamed by the Lord by contemplating him and listening to his words. Taming or establishing ties as affirmed by the fox is a patient exercise which calls for a presence to each other and rituals are not out of place in such encounters, nay they are a requisite. If we are to be tamed by the Lord, we need to find a time and a place to contemplate his face in the Eucharist/ Eucharistic presence and to listen to his Word.

Endnotes

¹ POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, Vatican, 1996, 63.

² POPE JOHN PAUL II, *John Paul II Speaks to Religious*, Book X (1997-1998), compiled by JEAN BEYER, London 1998, 75.

³ *Ibid.*, p.80.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.108.

⁵ THOMAS GROOME, “Parents and Communion: Lifting the Veil”, *C21 Resources* (fall 2011) 9-10.

⁶ FRANCIS, *Witnesses of Joy*, Vatican 2014, 16-18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸ *Verbum Domini*, 54.

⁹ *Verbum Domini*, 54.

¹⁰ *Verbum Domini*, 55.

¹¹ CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, “Instruction: The Service of Authority and Obedience, 11 May 2008, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Verbum Domini* 83.

¹⁴ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 24.

¹⁵ *Verbum Domini* 83

¹⁶ *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2. See also, *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 24.

¹⁷ *Vita Consecrata*, 94. See also, *Starting Afresh from Christ* 24; Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church: *Instrumentum Laboris*, 52.

¹⁸ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 39. See also, *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 24.

¹⁹ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 24.

²⁰ *Verbum Domini*, 83.

²¹ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 24.

²² John Paul II, Homily (2 February 2001): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 2001; *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 24.

²³ *Perfectae Caritatis*, 6

²⁴ *Vita Consecrata*, 94; See also, Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church: *Instrumentum Laboris*, 52.

²⁵ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 24; *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40.

²⁶ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 3.

²⁷ JOHN F. BALDOVIN, "Eucharist: The Many-Faceted Jewell", *C21 Resources* (Fall 2011) 2.

²⁸ *Vita Consecrata*, 95.

²⁹ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 9.

³⁰ English translation of the Homily given in Polish by Pope John Paul II, at the close of the Eucharistic Congress in Wroclaw. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 June 1997.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 6.

³³ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 30.

³⁴ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 18.

³⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, 95.

³⁶ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 26.

³⁷ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 25.

³⁸ Pope John Paul II's 1996 letter to the Bishop of Liege titled "Eucharist: Sacrament to be Adored". The letter was written on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the first celebration of the Feast of *Corpus Christi*, 5.

³⁹ Zenit.org, February 4, 2005.

⁴⁰ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 19.

⁴¹ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 22.

⁴² *Veritatis Splendor*, 21.

⁴³ *Vita Consecrata*, 72.

⁴⁴ JOSE VARICKASSERIL, “Eucharist: Pastoral Reflections from a Biblical Perspective”, *Salesian Animation Notes* 15/1 (2005) 15.

⁴⁵ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 60.

⁴⁶ *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 26.

⁴⁷ ROBERT IMBELLI, “The Sacrament of Real Presence,” *C21 Resources*, 9.

⁴⁸ ROBERT IMBELLI, “The Sacrament of Real Presence, *C21 Resources*, 9.

⁴⁹ JOSE VARICKASSERIL, “Eucharist: Pastoral Reflections from a Biblical Perspective,” 15.

⁵⁰ JOHN NOLLAND, as cited in JOSE VARICKASSERIL, 18.

⁵¹ *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 14.

⁵² *Ibid*,

⁵³ JOSE VARICKASSERIL, 20.

⁵⁴ This is an excerpt from, *The Little Prince*, a classic by Antoine de Saint Exupery.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY – A PLACE FOR BECOMING REAL BROTHERS AND SISTERS (FORMATION FOR FRATERNAL LIFE IN COMMUNITY)

Antony Bhyju, CMF

INTRODUCTION

The Synod on *New Evangelization* had asked religious to be witnesses of the humanizing power of the Gospel through a life of communion in community. During the *Year of Consecrated Life* Pope Francis challenged the Consecrated persons to live the present with passion by becoming “experts in communion”, “witnesses and architects of the ‘plan for unity’ which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design”. Through community, we can be helped to discover our truest and deepest selves. In the same way, the profound social orientation of the human heart, though denied by some, nonetheless gives each of us a deep desire for support of shared ideals and vision. The lonely life of a radical individualist is finally, at a deep inner level, neither very satisfying nor so happily abundant as it could be. There is both an intense desire for an improved quality of communal life and a sense of fear or resistance surrounding it. Candidates entering religious congregations today are very much influenced by the post-modern radical individualism, selfie culture, excessive use of social media, etc., but at the same time we find in them also a hunger for meaningful community. And so the person is caught up in this ambivalence and it is also reflected in the quality of life lived by religious in the present time. Many begin to question the relationship between community life and mission, their relevance and importance. A lot of energy is spent in questions of power and authority in the community and members find the exercise frustrating as the quality of their participation in the apostolic work suffers.

The challenging issue for contemporary religious communities is not lifestyle, i.e., whether religious live in large groups, small groups, inter-cultural groups, inter-congregationally or singly. The real issue is community, the psycho-socio-spiritual

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unity of minds and hearts in Christ which is theologically essential to Christian life as such and to which religious life is explicitly committed to bear a particular witness. By focusing on the real issue, namely community, we can perhaps discern more clearly what formation for contemporary community and preparation for diverse lifestyles require. New members in religious institutes must, before all else, be interiorly formed for community life in all its theological, spiritual, social, ministerial and affective density. But obviously, it is also important to prepare them, insofar as that is possible in view of the rapidly changing social world in which we live, for the variety of lifestyles in which they may eventually participate. In this paper an effort is made to present certain aspects of formation for community life from a psycho-spiritual perspective.

1. THE GOAL OF FORMATION

The document *Potissimum Institutioni*¹ states very clearly: “The formation of candidates, which has as its immediate end that of introducing them to religious life and making them aware of its specific character within the Church, will primarily aim at assisting men and women religious realize their unity of life in Christ through the Spirit, by means of the harmonious fusion of its spiritual, apostolic, doctrinal, and practical elements” (1). The Post-Synodal document *Vita Consacrata*² (65) further states: “formation should involve the whole person, in every aspect of the personality, in behaviour and intentions. Precisely because it aims at the transformation of the whole person, it is clear that the commitment to formation *never ends*. Indeed, at every stage of life, consecrated persons must be offered opportunities to grow in their commitment to the charism and mission of their Institute”.

It is the community which is entrusted with the task of formation, and not only that, formation happens *in* the community, and it is *for* the life and mission of the community that the person is formed. A community is formative to the extent that it permits each one of its members to grow in fidelity to the Lord according to the charism of his or her institute. Initiation into the joys and hardships of community life takes place in the community itself. Through the fraternal life each one learns to live with those whom God has put at his or her side, accepting their positive traits along with their differences and limitations.

Church document *Fraternal Life in Community*³ beautifully states: “community becomes *Schola Amoris*, a School of Love, for young people and for adults — a school in which all learn to love God, to love the brothers and sisters with whom they live, and to love humanity, which is in great need of God’s mercy and of fraternal solidarity” (25). The document further states: “Because religious community is a

Schola Amoris [...] it is also a place for human growth” (35). Therefore, the task of formative community is making it a place where the formees can expand their potential for love — love for God and the neighbours.

Precisely because it is important in the context of perseverance and of insertion into community life, the dialectical relationship between the individual and the life in community can be seen as discriminating criteria for *vocational discernment*. The ability to face the difficulties of fraternal relations and to grow spiritually and humanly in response to the challenges present in living with others and in relationship to the demands of the community can be an indication, although not the only one, that helps the young persons in formation and their formators to understand to what degree the person is making the values of consecrated life one’s own.

2. THE MEDIATING ROLE OF THE FORMATOR

Vita Consecrata while elaborating on the work of those responsible for formation states: “God the Father, through the unceasing gift of Christ and the Spirit, is the educator *par excellence* of those who consecrate themselves to him. But in this work he makes use of human instruments, placing more mature brothers and sisters at the side of those whom he calls” (66). The one who serves in such a ministry of formation is placed as a mediator between God’s action and the human response and must therefore be one who knows well both the human and the divine heart. The formator must be attentive to the action of grace but also capable of recognizing what opposes that action in the human person.

The formator may play his/her role of mediation in three forms: “the apostolate of example, the apostolate of service, and help directly given to candidate in solving personal problems”.⁴ It is well known that action speaks louder than words. The formees will get more help from a formator who gives what he/she is rather than from giving what one *knows*. Lived example can have a strong influence on the formees. At various times interaction with the formee needs to be social, spiritual, and didactic. There needs to be sufficient and frequent enough time allotted to the formee so that he/she may develop a deeper relationship with the formator and learn from him/her as a role model. Thus, the formator will need to be comfortable with one’s own needs and secure in the way he/she maturely handles them.⁵

The formator has to learn how to *discern* in the formee the presence of conflicts and immaturity, even those which are not immediately evident. It is indispensable that a formator knows how to perceive beyond purely observable behaviour to the deeper motivations, the underlying needs, the hidden tensions, etc. For it is precisely

at this level that one grasps the degree of freedom and consistency of the one being formed and discovers the real root of a problem so as to intervene effectively.

By means of the individual formation sessions (also known as *Vocational Growth Sessions*),⁶ the formator ought to be able to help the person to *discover* his or her own immaturity and vulnerability as well as identify the causes and consequences. The formation journey ought to bring the person in formation to the point of grasping a method by which he or she can learn to know the self and understand from where certain mental states, propensities and difficulties arise.

As in any group, in religious community too we find certain dynamics present. The community can exert pressure on a formee to change behaviour, but at the same time the formee also influences the community when change occurs. This could be considered as the “dynamic interaction between the intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics of needs, attitudes and values”.⁷ And these dynamic aspects determine the perseverance and effectiveness of each member in the religious community. It also affects the formation process. The formator needs to attend to this unconscious dynamic occurring within the community. Gaining this knowledge increases the likelihood of both personal and communal growth. If the dynamics within the community are not recognized and understood, problems will arise that have the potential to destroy the community and negatively influence the formation environment. I would mainly focus on this aspect of community dynamics in this paper.

3. METHOD OF FORMATION

The method a formator uses to influence the formee is important. The formator could use the method of *Reward and Punishment* in which the formee could respond out of fear and external compulsion. *Love Withdrawal* or giving and withholding affection and appreciation could be the second way in which the formee would respond only to have a good relationship with the formator. Thirdly the *Process of Induction*, namely explaining the relationship between action and its consequences so that the formee learns to take responsibility not only for his/her actions but also the consequences of their actions.⁸ Obviously the third method would be the most suitable for enhancing the process of internalization and transformation compared to the previous two which at best would only touch external behaviour without touching one’s attitudes. The third method encourages the exercise of freedom with responsibility meaning to say that the formee acts freely from within, without fear or favour; yet with responsibility for one’s vocational ideals and towards one’s superiors, companions, etc.

4. COMMUNITY

A Christian community can be defined as “a small group of persons who come together on a regular basis to foster their spiritual, personal, and/or apostolic growth”.⁹ Etymologically, the essence of community, “union with” or “common” connotes an in-depth recognition of a union that is shared by all the members of a particular group. So the real essence of community is: union of minds and hearts.¹⁰ And if we take it further to understand what a religious community is, the following characteristics can give an integral view: consecration, charismatic nature, the common life, and the grace of being together. The primary characteristic of the religious community is the fact that it is a community of consecrated people, i.e., the religious community is composed of people who have built their lives around the evangelical counsels as a particular way for perfecting charity. A second characteristic feature of the religious community comes from its being a charismatic community. This evolves from a common call to share the same charism with other brothers and sisters. At the root of every religious family is the particular experience of the founder or foundress. The third element is the life in common, which gives ecclesial communion a specific pattern of its own, making it visible in a stable common life. And the fourth element is concerned with how the relationship between its members is established. And so we can say that the religious community possesses a particular identity of its own in the ecclesial communion because it is composed of people consecrated by vows, its specific charism gives it particular feature of its own, it practices a concrete and stable common life, and it does not possess any prior human bonds – relations between its members are motivated only by the call of grace.¹¹

5. DIFFERENT MODELS OF COMMUNITY

In the context of formation for fraternal life it would be rather enlightening to ask one’s self what model of fraternal life one has. Some examples are as follows: a) **community of observance**: the needs of every member of the community are subordinated and adapted to those of the community itself. What is important is that each person performs the roles assigned to them by those in authority. In this model the individual is seen as the bearer of responsibility and freedom. All that counts is the “set of rules” to be observed. Soon members will experience frustration; b) a **community of self-fulfillment**: the community is seen solely in relationship to the needs of the individuals. Everything revolves around the individual. The community functions only if its members are happy. But the goal of consecrated life is not self-fulfillment but self-transcendence, i.e. detachment from oneself in order

to reach the ultimate objective that is God and c) **community for the Kingdom:** community is the place in which each one can make his/her own life conform to that of Christ and the Gospel. Being together is not an end in itself but is a means for building the Kingdom. The community is also a place of transcendence where it encourages the individuals to a total love of God and one another. So it is important that those involved in the ministry of formation clarify their model of community so as to accompany those under their care in an appropriate and effective way. Now let us proceed to understand community dynamics.

6. UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

My personal experience of living in different communities, especially formation communities, indicates that every community experience has the potential either to be life-giving or life-draining. It mostly depends on how well the members understand the normal group dynamics that occur in any community. Since community is a group, anyone wishing to be effective needs to be trained and knowledgeable about the dynamics that occur in all groups. So I present here certain community dynamics from developmental and dynamic perspective.

6.1 Stages of Community Development

According to Hammett, Juliano and Sofield,¹² all groups go through fairly predictable stages, and local religious communities are no exception to this fact. The term stage here refers to the steps that one goes through in a developmental process. And stages needs always to be viewed as helpful guides, never as definitive facts. Understanding stages through which communities move is important for the following reasons: first of all it allows us to identify where a community is developmentally at any given time. The frustration of many persons in community comes from the fact that the community is not where the members would like it to be. Secondly, realizing that stages are universal and that all groups pass through them often helps to relieve some of the anxiety felt by community members. Thirdly, once persons are aware of the stages, they are able to name what they are experiencing, thereby making it less frightening. Understanding the dynamics will free persons to communicate more openly and honestly. A community can become *fixated* at any stage; and communities can *regress* to an earlier stage. We should not expect all the members of a community to be at exactly the same stage. Now let us proceed to understand each stage briefly.

The initial stage of a community involves *orientation*. In this stage the members seek to discover what norms are acceptable and unacceptable within the group. In

the early stages, groups are often a source of anxiety and discomfort. Each person, overtly or covertly, anticipates rejection by the group. It may be communicated through silence, defensiveness, or any of the many ways we characteristically deal with fear. At this stage, it is important that community members become aware of and clarify their expectations. The formators and superiors need to facilitate this process. Only when individuals feel safe and secure will they proceed to the next stage.

The community then enters into a second stage, *inclusion-exclusion*. The transition to this stage happens at an unconscious level. Members begin to sort out those who are “in” and those who are “out” according to their unconscious preferences, and accordingly they feel either a sense of belonging or alienation. The need to feel a sense of belonging is a powerful drive, and when this basic need is frustrated, the normal reactions are *fight* or *flight*. Members who feel alienated may revert to neurotic behaviour to attain this need satisfaction. If a community is to move beyond this stage, it must establish a climate of safety in which those who are feeling alienated are able to ask questions that will help them feel more like members of the group.

Next is the *up-down* stage, the period during which the community establishes a hierarchy among the members. Members begin to test out their influence in the group, usually at a subtle or unconscious level. And the predominant need at this stage is for esteem, both self-esteem and the esteem of others. Competitive behaviour is evident at this time and conversations within the community centre on personal accomplishments and status. Formators and superiors need to discern the gifts of each member so that it may help to heighten the esteem and minimize the competitive climate in the community.

After the initial stages the community enters into another important and difficult stage, the stage of *conflict*. Conflicts can arise due to boundary issues,¹³ differences in the needs, expectations and values of each member and so on. Conflict is an extremely difficult issue for most people living in the community. At this stage some communities become stuck and tensions develop. Conflict is necessary — without that the group will not grow. Conflict is productive only when it is resolved. The willingness to embrace conflict demands a concrete act of the will, since the natural inclination is to avoid it. After the conflict, substantial energy must be directed towards fostering the process of forgiveness. The task of formators and superiors is to encourage the members to address the conflict.

When the community has begun to deal effectively with a conflict, it moves into the stage of *cohesiveness*. It refers to the condition of members feeling warmth and

comfort in the group, feeling they belong, that they are valued and unconditionally accepted and supported by other members. Cohesive groups are more productive, have a higher morale, and have better communication between members. Two negative trends may emerge at this stage: i) a tendency to “nest”, i.e., the community can become self-absorbed, focusing more on self-maintenance than on the call to mission and ii) a tendency to “group think”, i.e., a decision-making based more on the preservation of the peace and harmony of the community than on responding to Gospel imperative.

At the next stage, the community members actually begin to share faith openly and directly. By *faith sharing*, we mean more than just a group of people coming together to say the same prayers at the same time. It is a deeper sharing of their faith, i.e., their personal relationship with and experience of God. Faith sharing demands a climate of trust. After the community has dealt successfully with conflict and achieved a sense of relative cohesion, there is both a desire and a readiness to share faith. This stage is characterised by a general ambivalence, i.e., the desire to trust coupled with fear. Since resistance and fear of vulnerability operate to keep a person from actually sharing faith or prayer, breaking down these defences frees us to deal with or confront what we could not handle before. So the main task of formators and superiors at this stage is to create a climate where the members feel comfortable sharing this personal, intimate part of themselves.

Now the members are faced with the question of *intimacy* in community. This question often evokes a sense of ambivalence, anxiety and discomfort. As experience shows intimacy is probably the most stressful of all human experiences. In an intimate relationship we are called to step out from behind our facades and expose ourselves in the nakedness of our limitations, weaknesses, and poverties. To do this we need a great deal of love and trust. When intimacy is a reality in community, the persons mature. When it is resisted or denied as an issue, the persons will feel isolated. Genuine friendship with others is the stepping-off point for growing in intimacy with God. There may be members who, while desiring a high level of intimacy in community, experience constant frustration. They are expecting community to meet intimate needs that must first be met at a personal level. Given this spectrum, the task is to establish a level acceptable to all members.

The final stage in all groups is *termination*. Termination is usually a difficult and painful experience for the members of the community, especially if they have progressed through the above stages. Termination usually arouses in us a myriad of feelings, many of which are painful. It frequently recalls previous experiences of loss that have not been adequately dealt with or resolved. And so termination

precipitate ambivalent feelings. Persons find it too hard to talk about them directly and more often refer them in a symbolic ways. Opportunities need to be provided for persons to talk about their feelings in advance of the actual termination. Time is required to work through all the levels of feelings. It is important 1) that the community completes any unfinished business; 2) that the members relive and remember the positive community experiences that they have had; 3) that the members integrate what they have received from being part of the community by reflecting and sharing and 4) that members describe and express constructively their feelings about termination from the community. Unless a community proceeds through the process of termination, it will not allow new life to be generated within the community.

6.2 Transference and Counter-transference in Community

We have all noticed almost instantaneous reactions to a stranger, either positive or negative, before the other has said or done much of anything. And many times, we are not conscious of why we react that way we do. And Psychoanalytic literature has helped us to understand that it is due to the process called *transference*. Weiner explains the phenomenon of transference as follows:

Transference consists of the displacement of feelings, attitudes, or impulses experienced toward previous figures in a person's life onto current figures to whom they do not realistically apply. As such, transference participates to some extent in all interpersonal relationships, because the reactions of one person to another are always subject to the influence of prior interpersonal experience.¹⁴

We see the similar reactions happening in the religious communities too. The relationship between the superior of the community and its members can evoke such transference reactions. In the same way relationship between members of a religious community can set off schemata based on sibling interactions¹⁵, and there could be also the transference reaction between a smaller group and the larger congregation. Let us see how this process works between the superior and member in the community. Usually we approach the superiors thinking that they know or will know everything about us and will find us wanting. That is the way we felt about our parents when we were children. When we approach superiors with such feelings we are often nervous and guarded. And the superiors may sense it very well but may not know why so. When attacked by the transference reactions of the members, superiors can easily feel guilty because they did not act properly or perfectly. At such moments if the superior takes a defensive position, things may get out of hand. Trying to understand the person and making him/her understand the dynamic

may help.¹⁶ Many a time superiors can also distort relationships through *counter-transference*. Here counter-transference could be understood as “displacement by the [superior] onto a [member] of thoughts, feelings, and impulses that are not justified in reality by anything the [member] has said or done”.¹⁷ Here the superior might be reacting to the member out of an old experience he/she had with someone else. Here again the one is at the receiving end need to bring the feeling to the fore. It may not uncover the unconscious dynamic of the superior, but at least it can help both to bring the relationship onto a more realistic and perceptive footing.

The same dynamic could be also noticed among the members towards each other. Our identities, our values, even our perceptions of who we are and what relationships are all about are often inextricably bound up with our attitudes towards our brothers and sisters. Family systems theory brought to focus issues like importance of birth order, a child’s roles and identities in the family, the process of scapegoating, fusing of identities, excessive dependencies in unhealthy family systems, and similar issues. Dynamics that are part of family life replay themselves in religious community. In religious life, it is important to recognize that because of the varied life histories of the members, many different sets of expectations about ideal or intolerable behaviour are operating within the community. So we need to make these expectations conscious and explicit.

In community life changes in apostolate, governance, or life-style affect us all quite differently. Our viewpoints depend on our age, level of maturity, temperament and needs. As in childhood, we often find it difficult to express our needs and frustrations appropriately. And this affects our community life. Rivalries and jealousies may be carried over from sibling relationships. Attachments and dependencies work in the same way: they can be unwittingly transported into the community, unrecognized by many of the members. Awareness of the patterns forged in early relationships with siblings can be useful in understanding one’s own relationships in community.¹⁸ So sharing life in community presents to all of us a steady stream of opportunities and challenges to continue maturing our lives. Formators might benefit from a deeper understanding of the sibling bond.

6.3 Problem People in Communities

We are very much aware that every religious institute has some members who become so difficult and disruptive that they seriously disturb the peace and harmony of the community and inhibit its ability to carry out the apostolate and become life-giving communities. Many times the real issues are not addressed but the formation program is blamed for such a situation. The underlying problems of a

troubled religious were most certainly present when he or she entered the religious congregation. So it would be unfair to blame formation programs for creating paedophiles and sexual addicts, or avoidant, antisocial, or dependent personalities. But at the same time it would be good to probe whether such programs help exacerbate these problems or how they might fail to assist religious in dealing with the unhealthy aspects of their personalities. As with anyone in the society, religious can also develop personality disorders. Let us take a few examples. The *paranoid personalities* are overly sensitive religious who are easily hurt or offended. They keep everyone on edge; they feel persecuted, misunderstood, and abused. It is easy to understand why it is stressful to work or live with these difficult people.¹⁹ Members with *narcissistic personality* tend to be ruthless, grandiose, and exhibitionistic. They seek to dominate and control and are extremely exploitative. They lack empathy and are obsessed mainly with their own needs.²⁰ The *passive aggressive* members are noted for their resistance to demands for performance both in ministerial and interpersonal functioning. They follow a strategy of negativism, defiance, and provocation, and are unable to make up their minds as to whether to adhere to the demands of others or to resist their demands.²¹ We can add other personality disorders too to this list. So according to their intra-psychic dynamic they interact and affect the effectiveness of community living.

6.4 Celibacy, Intimacy and “Third Way” Mentality in Community

The question of intimacy pervades the life of any community and is an essential issue for the group to resolve in order to build community. Members bring to community their varying needs and experiences of intimacy. And this question of intimacy is very much connected to the vow of celibacy. Religious celibacy cannot be attractive and effective in the church unless it is seen as essentially involving a relationship of shared life and faith in religious community together with a distinctive relationship with God. But we see that many live this celibacy in a tension-ridden and joyless way. Many develop intimate, romantic relationships outside community which very much interferes with the life and apostolic effectiveness of the community. As in the family, when a religious community tries to handle conflicts by withdrawal of affect, i.e., by ceasing to emotionally communicate with each other, the members seek affective contacts outside the community. According to Aschenbrenner, we are gifted with a God-given seductiveness. “The celibate’s aim must not be to suppress or destroy this natural tendency, but to understand it and then to carefully adapt his or her expression of it. This adaptation is motivated and directed by the intimacy and decisive focus of a distinctive companionship with a loving God”.²²

An intimate relationship that carries a person to higher goals, to better behaviour, and to nobler thoughts obviously nourishes personality growth. There is an essential difference between intimacy that turns inward and feeds on itself and intimacy that enhances personal insight and encourages understanding of others. In religious life one must be willing to forgo the deepest human intimacy. One may find and cherish close friends, one may maintain and enrich family ties, one may love and be loved, but deep intimacy is not a characteristic of religious commitment. So it is important that those in community need to recognize the constraints on our intimate relationships.²³ Acknowledging those kinds of relationships that violate celibacy can help us to appreciate even more the clear and inspiring witness that celibacy is meant to be in all types of ministerial relationships. We should not think that genital sexual expression is the only, or even the chief, violation of celibacy. In these false forms of celibate relationship, it is often the unconscious aspects that are the most insidious. One such relationship is the romantic exclusivity of the *third way*. When this type of mentality takes over in a relationship, not only the celibate companionship with God obscured, but the celibate relationships in community and in ministry is impeded. To be without a marital partner is to bear a wounded emptiness as part of one's identity. But this wound need not force one to close in on one's self defensively; it can bring a salvific peace with one's own suffering because of a belief in God's love. This is no automatic development, however; it takes grace, faith, and much human development.²⁴

7. ELEMENTS AFFECTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

For community to be more life-giving a few vital issues need to be taken care of. The first element that needs our attention is the *psychosexual development* of the members. We see more and more that many members are psychosexually immature and thus incapable of living a generative, life-giving community life. Only individuals who have attained certain level of maturity have the capacity to contribute to and sustain the type of community that is desired. Two important elements in the psychosexual development: a sense of *personal identity* or a *capacity for intimacy*, both of which are prerequisites for becoming generative. Only when the psychosexual stages are attained is there an assurance that members will have the capacity to live and contribute to a life-giving community. The formation and training of the past often influenced against the accomplishment of these crucial developmental tasks. This is partially because individuals were encouraged not to develop a personal sense of identity but to define themselves by their title or role. Many defined self by their membership in a particular congregation. In addition,

developing one's capacity for intimacy was not encouraged. "Particular friendships" were frowned on and discouraged.

The next aspect that needs to be taken care of is the members' sensitivity towards the *dynamics of the community*. To the degree that these normal dynamics are understood and lived communities will be life-giving. When the dynamics go unnoticed or unattended, it is more likely that communities will be destructive. Ideally, all members of a community should be trained to understand stages of community development, defences in community, the dynamics of loss, and conflict management, etc.

The community to become a *life-giving* one three elements need to be taken care of. They are 1) the community members have a common approach to their mission; 2) they are able to engage in dialogue on a value level and 3) they are able to share faith, which implies that they are able to risk talking about God in their life.

Another important element that affects community development is the *self-esteem* of the members. When too many members of a community have underdeveloped self-esteem, the community is riddled with high levels of hostility and competitiveness. When most members of a community have fairly well-developed self-esteem, there is minimum of hostility and competitiveness, resulting in a more positive community experience.

The development of the community also depends on how they deal with *conflicts*. Communities develop only when the people involved have the willingness and capacity to deal with conflict. Until the members develop a greater comfort and confidence in dealing with conflict, communities are condemned to stagnation.

Another important and vital element is the members' ability to *forgive*. There is a direct correlation between community members' ability to forgive and seek forgiveness and the vitality of their community. Initiating the process of forgiveness inevitably seems to have positive repercussions. People choose not to forgive for numerous reasons, including lack of adequate models, failure to forgive oneself, and the desire to retain one's anger.

Next, the most successful communities are those in which the individual *gifts* of the members are identified, affirmed, and utilized. Communities that take time to acknowledge and affirm the giftedness of each member experience tangible results on many levels: the growth of the individuals, the improvement of community life, and the effectiveness of the ministry.

Finally, when individuals have had *positive experiences* of community, they will have positive beliefs and feelings in relation to community life. Negative experiences produce people who avoid community. Such people need to be provided with corrective emotional experiences. New, positive experiences can change people from resistance towards their participation in the community.²⁵

8. COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS TO BE FOSTERED DURING FORMATION

To form persons for community life demands that the formators focus on specific personal and social competencies and skills that are essential to live community life meaningfully and effectively. I present those competencies and skills briefly.

8.1 Personal and Social Competencies

Self-awareness is the fundamental personal competency a formee needs to cultivate during his/her journey of formation. Meister Eckhart says: “A human being has so many skins inside, covering the depths of the heart. We know so many things, but we don’t know ourselves! Why, thirty or forty skins, as thick and as hard as an ox’s or bear’s, cover the soul. Go into your ground and learn to know yourself there.” The more one is able to reflect honestly on one’s life and patterns of behaviour, the more one’s own self-awareness and mindfulness deepens. To facilitate the cultivation of this competence the formator can focus on a) *emotional awareness*, i.e. recognizing one’s emotions and their effects on self and others; b) *accurate self-assessment*, i.e. embracing one’s truest self with his/her strengths and limitations in a more balanced perspective and c) *self-confidence*, i.e. sureness about one’s self-worth and capabilities.

The next personal competency is *self-regulation*, which consists of a) *Self-control* that enables the formees to manage disruptive emotions and impulses such as anger, frustration etc., manages pressure situations well and having clarity of thought; b) *trustworthiness*, i.e. maintaining standards of honesty and integrity; c) *conscientiousness*: taking responsibility for personal performance by being accountable, meeting commitments and keeping promises; d) *adaptability* expressed through flexibility in handling change and e) *innovativeness*: being comfortable with and open to novel ideas and new information.

Another important competency that needs cultivation during the time of formation is *self-motivation* that can be seen in a) *achievement drive* by striving to improve or meet a standard of excellence; b) *commitment* that is achieved through aligning with the goals of the community and the congregation, and one’s capacity

to spend energy on the responsibility entrusted; c) *initiative*, i.e. readiness to act on opportunities and find new openings in difficult situations and d) *optimism* that is essential for persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks.

On the interpersonal level *social awareness* is very essential. The formators need to pay attention to the following competencies: a) *empathy*: understanding another from their frame of reference; it is fully and deeply understanding the other emotionally as well as intellectually; b) *service orientation*: anticipating, recognizing, and meeting the needs of those under one's care; c) *developing other* by sensing what others need in order to develop, and strengthening their abilities through mentoring and feedback and d) *intercultural sensitivity* that enables one to appreciate, enjoy and learn from the interaction with people of different cultures, customs, cults and languages.²⁶

8.2 Skills for Community life

Community living can be difficult. It is difficult for those who live in a community and must put up with the daily small annoyances and occasional major conflicts which close living necessarily involves. Cultivating certain social skills can enable members to be more sensitive and make community life joyful and smoother. Formators can offer opportunities to cultivate the following skills: i) skills for *mindfulness, centering and meditation* — pure attention and awareness to what *is* without judgment, attachment or fear that enables one to empty one's ego; ii) skills for *empathic listening* — someone has said, "God gave us two ears and one mouth so we would remember to listen twice as much as we speak." That two-to-one ratio seems right. The good listener in a religious community is a treasure indeed; iii) skills for *dialogue and communication* — communication is crucial to community living because it builds trust and can also help us to clarify and own our thoughts and feelings, provide encouragement, and ease our sense of isolation; iv) *conflict-resolution skills* — enable us to deal with the emotional turbulence that typically accompanies conflict. When good outcomes are achieved, these skills are likely to foster closer relationships in community; v) *leadership skills* — enables through a process of influence to persuade, enable, or empower others to pursue and achieve intended goals of a community and vi) skills for *team building* — creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals through valuing differences — to respect them, to build on strengths, to compensate for weaknesses, etc.

9. CERTAIN PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

From my experience in the field of formation I can offer a few best practices that can help the formators implement the ideas presented in this article. First of all it is

important to offer *courses on community dynamics* during the course of formation. A clear understanding of community dynamics during the initial formation will go a long way in making community life more meaningful and fruitful. Community *annual planning* can be an ideal time for the formators and formees to have a vision and action plan for the community. It also fosters sense of belonging and co-responsibility. Regular *community meetings* can offer opportunities for the formees to express their opinions and evaluate the life of the community. Time for mutual appreciation also can be integrated. Another practice that can strengthen cohesion and communion is *one-to-one dialogue*. During this dialogue formees are encouraged to meet each one of the members of the community and share deeply about each other, offer and receive feedback and encourage one another. Formators need to closely follow this practice. Formators can also organize occasional *fraternal correction sessions* in which the formees give feedback to their companions under the guidance of the formator at a common forum.

To complement the regular *Vocational growth sessions*, it is also important to offer opportunities for *group therapy* sessions. Group therapy is a form of counseling in which a small number of people come together under the guidance of a professionally trained therapist to help themselves and one another. Group therapy offers the rare opportunity to **explore and understand** how one relates to others and get **specific feedback** on how others react to him/her. Regular *spiritual direction* can offer opportunity for the formees to explore interpersonal issues they hesitate to open up with the formators and get guidance for their spiritual life. *Journaling* is another vital help for increasing self-awareness and self-direction.

CONCLUSION

Life in community is an incarnational encounter in which we proclaim through our life of witness the coming of God's Kingdom. Consecrated life is challenged with an opportunity and a very special task: that of creating, inspiring, enlivening and sustaining everywhere *authentic fraternal communities* that radiate friendship, encouragement, support and reconciliation. Consecrated life must put all its efforts to strengthen community life, to which new generations are very sensitive. It must accommodate the cultural and spiritual diversity of its members, knowing that community life itself is a mission. Community needs to progress *from a life in common to a community of life* rich in personal relationships, welcome, dialogue, discernment, responsible freedom and concern for the other and for what is diverse, where more than mere physical presence what is worth is the blending of spirit and the union of hearts.

This is one of the obstacles encountered in formation for community life: fraternal living requires a capacity for seeing and experiencing the presence of the other not as a threat to one's individual integrity, or as an obstacle to personal fulfilment, but rather as a gift which is to be accepted and towards which we should have a relationship of listening, expectation, confidence. Formation for community life is a skilled ministry which demands a preparation which renders the formator suitable. Formators also need to take care of their ongoing formation that makes them attentive to the formative action of the Father who patiently forms and reforms the consecrated person into the image of the Son. Ultimately the community for the person in formation exists expressly for the purpose of formation and that everyone involved in the ministry of formation have this end in mind.

Endnotes

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⁴ L.M. RULLA, *Anthropology of Christian Vocation*, I, Rome 1986, 397.

⁵ Cf. JOICE RIDICK, "Preparing Priests: The Road to Transformation", in FRANCO IMODA, *A Journey to Freedom*, 2000, 208.

⁶ For a detailed discussion see BABU SEBASTIAN, *From Restoration of the Self to the Recovery of Human Mystery*, Bangalore 2014, 293-375.

⁷ L.M. RULLA, *Depth Psychology and Vocation*, Rome 2003, 96.

⁸ Cf. JOSEPH BENEDICT MATHIAS, *Priestly Formation in Indian Context: A New Pedagogy for Integral Formation of Candidates to Priesthood in India*. Accessed on <http://stt.catholic.ac.kr/DATA/STTBOOK/1436491516825.pdf>, 28-29.

⁹ C. JULIANO – R. HAMMETT – L. SOFIELD, *Building Community*, 1998, 14.

¹⁰ Cf. J. MALONE, "What Is Community?", *Human Development* 13/2 (1992) 6-7.

¹¹ Cf. F. CIARDI, *Koinonia – Spirituality and Theology of the Growth of Religious Community*, Quezon City 1999, 283-287.

¹² This section on stages of Group Development is a summary. Please confer R. HAMMETT – L. SOFIELD, *Inside Christian Community*, 1981, 11-29; C. JULIANO – R. HAMMETT – L. SOFIELD, *Building Community*, 1998, 24-33.

¹³ Here it is good to recall the contribution of Salvador Minuchin who speaks of Boundaries in families, which can very well contribute to the understanding of conflicts in communities. He speaks of three types of boundaries: rigid boundaries, clear boundaries and diffuse or enmeshed boundaries. For a detailed account see S. MINUCHIN, *Families and Family Therapy*, Cambridge 1974, 53-56.

¹⁴ I.B. WEINER, *Principles of Psychotherapy*, New York 1998², 196.

¹⁵ Cf. M. GARANZINI, "Sibling Relationships Affect Community", *Human Development* 5/3 (1984).

¹⁶ Cf. W. BARRY, "Distortions in Relationships. The transference and Countertransference Phenomena", *Human Development* 6/3 (1985) 10-11.

¹⁷ I. B. WEINER, *Principles of Psychotherapy*, 237.

¹⁸ Cf. M. GARANZINI, *Human Development*, 29-35.

¹⁹ Cf. D. O'CONNOR, "The Problem People in Religious Communities", *Human Development* 13/2 (1992) 38.

²⁰ L. SPERRY, *Ministry and Community. Recognizing, Healing, and Preventing Ministry Impairment*, Minnesota 2000, 20-21.

²¹ Cf. L. SPERRY, *Ministry and Community. Recognizing, Healing, and Preventing Ministry Impairment*, 95-96.

²² G. A. ASCHENBRENNER, "Celibacy in Community and Ministry", *Human Development* 6/1 (1985) 27.

²³ Cf. R.J. McALLISTER, *Living the Vows. The Emotional Conflicts of Celibate Religious*, San Francisco 1986, 42-47.

²⁴ Cf. G. A. ASCHENBRENNER, *Human Development* 6/1 (1985) 30-32.

²⁵ Cf. C. JULIANO – R. HAMMETT – L. SOFIELD, "Fostering Community Development", *Human Development* 19/1 (1998) 17-19.

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CHALLENGES FOR LIVING TOGETHER AND A WAY FORWARD

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INTRODUCTION

By the fact saying “Living together”, we understand that there are challenges involved in this living. Every Christian is called to live in community as a member of the church. Christ in his wisdom draws each disciple into that particular expression of community which will be the best means of his/her conversion. There are different kinds of communities in the world such as ethnic communities, social communities, tribal communities, Christian communities, etc.. Here we are dealing with the consecrated people or religious people living in the communities and the challenges involved in this community living, the way we face them and the way to go forward as healed and joy filled redeemed people of God.

By nature, we are social beings. We live with one another’s company. From families to friendship, we share experiences and interactions with groups. Our attachment to these groups strong, or weak, weaves the fabric of association and community. A community is a social structure that shares personal values, cultural values, business goals, attitudes, or a world view. Community is affinity, identity, and kinship that make room for ideas, thoughts, and solutions. Wherever a community gathers, we aspire and inspire each other intentionally.

Our way of life in this religious community is one of many expressions of the common life in the body of Christ. We can be confident that Christ has called us in to this particular order or congregation because he knows that the challenges and the gifts it offers are the very ones we need for the working out of our salvation. Challenges are not obstacles, but God’s way of inspiring us to grow.

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CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY LIVING

1. One of the main challenges of community life is to accept whole-heartedly the authority of Christ to call whom he wills. In the Gospels, we find that Jesus called his disciples (Mk 1: 14-28). Our community is not formed by natural attraction of like-minded people. We are given to one another as we are with all our strengths and weaknesses, with all our complexities and brokenness. By abiding in him, we can unite in a mutual love that goes beyond deeper personal attraction. Mutual acceptance and love call us to value our differences of background, temperament, gifts, personality and style. Only when we recognise them as sources of vitality, we will be able to let go of competitiveness and jealousy. As we actively seek to grow, and discern our vocation, we must ardently seek for signs that God desires to increase our diversity in culture and race.

2. We are also called to accept with compassion and humility the particular fragility, complexity and incompleteness of each brother/sister. Our diversity and our brokenness mean that tensions and frictions are inevitably woven into the fabric of everyday life. Sometimes we are disappointed and discouraged; find difficult to accept another as she/he is! Let us remember they are not to be regarded as signs of failure. Christ uses them for our conversion as we grow in mutual forbearance and learn to let go of the pride that drives us to control and reform our brothers/sisters on our own terms. That comes so natural to many of us to complain, advice, instruct others and in certain instances to compel another to change according to our terms. Christ calls us to rise above our nature and to accept with compassion and humility the diversity and the brokenness of each brother or sister.

3. In John's Gospel, the community of disciples is portrayed as a circle of Christ's friends, abiding in him in obedience and love, and depending on the Advocate who leads them together into the truth. In this portrait, we recognize an implicit critique of the tendency for communities to harden into institutions, and for bureaucracy to replace the spontaneity of mutual service. Our faithfulness to our calling will be seen in the ways in which we fearlessly subject our life to hard questions in the light of the Gospel, resist lethargy and rigidity, minister to one another generously as equals, and stay open to the fresh inspiration of the Spirit.

4. Community life provides us so perfectly all our basic needs: food, clothing, shelter and medicine. Hence, we must rise to the challenge of making sure that our sense of personal responsibility stays strong. Community life is arduous, and not an escape from the toil of earning a living. It is essential that all the community work and the apostolate are distributed in such a way that each brother/sister shares

in its demands to the full extent of his/her ability. We are called to maintain a philosophy that stimulates each of us to learn new skills by which she/he can serve the sisterhood/brotherhood and develop her/his ministry to others. For example: I had read in one of the daily news papers about 30 years ago that within 10 years you would be considered uneducated if you did not have the knowledge of the computer. I was very sceptical using computer for our office. But when I read this in the news paper my eyes were opened and I volunteered to study the basic of computer. Indeed, that basic knowledge of computer was so essential for my papers and thesis when I pursued my higher studies. I am proud to say that though I am aging, the Lord is using me for his healing ministry. There are many examples of priests and nuns who have equipped themselves though they are advanced in years, with new skills and knowledge to start a new ministry to serve the congregation, church and the people of God.

5. Community is based on mutual respect, as it is respect and appreciation that makes an individual unique and special in their own right. One has to always keep in mind and be sensitive to each person and this is very challenging. Compassion, engagement and inspiration are not only the gifts of community but they are also simultaneously the bricks which build community.¹

6. Some people come into community because they are attracted by a simple way of life, in which there is welcome and sharing and where relationships come first. Sometimes, they are afraid of the demands of life in open society. They hope to find their growth in a life of spontaneity and celebration. But they gradually discover that there is more to community life than that. Remaining faithful means accepting certain disciplines and structures and daily making effort to come out of the shell of egoism. Then, they discover that community is not primarily a way of life but they have been called by God to carry others in their suffering and growth towards liberation, and to be responsible for them. And that is demanding. It is not simply a question of becoming responsible for others and being committed to them; it is also accepting to be loved by them, and enter into a relationship of interdependence and into a covenant. And that is sometimes even more difficult and demanding, because it implies a revelation of one's own weakness and brokenness.²

THE BROKENNESS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

There have always been evil and brokenness in the world. The presence of evil does not give us a neat and clear picture of reality. But it opens us to the abyss of the divine. It cures us from superficiality and a sense of self-sufficiency. It is part of the mystery. Humans have searched for a satisfactory explanation of evil but

efforts have failed. However in the causes of human brokenness many causes have been found. They could be categorized as personal, societal, cultural, historical and psychological. Some causes are based on faulty philosophies, theologies, spiritualities and ideologies. Let us go through some of them:

1. Human Limitations

The first source of human brokenness is the very limited nature of humans. We humans are not absolute and perfect. We are limited finite, so often powerless, helpless and vulnerable. Because of our natural limitations, we are incomplete in our capacity and capability to see, perceive, know and decide. Hence it is human to make mistakes and to hurt others as well as ourselves. In fact there is also an old saying: “To err is human. To forgive is divine”. So often without any ill will, we hurt others by our words, gestures, compliments, advice, suggestions and in various forms of communication and behavioural patterns.³ Let us illustrate this with an example:

Once there was the gathering of the Franciscan religious communities for the feast of St. Francis of Assisi on October 4th. One of the neighbouring communities had to perform a prayer dance. The junior sisters were performing; one of the sister’s make up jewellery slipped down, another stamped the jewellery and the chain broke! I was near the stage and soon after the dance I heard one of the senior sisters blaming that junior sister saying: “You are so careless; you are so stupid. You spoiled the dance”. The junior sister’s countenance fell and she went about broken hearted and in the course of the day went about hurting many others. Let us narrate another example:

Sisters were preparing for their annual feast. The junior sisters were practicing a skit and one of the junior sisters was escaping from the practice, giving some lame excuses. It was very difficult for the other junior sisters to practice. On the final day, her performance was very poor. All the junior sisters who worked hard felt very sad. Junior directress enquired about the reason and finally she came to know the behaviour of that particular junior sister who wanted the importance and main character in the skit. So, she was not able to accept other junior sisters’ performance due to her brokenness.

2. Faulty Upbringing and Education

Adult human behaviour depends very much on one’s early healthy or unhealthy upbringing. If people are brought up in a happy family and their basic human needs are reasonably satisfied, we can expect healthy adult behaviour from them.

On the contrary, if one's childhood was spent in a broken family or in an unhealthy environment, their adult life could be full of behavioural problems. The child from the birth consciously and unconsciously absorbs everything from the environment; that is the parent's and other close peoples' reaction towards the child positive or negative and accordingly behaviour is formed. Recent studies explain that even in mother's womb the foetus can absorb the positive and negative experiences of mother. The joyful as well as sad feelings are felt by the foetus. Because the life of the child in the womb is so intimately connected with the life of its mother, the child's memories are connected with its mother's experiences and reactions. Fortunately babies can absorb and remember love and enjoyment as well as stress and trauma. The love of parents is the most important thing that babies experience in the womb, and it can overcome the negative effects of many stress and traumas.⁴

Not only the environment but the training of the child is also very important from the early years of life. The child from the early age itself needs to be trained in healthy behaviour. Fortunate are those who were brought up in a healthy atmosphere. They have far less adult problems than those brought up in an unwholesome atmosphere. In general, adult life is greatly determined or conditioned by early childhood upbringing as well as womb experiences.

3. Faulty Mindset and Faulty Beliefs

Faulty mindset and beliefs radically affect one's way of seeing, perceiving, knowing, relating and responding to life's realities. An unhealthy early background, faulty kind of education and formation go to form a defective mindset and false beliefs in humans in general. And they are accountable largely to one's brokenness and unhealthy behaviour. For example if a child is allowed to sleep in the mornings for long hours and goes to school hurried and late, it will form a mindset to get up late in the mornings and even in adult life is not serious of time management. If a child is taught that there are evil spirits in the dark; that child is afraid of the darkness and as an adult will have phobia of the dark places. These children will relate to others and to the world purely on their mindset and beliefs. And this can have far reaching unhealthy consequences on the personal and the social level. Many of us have already experienced the sad consequences of such faulty beliefs and mindsets.

4. Broken Self Image and Lack of Self- esteem

Self image is the mental picture of oneself and self esteem is the respect we have for that self-image. Both are very important in one's life. Because of several types

of unhealthy and painful experiences, such as rejection, oppression, deprivation, undue punishment and prolonged suffering, many acquire a defensive or broken self image. They thereby experience various types of brokenness personally, while relating or responding to others and also while fulfilling their social roles.

5. Non-fulfilment of Basic Human Needs

God has made us not angels but human beings with body and mind, feelings and emotions, intelligence and will. As humans we have our basic human needs, which are mainly, physical, psychological, social and spiritual. A person grows healthily if these needs are reasonably fulfilled in a healthy atmosphere. If not, there is all likelihood of a person developing various types of brokenness in life. Our main physical needs pertain to food, clothing, shelter, healthy sexual expression. Certain psychological needs are an important necessity: the need to love and to be loved, to be accepted, to belong to groups, the need for security, freedom, recognition, creativity, spontaneity, self-fulfilment, recreation and privacy. The spiritual needs are: the need to go beyond oneself, to search for ultimate meaning in life, the need to refer oneself to the Transcendent or the Immanent whom we call God. When these needs are not met reasonably at one's own level, one would try to meet unreasonably and in ways abnormal, thereby giving rise to brokenness in mind and behaviour to fulfil the unfulfilled needs. Some tend to become selfish or possessive in early childhood itself due to non-fulfilment of the basic human needs. Let us illustrate an example:

In a certain spiritual centre of the religious sisters, there was a very intelligent junior sister. She used to work hard and thus score good marks in almost all the subjects. However she had a major weak point. Whenever a good book was introduced to the student sisters, within a few days that book would disappear from the library. Though each student sister was allowed to take a limited number of books to their rooms and not to take the new books from the self, they had to refer in the library itself she would unscrupulously take the newly introduced book to her room. When several such new good books were missing, it aroused a suspicion. When her room was inspected about 15 important books were found in her possession! Others' deprivation never bothered her, the possessive trait of her mindset obviously blinding her to others' needs. She was actually compensating what was deprived of painfully in her childhood.

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO BROKENNESS?

We experience brokenness in life almost every day, sometimes with more severe

intensity and sometimes lesser. But how do we respond to our brokenness? Some face it in a healthy manner and others in unhealthy ways. Here are some common ways of responding to brokenness:

1. Some are aware of their brokenness but refuse to accept it and do nothing about it:

No healing or solution is possible unless one accepts and acknowledges her/his brokenness or problematic behaviour. A sick person would decide to go to a doctor only if s/he accepts that s/he is sick. There are a number of people who become aware of their physical or psychological sickness, yet do not accept that they are sick. Thus, they refuse to avail of appropriate medical treatment or psychological help.

There was a religious sister, Pushpa by name, young and energetic. Strangely Pushpa had high blood pressure. She was aware of it, but did not bother to do anything about it. When her superior came to know about her health problem, she recommended a thorough check up. She also volunteered to accompany her to some good physician. But Pushpa bluntly refused to go for a check up. She carelessly retorted, "I have no health problem. I am hale and healthy. Don't worry about my health". She went on with her careless attitude. Her blood pressure rose higher and higher, after a few months Pushpa suddenly suffered severe brain haemorrhage, leaving her paralysed on one side. Her condition gradually became critical to the point of danger of death. Her superiors came to her rescue and had the best medical care was given to her and thank God, she survived! Yet the effect of the brain haemorrhage remained, with the result that Pushpa could not live a normal life.

There was a middle aged religious sister, called Jessy. She was intelligent and capable of many good works and would do any job entrusted to her with great success. But Jessy's greatest problem was maintaining healthy relationships with her community members. As a result Jessy had to move from one community to other. In the beginning in a community Jessy would show that she was an instant success. But soon she would land up in a series of misunderstandings and strained relationships. She was suffering from jealousy as such she would talk to her companion sisters and her colleagues in the school in a rude way. Jessy was not aware of her jealousy and her rude talk. When a responsibility was assigned to her, she would boss over every one. This was brought to the notice of the higher superiors during the canonical visitation of the community; the Provincial superior very kindly requested Jessy to go for a counselling course so as to know her at an in-depth level and to take appropriate healing remedies. However Jessy bluntly retorted, "what you have

listened from others is all lies. It is you who need counselling not me. I am alright”.

Now in this case no remedy is possible.

2. Some accept brokenness but take sedatives to forget about it

When people become aware of their brokenness in life, instead of taking suitable steps to remedy it, some go in for chemical or non-chemical sedatives to drug themselves or distract themselves from their brokenness; others would busy themselves in reading novel after novel, or watch movies or T.V. serials for hours together or spend time in idle gossip for long hours. Yet others are getting habituated to consuming excessive alcohol, resorting to drugs. And there are some who stuff themselves with food and develop obesity. Basically what they do is merely distract themselves instead of doing something concrete in terms of remedying the brokenness in their life.

3. Some blame others for their brokenness

Often one is not really responsible for all the brokenness in one's life. Several external factors like an unhealthy family atmosphere, parents physical, emotional abuse and in some cases sexual abuse, parents' brokenness, parents' substance abuse or social situations can cause a lot of brokenness in one's life. And some of us are the victims of abuse in the schools, boarding houses' and hostels. But as we grow older and become adults, we have the capacity to protect ourselves from unhealthy external influences, own up all that happens within us and take the right steps to undo the wrong in us. We can also rectify false beliefs and come out of our brokenness by taking appropriate measures. Some instead of owning up their brokenness go on blaming others, their elders, their birth or their socio-economic situation for all their ills. The end result of the blame game is that they become losers rather than winners in life. To such as these the sage advice of John Powell is “stop blaming and start owning and keep growing”.

Been was a young nun with high ambitions in life. Soon after her final profession, she was posted against her wish in a remote and poor village. The very next year she asked permission to do either her M.A. or her B.Ed. Permission was denied and Beena was disappointed. She was not happy in life and started blaming her higher superiors for her sadness. As she started to share her disappointment with a young seminarian, they fell in love. Her companions advised her not to be so close to that seminarian but Beena said that she wanted to forget her sadness and ignored the advice and within a few years she left the congregation.

4. Some accept their hurts and wounds, but go on parading through life

Some do accept their brokenness because of various failures and disappointments. But instead of taking constructive steps to heal themselves and live a fuller life, they choose to parade their brokenness before the world! Putting on long faces and morose looks, they withdraw from common recreation, parties, celebrations and festivities and give in to sadness and discouragement. Suffering overtakes them and they get drowned in pain and sorrow, thereby proclaiming to the world that they are dead and thus celebrating their own funeral procession!

Leticia was an elderly sister. She had a great love for the children and educating them. Yet for all the good she had done to these children, she herself remained ever so sorrowful. Occasionally she would enjoy the recreation and feel good. A junior sister was transferred to her convent and she was a good listener. Leticia would ask the junior sister to accompany her to visit the houses or the church and they became good friends. Leticia felt confident to share her wounds and pains of the past. And a few months later the junior sister observed that Leticia was sharing the same wounds and pains of the past over and over. Once the junior sister expressed what Leticia was trying to recall and Leticia got puzzled. She asked the junior sister, “how do you know this?” The junior sister said, “Sister you have shared this same incident at least five times and I remember every detail of that. Of course I have not shared this with any one though”. That day Leticia realised that she was actually celebrating her hurts all the time she was sharing with that junior sister without entering into a process of healing.

PATH TO WHOLENESS AND FULLNESS OF LIFE

The goal of our life is to live as well-integrated persons, whereby we become fully alive, for “The glory of God is man/woman fully alive” (St. Irenaeus). But we find ourselves broken in body, mind and spirit. What we need today is to restore wholeness of life by finding all that is lost, reconnecting all that is disconnected, healing all that is wounded and broken. God sent His only son Jesus amidst us so that we may have life in abundance (Jn10:10). Becoming one of us in all human completeness, Jesus became our wounded healer. He went in search of the wounded, the sick, the sinners, and touched their wounds and made them whole and transformed. He empowered them to choose a path of life that leads to the fullness of life. Concretely with the power of God each one has to choose her own path from brokenness to wholeness.

1. Learn to relax and be still: we usually become restless in mind and body when we experience brokenness. With a restless mind, we cannot think and reflect.

Hence the first thing we need to do is to keep calm and maintain an inner balance of mind and heart. Certain rigorous body exercises and yoga practices help in this direction. Develop a habit of going for long walks, and while walking keep silence so that your mind gets relaxed. Spend some time in hobbies that you like for example gardening, music, drawing, painting, etc. Only when one is relaxed in mind and body that the process to wholeness can begin. The body knows exactly what it needs, and constantly gives us useful messages. When we neglect to listen to these messages, the body resorts to stronger language to get our attention, starting with simple headaches and other body pains, continuing to migraine, sleep disturbances, accidents, and chronic pains either in the back or stomach.

2. Cultivate self-acceptance: self-acceptance is an alternative to boosting self-esteem and tackling the problem by removing self-rating. If you do not have a strong belief that your value is built-in, you may have difficulty concluding that you have any worth at all when things go wrong for you. Self-acceptance is a positive regard for oneself, a joyful recognition of one's self-worth. Unconditional self-acceptance means freeing yourself from the external 'measures' or 'ratings' of your value as a person.

Self-acceptance involves making the following assertions:

- As a human being, you are a unique multifaceted individual.
- You are ever changing and developing
- You may be able, to some degree, to measure specific aspects of yourself (such as how tall you are), but you'll never manage to rate the whole of yourself because you are too complex and continuously changing.
- Human, by their very nature, are fallible and imperfect.
- By extension, because you are a complex, unique, ever changing individual, you cannot legitimately be rated or measured as a whole person.

Imagine how much easier your life will be, and how much more stable your self-esteem will be, if you realise that you have worth as a person independently of how much other people value you. You can appreciate being liked, admired, or respected without it being a dire necessary to get it, or living in fear of losing it.⁵

The way we treat ourselves is the way we understand, respect and love others. What one is inwardly, that he/she will be outwardly too. If there is no joy inside,

it cannot be found outside. Heaven must be experienced right inside of us. That is why Jesus said, “the Kingdom of God is within you”. Hence we need to befriend ourselves and let go of all negativity from inside of us. Let us be positive towards us and others. According to our faith each one is an image of God and bears the likeness of God. Maintaining the deepest relaxation and becoming aware of our breathing with eyes closed one needs to say to oneself repeatedly what I call positive statements, “I am the child of God. I am the temple of the Holy Spirit. I am a good person. I am lovable. I am intelligent, etc.” Thus and in many other ways we need to improve our self-image and self-esteem every day.

3. Learn to reconnect: Basically brokenness or sinfulness is nothing but disconnection from what God had made or intended. Hence reconnecting ourselves to God, to others, and to reality around us is a sure path to wholeness, healing and transformation. One has to reconnect and integrate within oneself, with the mind, body, spirit, feelings, emotions, convictions, and actions while becoming whole.

4. Faith and Prayer: Faith is essentially a fundamental openness to God. If we learn to keep ourselves fundamentally open to God, we shall learn to know the truth that will set us free and make us whole. Constant prayer keeps us connected to God and makes us deeply aware that he lives in us and we live in Him. The Gospels portray Jesus as a man of prayer. In His public life, he served the people during the day and at night; He withdrew to lonely places to pray (Lk 6:12; Mk 1:35). Jesus asked His disciples “to remain awake, to watch and pray ceaselessly” (Mk 5:17). And St. Paul said, “Pray constantly” (1Thess 5:17) “Pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance” (Eph 6:18).

From our experiences we know that whenever we have prayed well, we have experienced inner peace and joy, and the strength needed to face failure and criticism, misunderstandings and the various difficulties of life. And whenever we have neglected prayer, we have become restless, aimless and dissipated and often some crisis in life has appeared. Mostly it is prayer during our difficulties and struggles that has again and again, led us to inner peace and calm.⁶

5. Forgiving is healing: There are many blocks within us that we carry due to our inability to forgive others and it is the main cause of brokenness within us. Forgiving others is another sure path of initiating healing within us. As humans all of us get hurt and hurt others. And once we get hurt it is very difficult to forgive. There are different therapies today to forgive those who hurt us. Our child within us is hurt in our childhood and it gets hurt again and again now. Once we undergo the therapy of healing this inner child that was wounded, we would get lot of positive

energy to understand others and to forgive them. There is another NLP exercise called “positive anchoring”. One has to hold on to all the peak positive experiences of life and get lot of positive energy and learn to forget the negative experiences of life. Above all learn from Jesus crucified who called out to His heavenly Father and said, “Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).

6. Cultivate to be other-oriented: when we experience brokenness and pain, we usually become withdrawn. We recoil within ourselves. We turn to ourselves, there by becoming self-oriented. We give in to pain and brood over it. Fret and fume and loose the zest for life. We humans are essentially relational beings, other-oriented persons. Hence if we turn our attention with love and compassion towards others, their problems and concerns we shall experience and that gradually our brokenness and pain will disappear and we will become healed and transformed. Through others difficulties and problems, we learn to forget our pains and we realise that everyone on this earth has some difficulties or problems and this will be an eye opener for us. Thus we learn to be more other oriented and ministry oriented.

7. Become Nature oriented persons: Buddha has said, “if you want to be whole, learn the laws of nature and follow them”. Creation (nature) is God made. Nature is mirror of God. Let us go to the nature and learn to listen to the sun, moon, mountains, rivers, trees, plants, animals, etc. They will teach us marvellous lessons. The nature will make us calm and peaceful. We are surrounded so much with cement (buildings), machines and computers and we miss the nature. When you are continuously inside a room, class room or office room your tensions builds up and you lack the inner energy and peace to face your companions in the religious house. It is essential to be with the nature and spend time with the nature that makes us relax.

CONCLUSION

Let us cultivate trust in the providence of God and a positive attitude to life. We believe that God being infinitely good and wise has an unmistakable and good plan for us and for the whole of humanity. Let us learn to surrender all our brokenness before the infinite good God. Let us not hold back the brokenness within us, but pass it on to God lovingly and with deepest trust. When we do so, we shall gradually begin to see what others do not see, and hear what others do not hear. We have to develop a positive attitude to life. Whenever we are negative consciously we have to practice to be positive. It takes some time to have a positive attitude if you are very negative. You need guidance and counselling to practice to be positive in life. So with Juliana of Norwich, let us keep repeating, “All will be well. All will be well”⁷

Endnotes

¹ ROBERT L'ESPERANCE, "The Challenges of Life in Community", 1-2 (Accessed on the internet on February 13, 2012).

² JEAN VANIER, *Community and Growth*, Mumbai 1979, 46.

³ GEORGE MALONY, *Broken But Loved, Healing Through Christ's Power*, Mumbai, 1981, 60-78.

⁴ MATHEW LINN – DENNIS LYNN– SHEILA FABRICANT, *Healing the Eight Stages of Life*, New York 1988, 31-35

⁵ ROB WILSON – RHENA BRANCH, *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Dummies*, England 2006, 160-161.

⁶ SEBASTIAN PAINADATH, *Dynamics of Prayer*, Bangalore 1980.

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FRIENDSHIP AND INTIMACY IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

George Kallampally, CMF

In the pre-Vatican era the concepts like friendship and intimacy were anathemas to religious communities in the Catholic Church. People who propose or advocate such life styles were considered as less authentic and even a threat to the ideals of religious communities proposed by the spiritual leaders. The development of behavioral sciences like psychology and sociology and the insights gained from them in matters of human life and interaction led the religious communities to develop openness to such possibilities of creative living of the ideals proposed by the religious life in the Church. Nevertheless, the resistances placed by the traditional orthodox ideologies in the church continue to be an obstacle for examining and experimenting such new styles in religious communities in the Church. Here is an attempt to look into the concepts and complexities of such a model of life which can bring freshness and enthusiasm for living the religious life in the church.

1. WHAT IS FRIENDSHIP?

Friendship is a relationship between two people who care about each other.¹ Friendship is a relationship of mutual affection (love) between two people. It is a stronger form of interpersonal bond than an association. Friendship has been studied in academic fields such as communication, sociology, social psychology, anthropology, and philosophy. Various academic theories of friendship have been proposed, including social exchange theory, equity theory, relational dialectics, and attachment styles. A World Happiness Database study found that people with close friendships are happier.² Although there are many forms of friendship — some of which may vary from place to place — certain characteristics are present in many types of bond. Such characteristics include affection, kindness,

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love, empathy, altruism, mutual understanding and compassion, enjoyment of each other's company, trust, and the ability to be oneself, express one's feelings, and make mistakes without the fear of judgment from a friend. While there is no practical limit on what types of people can form a friendship, friends tend to share common backgrounds, occupations, or interests and have similar geographic affiliation.

1.1 Different Forms of Friendship

Aristotle figured there were three kinds of friendships: First kind is the friendships of utility which exist between you and someone who are useful to you in some way. For instance, perhaps you are friendly with some people because they help you to study together or because they help you figure out the printer when it jams. Second form of friendship is the friendships of pleasure. They exist between you and those whose company you enjoy. Often, these are "activity buddies", people with whom you do things like playing soccer, going for long bike rides or partying. Third form of friendship is the friendships of the good based on mutual respect and admiration. They often arise when two people recognize that they have similar values and goals; that they have similar visions for how the world should be.³

2. INTIMACY

Intimacy generally refers to the feeling of being in a close personal connection. Intimacy is a sense of deeply belonging together. It is a very close affective (emotional) connection with another person. Intimacy is a bond that is formed through knowledge and experience of the other. In human relationships, the meaning and level of intimacy varies within and between relationships.

2.1 Types of Intimacy

According to Richard J. Gilmartin there are eight types of intimacy.⁴

a) Emotional Intimacy

Emotional Intimacy happens when two people are able to share a feeling with another and sense that the other understands perfectly what one is describing. It also happens when someone may express a feeling that the other knows but cannot describe. At a particular point there exists a oneness between the two. Emotional intimacy is an aspect of interpersonal relationships that varies in intensity from one relationship to another and varies from one time to another, much like physical intimacy.⁵ Emotional intimacy involves a perception of closeness to another that allows sharing of personal feelings, accompanied by expectations of understanding, affirmation, and demonstration of caring. Emotional intimacy can

be expressed in verbal and non-verbal communication. The degree of comfort, effectiveness, and mutual experience of closeness might indicate emotional intimacy between individuals. Intimate communication is both expressed (e.g. talking) and implied (e.g. friends sitting close on a park bench in silence). Emotional intimacy involves opening up to deeper authentic feelings by sharing emotions verbally or nonverbally.

b) Cognitive or Intellectual Intimacy

A second form of intimacy is cognitive or intellectual intimacy where two people exchange thoughts, share ideas and enjoy similarities and differences between their opinions. If they can do this in an open and comfortable way, then they can become quite intimate in an intellectual area. Intellectual intimacy is a cerebral connection often obtained through thoughtful conversations on subjects such as politics, philosophy, religion or education. Psychologists define intellectual intimacy as two people who really come together to share ideas and thoughts; they are comfortable in doing so, even when they differ in their opinions. Truly, in a sense intellectual intimacy is connecting brain to brain. Someone expresses a thought that the other, too, have had, but the other may not have been able to express.

c) Aesthetic Intimacy

Aesthetic intimacy refers to sharing something beautiful together, e. g. enjoying sunset or watching clouds together, climbing a mountain together, cherishing a work of art together at the same time, strolling through a botanical garden, listening to a live band on the lawn or watching a lightning storm from the patio, etc. There is hardly any verbal communication between the two but both are simply sharing the beauty.

d) Creative Intimacy

When one is able to work well with another, to make something happen together that does not happen alone, creative intimacy happens. It enables people to function smoothly and facilitate each other's effort.

e) Recreational Intimacy

When two people laugh together and enjoy the company of each other, recreational intimacy results. The two enjoy the company of each other and have fun with each other without any strain of having to keep the conversation going or searching for what to say next. It is effortless relationship of fun.

f) Crisis Intimacy

It is intimacy created because of a crisis in a life situation like death of one's spouse, sickness, etc. It happens when two people share a transformative tragic incident and are drawn to oneness. Parents of a child killed in a traffic accident feel the horror together and are drawn into a bond of share grief is a typical example of crisis intimacy. Intimacy is created because of a crisis in life situation. Times of great pain and stress can actually strengthen, rather than destroy relationships and forge great levels of intimacy.

g) Erotic/Sexual/Physical Intimacy

When the other person touches something within us, it results in an urgent longing to be sexually intimate with him or her. Erotic intimacy is the desire to possess the other totally — physically, sexually and permanently. It is a strong feeling of at-oneness with a passion to possess physically which provokes close friendship, romantic love or sexual attraction between people. When it is mutual and expressed, we feel at-oneness with a passion we hope will never end. It is much more than just finding someone sexually attractive.

h) Spiritual Intimacy

When we share our deepest beliefs about life, death, immortality, evil, soul, etc. spiritual intimacy is created. Sometimes we meet someone with whom we can bare our souls and hearts. When there is an in-depth soul-sharing, we achieve a spiritual at-oneness. History has some of the greatest heterosexual love relationships that appear to be spiritual intimacy. The love relationship between Francis and Clare, Benedict and Scholastica, and John of the Cross and Theresa are some of the shining examples of heterosexual spiritual intimacy.

2.2 How is intimacy achieved?

Intimacy is gained through self-disclosure. When people share their feelings, reactions, and concerns with a trusted and responsive friend, they build a closeness that helps sustain the relationship.⁶

Requirements of intimacy

Genuine intimacy in human relationships requires dialogue, a conversation between two or more people. Pope Paul VI said that in our times dialogue is the language of love. Secondly, it requires transparency which is the currency of trust, the open sharing of information among parties involved. Vulnerability is the third

requirement which implies the courage to be yourself. It involves uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure (that is why vulnerability might seem frightening). Vulnerability is an inevitable part of social relationships. Next comes reciprocity, the expectation that people will respond to each other with similar benevolence of their own. Another requirement for intimacy is the ability to be separate (individuality). Finally intimacy requires an ability to be together (connectedness). Participants need to have an ability to be in an intimate relationship. Individuality and Connectedness, though they appear different and separate, are very much interrelated: Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) writes:

*Sing and dance together and be joyous,
but each one of you be alone
Even as the strings of a lute are alone,
though they quiver with the same music.
Give hearts, but not into each other's keeping
For only the hand of Life can contain your heart.
And stand together yet not too near together:
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the oak tree and the Cyprus grow not in each other's shadow.⁷*

Poor skills in developing intimacy can lead to getting too close too quickly, struggle to find the appropriate boundary and cause problems to sustain the connection.

2.3 The Relationship between Friendship and Intimacy

Friendship creates intimacy or intimacy is the fruit of friendship. Friendship creates a favourable condition for intimacy. Friendship need not necessarily create intimacy. Intimacy develops and deepens friendship. Intimacy need not necessarily create friendship. But intimacy deepens the level of friendship and disposes us to more intense friendship.

a) Friendship and Intimacy in Religious Life

Friendship and intimacy in religious life is not a friendship of utility or usefulness. Nor is it friendship of pleasure. But it is the friendship of the good; friends having similar vision, values and goals. Friendship in consecrated life is not *philia* which refers to an affectionate, warm and tender love. It makes you desire friendship with someone. It is not familial love which refers to natural or instinctual affection, such as the love of a parent towards offspring and vice versa. It is a kind of family friendship love. This is the love that parents naturally feel for their children;

the love that member of the family have for each other. Friendship in religious life is not *eros*. *Eros* is a passionate and intense love that arouses romantic feelings; it is the kind that often triggers “high” feelings in a new relationship and makes you say, “I love him/her”. It is simply an emotional and sexual love.

Friendship in Religious life is *agape/caritas/charity*. *Agape* is the unconditional love that sees beyond the outer surface. *Agape* accepts the recipient for whom he/she is, regardless of their flaws, shortcomings or faults. It is inclusive and extends to all (Mt 5:43-48). *Agape* is a committed and chosen love. It can be explained as boundless benevolence or unlimited goodwill.

b) Intimacy in Religious Life

Intimacy in religious life may or can have all the types of intimacy mentioned earlier by Richard J. Gilmartin, except genital sexual/erotic intimacy. Emotional intimacy helps the religious to share feelings with other so as to create a feeling of oneness and togetherness. Such feelings of togetherness can drive us into deeper levels of engagement. Intellectual intimacy is the cognitive component of intimacy where the members connect to each other at the level of sharing of ideas. When fellow religious enjoy together some beautiful poetry, works of art, or some artistic and cultural pieces aesthetic intimacy is created. Creative intimacy happens when members of a religious community work together to make a beautiful piece of art or organize an exhibition of the works of their founder or foundress. Common recreation, common outings, common sight-seeing trips, etc. create effortless relationship of fun and thus recreational intimacy happens. Tragic incidents and crisis situations in the community can create a bond which is called crisis intimacy. Spiritual intimacy among religious is the result of in-depth sharing of our values and beliefs about human destiny, eschatological realities, ultimate meaning of life, etc. Such intimacy took them to deeper levels of friendship and enables them to share the blessings of mutual care and concern. Intimacy in religious life or celibate intimacy cannot be erotic/genital/sexual because any desire to possess the other totally, physically, sexually, and permanently is absolutely contrary to values of religious life.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF FRIENDSHIP AND INTIMACY IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

To live serenely friendship and intimacy within the religious community, it is good that all the members of the community know the characteristics of religious friendship and intimacy which distinguish it from other community relations.

First of all, friendship and intimacy in religious community is diffusive. It is spread over a wide area of interaction. It cannot exclude anyone; it cannot marginalise or keep out anyone. Secondly, friendship and intimacy in a religious community does not find its origin in a psychological dimension, like friendship and love, nor in a blood bond, like the family relations. It is based on basic connectedness (ontological reality) which brings together every human being. Thirdly, friendship and intimacy in religious communities is strengthened by the sense of common belonging to a community united by shared values and ideals. It emanates from the sharing of values, of ends, one charism and mission. Consequently, no member of the religious community can be excluded from this relation, neither for psychological reasons nor for the qualities (inclusivity). Within the religious community all the members are to be considered equal. If there is anyone who can be paid more attention, he/she will certainly not be the most gifted, the most important, but the least and the simplest.

Friendship and intimacy is also a diffusive kind of relation, as the English saying goes, “The friends of my friends are also my friends”. It is impossible to experience this reciprocity with all within a religious family. The common sharing of the same charism does not demand a strong understanding at psychological and affective level. It is not necessary to have the same tastes and to experience the same sympathy with the sisters/brothers, whom we live with, in order to experience a solid sense of belonging to a religious family. Religious community life demands reciprocal love and respect, a love generated not by sentiments, but by the will and the adhesion (attachment) to the Gospel values. This is the deep bond which unites and creates fraternal relations; this is the nucleus of community life.

Above all, friendship and intimacy in a religious community is a charism — a gift of the Holy Spirit. So it is a spiritual friendship and intimacy. For this reason, true friendship and intimacy in the Spirit must have some essential requisites. First of all, spiritual friendship in religious communities is poor, not demanding, not presumptuous (arrogant). The spiritual friend welcomes the other, receives her/him with gratitude and knows how to respect the times and the journey of the other. Such a friendship and intimacy is discreet. It does not need too many words, useless talks and unending exchanges. It is also faithful, ready to welcome the other even in dark circumstances, in difficult seasons, when he/she needs to be supported, defended or finds it difficult to live a bond of reciprocity.

The friendship is sincere which means that it does not cheat the other, nor manipulate him/her for one’s own interests. On the contrary, his desire of good for the other demands purity of heart and the capacity of speaking the truth, even

when this may be unpleasant and therefore not easy to manifest. Another quality of friendship and intimacy in religious community is that it is also merciful, because it does not judge or express evaluations; but accepts always unconditionally. A spiritual and intimate friend is the one to whom you confide your falls without fear; to whom you are not ashamed of revealing the progress of your spiritual things; and to whom you can entrust all the secrets of the heart and disclose its projects.

Like all other forms of love, spiritual friendship, too, knows its difficult moments. Pleasant, as the company of the other and deep as the affinity may be, even this relation will at the end meet moments of fatigue and misunderstanding. The differences of feelings, temperament, views, and all the diversities which make the relation more attractive may provoke little or big conflicts. True spiritual and intimate friend is he/she who knows how to step behind, how to create a space to the difference, and how to respect uniqueness. At the same time, he/she is able to discuss and make questions when the thought or the acting of the other does not answer the ideals shared by both.

4. CHALLENGES TO FRIENDSHIP AND INTIMACY IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

4.1 Privacy

Privacy is the state of being alone. Such people do not want to be disturbed by other people. The more we practice privacy in each of the areas of our religious living, the greater the challenge we have for achieving authentic intimacy in them. The movement towards greater sharing should yield better relationships, closer connections, and improved capacity for emotional intimacy. After all, being open with a person is a fundamental part of connecting with that person.

4.2 Secrecy

Privacy becomes secrecy when there is conscious motivation to keep something unknown, hidden or unseen from others in the community. Some people make sure that nothing is known about them by others. Secrecy in relationships impairs trust and impedes intimacy. Secrets can be motivated by betrayal, shame, fear, or anger. Secrets disqualify intimacy because they prevent authenticity. Psychologically when the members of the community are holding a secret, a part of them is not available for connection. Sadly, secrets often breed mistrust and secrecy.

4.3 Withdrawal

Withdrawal is the act or behaviour of somebody who wants to be alone and

does not want to communicate with the other members of the community. This withdrawal can occur either mentally or physically. The mental withdrawal occurs when someone goes into a world of their own and engages in an inner world of interests, fantasy, worries or other preoccupations. Physical withdrawal can occur when people stay in the rooms for most of the day. Withdrawal can prevent development of friendship and intimacy.

4.4 Rituals

Rituals can be defined as “stereotyped, predictable exchanges such as greetings and farewell rituals”. Rituals involve a well established pattern of behaviour that generally remain unchanged. When one person says, ‘Hello, how are you?’, the ritualistic response goes something like, ‘Fine, how are you?’ The practice of rituals in the community keeps the contact minimum among the members of the community. If the community remains at this level of interaction, it will not promote the growth and development of friendship and intimacy in the members.

4.5 Pastimes

Pastimes are literally passing the time during the waiting period before a meeting begins. A pastime is a hobby, or as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it, a diversion or recreation which serves to pass the time agreeably; an activity done for pleasure rather than work. It can be a hobby, a sport, or a game. Many male religious spend lot of time in discussing cricket or football. Pastimes can be a “warm-up” to get connected to others, but it will not lead to any form of friendship and intimacy.

4.6 Activities

Activities mean the works a person is involved with a group of fellow religious. Engaging activities might involve collaborating in a joint project with the interactions required to complete the task. When a religious community sits down together to work out their approach to their ministry, they can develop certain friendship and closeness, but it does not usually reach the level of friendship and intimacy.

4.7 Psychological Games

Psychological games⁸ can be thought of as emotionally charged interactions, which can be likened to a dramatic production, being played out again and again, in an inescapable cycle. You could consider games as repeating patterns of dysfunctional behaviour. There’s certainly very little fun involved in them. People may shift their roles during the course of the drama of a psychological game, and

both parties usually feel worse rather than better for having taken part. In the late 1960's, Stephen Karpman pointed out that dramatic interchanges involve a triangular pattern of three positions: Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim.⁹ Psychological games are played for 'concealed motivations'. They are unconscious process in which both parties find themselves in arguments before they realise what is happening. In such communities members look with suspicion at each other. Games prevent from journeying to togetherness and intimacy.

One or a combination of any mentioned above can create hurdles and may even prevent authentic friendships and intimacies from developing and blossoming in religious communities. Personal vigilance and collective watchfulness can, to a certain extent, prevent these venomous influences from developing into termites, eating away the very life sap of a religious community.

5. HELPS TO FOSTER INTIMACY

5.1 Strengthen the Spiritual Foundations:

In the consecrated life, friendship and intimacy cannot be based only on sympathy and affinity. The psychological dimension is very important, but it is not sufficient to create a truly solid and deep affection. If we limit ourselves to forge links based on common interest and reciprocal understanding, the fundamental dimension of the person would be excluded: its natural orientation to God. The friendship between consecrated persons can be considered truly such if it is spiritual and moved and guided by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who unites the hearts, and introduces them into a more intimate relation with the Father and the Son. Aelredo of Rievaulx, the singer monk, says that this friendship must begin in Christ, develop in Christ and have Christ as its end and its perfection.¹⁰ This means that the common interest par excellence for Jesus the Lord must be added to the indispensable psychological factors.

5.2 Develop Personal Competencies

Personal competencies are personal traits and abilities that affect your life and relationships in life in general and in our context, our life in the communities. The sum of these competencies is a good indicator of whether you will be successful as a member of a religious community in creating meaningful relationship in the religious communities. There are ways to increase your personal competencies and help you to create a formula for success in living your life in a joyful and life-giving manner.

Some of the personal competencies that are helpful in creating and developing authentic friendships and intimacies in religious communities are trust, affection, autonomy, empathy, initiative, identity, honesty, integrity, altruism and compassion. All or some of these help us to establish and sustain healthy, meaningful and life-enhancing life and relationships in the religious communities.

Trust is the primary building block of the human personality. Trusting someone means that you think they are reliable. You have confidence in them and you feel safe with them physically and emotionally. Trust is something that two people in a relationship can build together when they decide to trust each other. Affection is love for the other and is the positive feeling you may have or express for other people. It is a disposition or state of mind or body that is often associated with a feeling of love. Personal autonomy is defined as the capacity to decide for oneself and pursue a course of action in one's life. It is the ability to be oneself and express one's feelings. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. It is the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within the other person's frame of reference, i.e., the capacity to place oneself in another's position.

Personal initiatives are the behavior that results in an individual taking an active and self-starting approach to work goals and tasks and persisting in overcoming barriers and setbacks. Self identity is the basic awareness of who you are, what your values are, and what the goals and directions you are pursuing. In psychology, identity is the qualities, beliefs, personality, looks and/or expressions that make a person. Honesty refers to a facet of moral character and connotes positive and virtuous attributes such as integrity, truthfulness, straightforwardness, including straightforwardness of conduct, along with the absence of lying, cheating, theft, etc. It also involves being trustworthy, loyal, fair, and sincere. Integrity is the quality of having strong moral principles; moral uprightness. It is generally a personal choice to hold oneself to consistent moral and ethical standards. Compassion means a concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others. Altruism is disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others.

5.3 Develop Interpersonal skills

Interpersonal skills are the life skills we use every day when we communicate and interact with other people, both individually and in groups. People who have worked on developing strong interpersonal skills are usually more successful in both their community, professional and personal lives. Interpersonal effectiveness and pastoral and ministerial fruitfulness is positively correlated with interpersonal

skills. The main interpersonal skills are communication skills, listening skills, team-working skills, negotiation, persuasion and influencing skills, conflict resolution skills, mediation skills, and decision-making skills.

Communication skills include verbal communication (what we say and how we say it) and non-verbal communication (what we communicate without words. e.g. body language, eye contact, hand gestures, and tone of the voice). They also include clarity and concision, friendliness, confidence, empathy, open-mindedness and respect. Listening skills are the ability to pay attention to and effectively interpret what other people are saying both verbally and non-verbally. Team working skills are the ability for working with others in groups and teams, both formal and informal. Negotiation, persuasion and influencing skills enable you to work with others to find a mutually agreeable (win/win) outcome. Working with others to resolve interpersonal conflict and disagreements in a positive way enhances your conflict resolution skills. Problem solving and decision-making skills equip you with tools to work with others to identify, define and solve problems which include making decisions about the best course of action.

5.4 Willingness to Invest

Your spiritual resources and personal and interpersonal competencies are not sufficient to achieve meaningful friendships and intimacy in religious communities. At best, they remain as ideals which failed to inspire our lives if we are not ready to invest our resources towards the above said goals.

The first of the resources we have for investing in our pursuit of achieving greater depth and intensity in friendship and intimacy in our religious communities is our time. Quality time can strengthen your relationship in the community in several ways: It gives you distraction-free time to talk, and helps you stay rooted in your community and connected with what is going on in the community and in the lives of the members of the community. If you engage in fun, exciting and unusual activities, you're more likely to buck the trend of taking each other for granted. Planning good times together can help keep you in growing in your love for God and for your confreres. Time together can foster a greater sense of togetherness. By prioritizing time together as a community, you're signaling to others in the community the importance of your relationship. Stress is one of the biggest threats to a strong relationship. Making sure you have time together planned lets you relax, have fun and unwind.

The second resource we have for building and nourishing the friendship and intimacy in religious communities is the energy. By energy I mean the strength and

vitality required for sustaining and nurturing the life and relationship that we have created as a religious community. More than the physical energy, what I mean is the emotional energy. It is an aliveness of the mind, a happiness of the heart, and a spirit filled with hope. Emotional energy has a specific feel. It's a sense of being up, happy, forward looking, resilient, feeling young, feeling open, and being in touch with the loving, creative, generous, hopeful parts of yourself.

We have other resources like money, materials, and other assets that can be drawn on by the members of the community in order to function effectively and forge fraternal bonds which refresh every member of the community. What is needed is a personal and collective readiness and willingness to invest resources so that warm and refreshing and nurturing relationships can be created and celebrated in our religious communities.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We, as religious, have experienced the beauty and savoured the sweetness of friendship and intimacy in our religious communities and we long to sustain such life-enhancing ambience in our relationship in our religious communities. We need to understand that such friendship and intimacy do not happen automatically. It is consequences of watchfulness, effort, and a willingness to be together and work together towards the aim for which religious communities have been established in the church.

There seems to be, at least in some religious communities, a crisis of friendship and intimacy. The plague of modern ideologies of individualism and freedom has infected our religious communities and some of the religious are under the illusion or pseudo perception that fulfilment of our religious life can be found in isolation and privacy.

These challenges have to be seen as a call to growth and integration and confronted creatively with authentic spirituality and insights from behavioural sciences like sociology, psychology, etc. A smug feeling can make us unaware of the sinister influences that are creeping into our collective living. We are people of resurrection and we should never lose faith in the power and presence of God which can renew, recreate and refresh our sense of consecration and mission in the church.

Endnotes

¹ "Friendship", *Oxford Dictionaries*, [accessed: 01.07.2017], <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/friendship>.

² Cf. LAURENCEAU BARRETT – PIETROMONACO, “Friendship”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74/5 (1998)1238-1251.

³ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics: Three Types of Friendship* [Accessed: 01.07.2017], <https://aquileana.wordpress.com/2014/02/11/aristotles-nicomachean-ethics-three-types-of-friendship-based-on-utility-pleasure-and-goodness/>

⁴ Cf. RICHARD J. GILMARTIN, *Pursuing Wellness, Finding Spirituality*, New London 1996.

⁵ Cf. ALAN M. DAHMS, *Emotional Intimacy: Overlooked Requirement for Survival*, Boulder (U.S.A.) 1972.

⁶ LAURENCEAU BARRETT – PIETROMONACO, “Friendship”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74/5 (1998)1238-1251.

⁷ Cf. LASSAAD METOUI, ed., *Love Letters in the Sand: The Love Poems of Kablil Gibran*, London 2006.

⁸ Cf. E. BERNE, *Games People Play*, New York 1964.

⁹ STEPHEN KARPMAN, “USATAA/ITAA conference lecture on August 11, 2007” [Accessed: 01.07.2017], <http://www.karpmandramatriangle.com/pdf/thenewdramatriangles.pdf>

¹⁰ Cf. AELREDO DI RIEVAULX, *L'amicizia spirituale*, Siena 1982, 89.

COMPASSIONATE CARE FOR THE AGED AND SICK MEMBERS OF COMMUNITY

S. Anselmus, CMF

INTRODUCTION

Consecrated persons are called to be close to the people. Their call implies loving, caring and sharing. We can say that the essence of consecrated life is to share, care and love. This is what the evangelical counsels call for from the consecrated persons. As Pope Francis reiterates, consecrated persons are for Jesus and others. Consecrated persons must love and take care of their neighbours. They are not to distance themselves from people and have all the comforts possible. Rather, they should draw close and understand the life of Christians and non-Christians — the sufferings, the problems and many other difficulties of the people. But, who is the first neighbour of a consecrated person? The first neighbour of a consecrated person is always his/her community member. The brother or sister of the community is his/her first neighbour. And it is to the first neighbour that the consecrated person should first of all be kind, good, close, loving and caring. Indeed, it becomes very easy to love and care and show compassion to those who are far away from the communities of the consecrated persons. Sadly, it becomes so difficult for many consecrated persons to love and care compassionately those living with them in the same community.¹ Though consecrated persons are called to be close with all the community members, a special compassionate care should be the priority for the elderly and the sick members.

Religious are called to be “experts in communion”. Since the religious are given the gift of communion, they have the duty to build fraternity. It is spirituality that helps the religious to be in communion with their community members. Jesus who called them to religious life continues to invite them to speak to him and to their

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brothers and sisters through the Eucharist. The communion in religious community is built around the Eucharist which is the starting point of all growth in fraternity. Prayer in common is the foundation of all forms of communion in community life. Real communion is achieved in religious communities starting from liturgy especially Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation. The Word of God too plays a very important role for sharing, loving and caring in the religious communities. The Church document *Fraternal Life in Community* stresses that from Eucharist all education and formation for community spirit and caring of community members must begin. Certainly the practice of *Lectio divina* nourishes and cherishes fraternity and communion. Religious community must be a place for becoming real brothers and sisters.²

1. THE UNDERSTANDING OF COMPASSION

According to *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1995), “compassion” is understood as having strong feelings of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, “compassion” is sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.

Compassion is to be understood in a positive sense, in the biblical sense. “Be compassionate just as your heavenly Father is compassionate” (Lk 6:36).³ It is being deeply aware of other persons as persons to be loved and respected and having sympathy for other person's suffering. Compassion is to be understood as a positive emotion, being thoughtful of other person and coming forward voluntarily to help those in needs. Compassion is to be seen as having genuine sympathy, putting oneself in someone's shoes and having real feeling for others. The authentic compassion for others will oblige one to come forward so spontaneously to help the needy persons.

Pope Francis announced the *Year of Mercy* because all are not merciful and compassionate as the heavenly Father is merciful and compassionate. As humans, Christians and Consecrated persons, many still have a very long way to go in being merciful and compassionate towards the needy brothers and sisters. Indeed, in the *Year of Mercy*, we studied, reflected and meditated more about the mercy of God and made sincere efforts to do the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Corporal works of mercy includes healing the sick and comforting the afflicted. As consecrated persons, they have a special vocation to be an extension of the mercy of God in time and space. This has to begin from the religious communities. The Church's very credibility is seen in her merciful and compassionate love.⁴ This is all the more true with regard to religious communities and their members.

2. COMPASSIONATE CARE FOR THE ELDERS

I do not think that one must have mere compassion for the elderly if compassion is understood as “sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortune of others” or “having sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others”. I do not think that by aging, one is suffering or misfortune and bad luck have fallen on him/her. Old age is not to be understood as misfortune or bad luck. The aging process is really a change, a normal human process. It is to be welcomed joyfully and gladly as each phase of human life is a step forward on the path, which has no end. Man is not merely physical. He is very much beyond bodily appearances and the numerical number of age. Man has powers, which transcends his bodily powers.⁵ As Pope Francis observed, aging is actually a time of grace and the aging process is to be understood as such.⁶

The man, who thinks that the earthly cycle of birth, adolescence, youth, maturity and old age is all there to life by chance, is indeed to be pitied. Such a man has no anchor, no hope and no vision and to him life has no meaning. When life is reduced like this, then there is frustration, stagnation, cynicism and a sense of hopelessness resulting in neurosis and mental aberrations of all kinds. Old age has to be welcomed and accepted joyfully and gracefully. Aging has its own glory and beauty. As one ages, our body may undergo some changes but qualities like happiness, wisdom, goodwill and understanding will never grow old or die. One’s character, the quality of mind, faith and convictions are not subject to decay.⁷

2.1 The Teachings of the Church in Caring the Elderly

The Church document *Fraternal Life in Community* fascinatingly dedicates eight paragraphs for the care of the elderly religious. The salient aspects of the document are:

- Religious communities should accept in their midst the elderly religious and esteem deeply their presence and the services which they can offer.
- Religious communities should provide them care and attention fraternally and in a way consistent with consecrated life those means of spiritual and material assistance which the elderly need.
- The presence of the elderly in the religious communities can be very positive. An elderly religious is an invaluable support for the young. Elderly provide a witness, wisdom and prayer which are a constant encouragement to the young in their spiritual and apostolic journey.

- Those religious who take care of the elderly give evangelical credibility to the world.
- Consecrated persons also should prepare themselves long in advance for becoming old and for extending their “active” years by learning to discover their new way of building community and collaborating in the common mission and responding positively to the challenges of their age.
- Superiors have to arrange courses and meetings for the elderly religious to assist personal preparation and to prolong and enhance their presence in their normal workplaces.
- When in time these elderly members lose their autonomy or require special care, even when their health is cared for by lay persons, the institute should support and care them in such a way that they continue to feel a part of the life of the institute, sharers in its mission.⁸

Pope Francis who has a very special love for the elderly and sick celebrated a special mass at St. Peter’s square on 28th September, 2014 especially for the grandparents and the elderly. In his homily, he reiterated that the old age was a time of grace and affirmed beautifully that the elderly are a treasury of wisdom and a gift of love and beauty for both the Church and the world. He was uncompromising in declaring that a people that do not have care for the elderly, that does not treat them well, has no future: such a people loses its memory and its roots. According to him, it is inhuman to abuse elders just as it is inhuman to abuse children. There must never be institutions where the elderly are forgotten, hidden or neglected. He adds that homes for the elderly should be the “lungs” of humanity in a country, in a neighborhood, in a parish; “sanctuaries” of humanity where old and weak are cared for and taken care of like a brother or a sister. He recommends the young to visit senior citizens and come out of their misery and sadness and become joyful.⁹

2.2 The Beauty and Value of Old Age

It is important that the members of religious community have positive understanding about their aged members. The elderly must also have positive outlook about themselves. I have heard some people saying, “I am retired, I am old, I am finished, my life is over, etc.” These negative resignations would lead to stagnation and mental death. The elderly should be convinced that the human life is much more than mere age and it in fact transcends age.

Interestingly, some may feel old even at the age of 40 while others may feel pretty young even at the age of 80. George Bernard Shaw was above 90 but the artistic

quality of his mind was very active. As religious age, they are maturing in experience, wisdom, skill and understanding. Their emotional and spiritual maturity should be a fabulous blessing for the younger ones. One is as strong as he thinks he is, and as valuable as he thinks he is. If one's thoughts are continually on the beautiful, the noble, and the good, he/she will remain young, regardless of chronological years.¹⁰

Normally, people grow old when they lose interest in life, when they cease to dream, fail to hunger for new truths and put the curtain down in searching for new worlds to conquer. When our mind is open to new ideas, new interest and new adventures, we remain young. Even when a religious is 65 or 95 years of age, he/she must realize that he/she has a lot to contribute to the congregation and to the society, advise and direct the younger generation. His/her knowledge, experience and wisdom are priceless. Though the body may become fragile as we advance in age, our mind will never retire. Even when our human body slows down gradually with age, our conscious mind can be made much more active, alert and alive. Instead of saying "I am growing old", elderly religious should learn to say, "I am getting more experience and becoming wise in my spiritual life".¹¹

Greek philosopher Socrates learned to play musical instruments when he was 80 years old. Michelangelo was painting his greatest canvase at 80. Alfred Tennyson wrote a magnificent poem, *Crossing the Bar*, at 83. Morarji Desai became the prime minister of India at the age of 81. Karunanidhi was born in 1924 and now he is 93 years old. He had been the chief minister of Tamil Nadu for five times. He is also a play writer, screen writer, journalist and writing daily letters to the party members. He still dreams of becoming the chief minister for another term! Ronald Reagan was an actor, but he became the president of USA at the age of 70. The oldest woman to run and complete a marathon was Gladys Burrill from Hawaii at the age of 92. She had run her fist marathon at the age of 86. The official distance for this race was 42.19 km. Peter Roget created Thesaurus at the age of 73 in spite of suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder. The 90 years old Paul Siromoni from Chennai recently obtained his Ph.D after writing six papers, attending several seminars and giving long three exams. The topic of his research was *God's Call to the Church in Transforming the World into a Kingdom of Love*.¹²

2.3 Aged Religious – Incredible Contributors

The elderly have to be esteemed and they should be offered opportunities to work on their expertise. The positive attitude towards the aged members of institutes will enable them to contribute as much as they can. Aged religious should believe that they still have a lot to contribute. Surely, the elderly brothers and sisters pray

better, love better, take care of the needy better, forgive better and share their experience better. It is also important that the elderly equip themselves and that they feel energetic and young at heart always. There should be concrete plan to care the aged members. Provisions have to be made for them to move in freely in the wheel chair inside the house and the campus. It is good to keep the aged religious active as much as possible. It is not a bad idea to provide a computer to them to write their memoirs, experiences, reflections, homilies and biblical commentaries. It is profoundly encouraging to discuss the congregational matters with them. Occasionally, ways are to be found to share the meals with them even if they are bed-ridden.

Even the elderly religious have the desire and longing to visit the communities, friends and family members. Many of them are disappointed when they are told, “you are too old so don’t go out of the house. We will give you the food that is the best for you”. They will be happy if they are taken out occasionally. The community also does not allow the aged members to do some work being worried what others may think about the members of the community. It is important to give the aged religious the opportunity and space to do whatever is possible for them. They need to be encouraged to do what they can and they must be generously appreciated for the works done. The elderly after their so-called retirement should try to do what they want to do, study new lesions, do research in new topics and keep themselves busy always by reading, writing and listening besides resting and relaxing. They can see and experience God and life from a higher perspective and share and write those precious experiences for the future generations.

3. CARING THE SICK

3.1 The Healing Ministry of Jesus

The Gospels speak of Jesus’ great concern and love for the sick. Throughout his public ministry, Jesus’ compassion and love for the sick shine through. In the Gospel, we read how Jesus cured the sick and restored them to friendship with his Father. In fact, the Church is mandated to continue the healing and caring ministry for the sick with deep compassion and respect for human dignity. The Church also teaches the importance of preserving life and prays for the health and well-being of its members. The Church continues Jesus’ ministry to the sick and dying through the sacraments. In administering the sacrament of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick, the priest brings to those who are sick the loving and redeeming embrace of Jesus. Priest, acting in the person of Jesus Christ, brings to the patient forgiveness, inner healing and strength for what lies ahead.

3.2 Human Life – God’s Precious Gift

Since we are not the owners of our life and life is a gift that we have received from God, we cannot neglect ourselves and those entrusted to our care. We are obliged to make reasonable efforts to preserve our health and prevent serious illness. In time of sickness, we must take sensible steps to restore our health as well as those entrusted to our care. Such efforts often include appropriate care given by medical professionals. Christian approach to sickness should be one of compassion, mercy and tenderness because in Mt 9:36 we read, “When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like a sheep without a shepherd”. This merciful and compassionate care and love for the sick should begin in our homes, in our religious communities. On the occasion of the 25th World Day of the Sick, Pope Francis in his message said, “The sick and those who are disabled, even severely, have their own inalienable dignity and mission in life. They never become simply objects. If at times they appear merely passive, in reality that is never the case”.¹³

3.3 Care for the Sick in Religious Communities

In religious communities, the sick members are to be taken care very well. They have to be served as if Jesus is taken care of: “I was sick and you visited me” (Mt 25:36). This is how Saint Benedict writes in his Rule with regard to taking care of the sick brethren.¹⁴ Like any human family, religious should take care of the sick members of their community as much as possible. Let us also be reminded of the exhortation of James: “Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the Church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord” (5:13-14). It is often said that the healthy members have only limited time, talents and experience to care for the sick members of the community in the long term. Yet from my experience, I can say that the sick members are provided in most of the religious communities the best care possible in the given situation. But if they are bedridden and the recovery is not possible, the love and care given to them are insufficient. And it is really painful!

In most of the religious communities, the facilities provided for the sick persons are not adequate to live independently on their own. There should be access for handicapped persons throughout the buildings, from the bed room to the chapel, to the refectory, to the recreation room, to the parlour, etc. The sick persons should be given chance to mingle with other members of the community. They are often forced to spend most of the time in isolation as facilities are not there for them to

move around freely. Some Congregations have their own home for taking care of the sick and elderly members. When members become sick and old, they are sent to live in old age home. And they go there very reluctantly and sadly with heavy heart, with no hope of returning to any the communities. Real community life is over for them. What a tragedy! Actually, they are so unwilling to go there because they are sent to a place where they have never been before and have no friends or known persons there. The house for maintaining the sick members and elderly must be connected to the main house, where they can come periodically for celebrations and gatherings and visit their friends and spend some time leisurely with them and get the support they need. It is also essential that good medical and nursing facilities are provided so that the recovery is possible.

Pope Benedict XVI while speaking to the participants of the 22nd International Congress of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care on 17th November 2007 said, “Today’s efficiency mentality often tends to marginalize our suffering brothers and sisters as if they were only a «weight» and a «problem» for the society. The person with a sense of human dignity knows that they are to respect and sustain them while they face serious difficulties linked to their condition”. Alongside the indispensable clinical treatment, however, it is always necessary to show a concrete capacity to love, because the sick need understanding, comfort and constant encouragement and accompaniment. The elderly in particular must be helped to travel in a mindful and human way on the last stretch of earthly existence in order to prepare serenely for death, which — we Christians know — is a passage toward the embrace of the Heavenly Father, full of tenderness and mercy.¹⁵

It is best to take care of the aged sick in the religious communities so that the aged sick can pass the final period of their life in a familiar community and prepare for death in a warm family environment. Even when it would become necessary to be admitted to a health-care structure, it is important that the religious’ bonds with his/her conferrers and with his/her own environment are not broken. They should also be encouraged to find the strength to face his/her hard trial in prayer and with the comfort of the sacraments. They should be surrounded by brethren who are ready to listen and to share his/her sentiments.¹⁶

In fact, all the religious understand the need and the responsibility to take care of the elderly and sick members of their respective Congregations. Yet, they point out certain practical difficulties in caring the sick and aged religious.

3.4 Certain Practical Difficulties

a) Lack of Sufficient Members

Today, most of the religious institutes are facing vocational crisis. The members are aging but there are not sufficient young ones to replace them and take care of them though it may not be a case as of now in India. But believe me; we are not far from this crisis! The missionary and administrative needs are so high that sufficient members are not spared to take care of the aged and sick members.

b) Medical Fund

Most of the religious dedicate their entire lives for ministries without decent remuneration. In country like India, most of the religious do not have any retirement benefits. Many religious institutes do not have any medical insurance for their members. In spite of the absence of special medical funds for the sick and elderly, no congregation has ever neglected its sick member for the want of money. God has always been generous to provide all that is needed for the upkeep of the religious.

c) Longer Lifespan

Human beings are living longer these days. The lifespan of human beings have increased dramatically in most of the countries including India in the last few decades thanks to better medical facilities and healthy food habits. And it will augment further specially in developing countries like India. This implies that the religious live longer and the religious institutes will have more elderly members who need special care for a longer period of time. This phenomenon demands additional personnel, infrastructures and finance from the religious institutes.

d) Expensive Medical Care

It is true that we have better health care system today than what was available a few decades ago. Consequently, health care has also become very expensive even in India. Medicines are costly and the doctors' fee as well. And a very good number of religious in every religious institute are in regular medication; be it for diabetes, cholesterol, blood pressure or some other diseases. Nursing care in the hospital is so costly as well. Even to employ caretakers, we need to spend a lot.

3.5 Certain Practical Guidelines for Caring the Aged and Sick

I suggest below a few practical tips for caring the aged and the sick from my own experience.

a) Frequent Visit

The aged and the sick like to be visited by people known to them, especially by members of the congregation. Because of age and sickness, they are not able to move around as freely as they would like to. They are not in a position to visit the members. But the members can. Let us feel happy to visit them. Let us visit our elderly and the sick members as frequently as possible.

b) God's Blessing to the Institute

The elderly and the sick may be feeling bad for their inability to contribute actively to the Congregation and to the society. In the modern “throw away” culture, they may consider themselves as useless, a burden or a disturbance to the community. Some may be even cursing themselves for being so inert. It is very important to assure them again and again that they are indeed a great blessing to the congregation and to every member of the society. The members’ words and actions should enliven them and the members have to accept them as God’s blessing.

c) Understanding Their Mentality

The elderly religious have their own way of arranging things and furniture in their living room. For some, it may look so untidy and inconvenient. Sometime, one may get so interested in them and try to arrange the room the way he wants. One may also take away some things from their rooms as they are no more useful. It is important to arrange their rooms the way they want. Let them keep whatever things they want in their living rooms. No one should remove any things from their room. For them, they are precious.

d) Listening to Their Stories

When one visits our elderly and sick, they may begin to share their own experiences, achievements and stories. They may say the same things again and again. One may hear the same story every time he/she visits them. It is good to listen to their stories even the same stories again and again. They need a good listener. As members of the same congregation, who can be the better persons than we?

e) Accepting Joyfully the Elderly Members

Before we care our elderly members, we should be aware of their situation, “isolation” and the pain they are undergoing. They are not accidentally in our life. They are part and parcel of our life, our community members and our family members like any other.

f) God, Emmanuel

Our God is Emmanuel, a God who is with us. He wants us to give our presence to the sick and the elderly religious in their moments of need. When we are present, in fact, we make God present to them and we experience the presence of God in them: “I was sick and you took care of me” (Mt 25:36).

g) Hopeful Words

It is important to give people living in sickness and old age the gift of hope. People can handle almost everything in life if they have hope. One of the way, one can give hope to the aged and sick religious is through words of encouragement, support and confidence. Physical expression of affection like touch, hug, kiss, a pat on the back can also revitalize spirit in them besides showing one’s concern for them.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude this article with the words of Pope Francis on Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on the occasion of the gathering of the grandparents and the elderly at St. Peter’s square on 28th September, 2014. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was also present on the occasion. Looking at him straight, Pope Francis said, “I specially thank Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI for his presence. I have said many times that I am so happy that he lives here at the Vatican because it is like having the wise grandfather at home”. Yes, every elderly religious in religious communities, in congregations is like having a wise grandfather or grandmother at home. The presence of the elderly members in religious communities and in religious congregation should make everyone happy.

Endnotes

¹ POPE FRANCIS, “Jubilee for Consecrated Life on the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. Address of His Holiness” [Accessed: 20.01.2017], https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco_20160201_giubileo-vita-consacrata.html

² Cf. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Fraternal Life in Community*, Rome 1994, 11-20.

³ The Greek word *oiktirmon* can be translated as merciful or compassion.

⁴ POPE FRANCIS, *Misericordiae Vultus*. Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Year of Mercy, Rome 2015, 10.

⁵ Cf. JOSEPH MURPHY, *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind*, New Delhi 2015, 247.

⁶ Pope Francis who is so compassionate towards the elderly made this beautiful observation while addressing the elderly at St. Peter's square on the occasion of a special Mass celebrated for the grandparents and the aged on 28th September 2014. His message on this special occasion can be accessed at <http://www.catholic.org/news/international/europe/story.php?id=57070>

⁷ Cf. JOSEPH MURPHY, *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind*, 248.

⁸ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 68, 69.

⁹ His message on this special occasion of the gathering of the grandparents and elderly can be accessed at <http://www.catholic.org/news/international/europe/story.php?id=57070>

¹⁰ Cf. JOSEPH MURPHY, *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind*, 248.

¹¹ Cf. JOSEPH MURPHY, *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind*, 249-250

¹² Refer *India Today* dated 13th February 2017 on the interesting and inspiring life of Paul Siromoni and his wife Joyce and their missionary service among the poorest of the poor and needy: <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/education/story/phd-at-90-yrs/1/881414.html>

¹³ Every year, 11th February is celebrated as the *Word Day of the Sick* being instituted by Saint John Paul II in 1992. The first Word Day of the Sick was celebrated at Lourdes on 11th February 1993. On the occasion of the 25th *Word Day of the Sick*, Pope Francis sent a page message on 8th December 2016. His entire inspiring and touching message can be accessed electronically at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_giornata-malato.html

¹⁴ Saint Benedict in chapter 36 of his famous monastic Rule gives the following recommendations for taking care of the sick: ¹ Care of the sick must rank above and before all else, so that they may truly be served as Christ, ² for he said: I was sick and you visited me (Matt 25:36), ³ and, What you did for one of these least brothers you did for me (Matt 25:40). ⁴ Let the sick on their part bear in mind that they are served out of honour for God, and let them not by their excessive demands distress their brothers who serve them. ⁵ Still, sick brothers must be patiently borne with, because serving them leads to a greater reward. ⁶ Consequently, the abbot should be extremely careful that they suffer no neglect. ⁷ Let a separate room be designated for the sick, and let them be served by an attendant who is God-fearing, attentive and concerned. ⁸ The sick may take baths whenever it is advisable, but the healthy, and especially the young, should receive permission less readily. ⁹ Moreover, to regain their strength, the sick who are very weak may eat meat, but when their health improves, they should all abstain from meat as usual. ¹⁰ The abbot must take the greatest care that cellarers and those who serve the sick do not neglect them, for the shortcomings of disciples are his responsibility.

¹⁵ Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's entire beautiful address can be electronically accessed at https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20071117_xxii-operatori-sanitari.html.

¹⁶ Cf. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's entire interesting address to the participants of International Congress of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care can be electrically accessed at: https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20071117_xxii-operatori-sanitari.html.

JOYFUL COMMUNITY LIFE- THE FIRST APOSTOLATE (COMMUNITY FOR MISSION)

Mariola, BS

“How good and pleasant it is when kindred dwell in unity” (Ps 133:1)

INTRODUCTION

Religious life is a form of consecrated life within the Church wherein the members profess vows of chastity, poverty and obedience within a congregation or community approved by the Church. Shared community life is an integral part of this form of consecrated life. In professing vows and living within community, the members individually and as a whole witness to a life of communion with Christ, the Church, and one another.

Apostolic religious congregations develop their own traditions based on the original vision of their founders or foundresses, while continuing to focus their ministries to meet the needs of the Church today. While every religious congregation is unique, together they form a rich source of inspiration for the entire Church.

Life in community is the primary way in which God prepares us to participate in the divine life. The deeper we enter into community, the more we prepare ourselves for our relationship with God, both now and in the life to come. It is basic to being human, not “an extraneous addition, but a requirement” of our nature (CCC, 1879). The core of Christian life is to be united with God by means of communion with one another; that is what Trinitarian communion teaches us.

Our communities are called to be the replica of the Trinitarian community pervaded by love, grounded in faith, filled with hope and growing in communion

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with God, self and one another. By Baptism we become the children of God and members of the ecclesial community, which is confirmed by our religious consecration. Rooted deeply in this experience we extend our ecclesial communion beyond the boundaries of our communities to other peoples, races, cultures, religions and the cosmos.

The essence of the community is love, equality and mutuality. The holiness of the members promotes the quality of the Institute, which also adds to the holiness of the Church. Hence it is the responsibility of every Sister/brother to make the community a 'home' where everyone's presence is felt and active participation is solicited, in all the common exercises of the community.

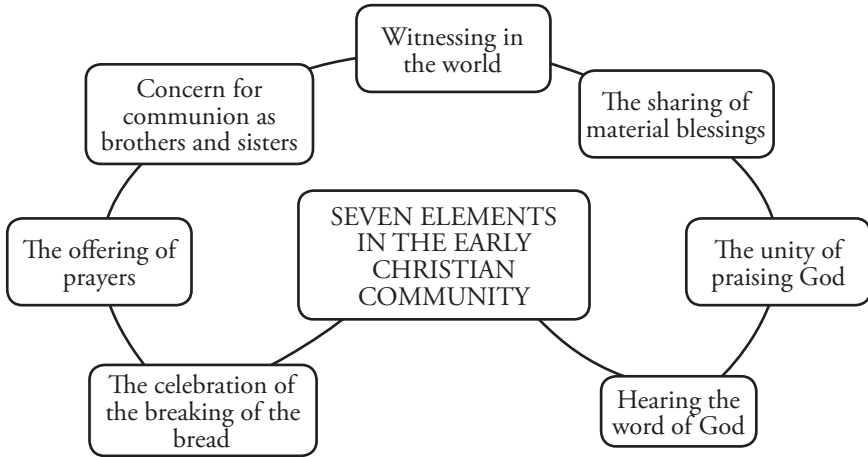
1. TERMINOLOGY: COMMUNITY

The word community comes from two Latin words, *cum* that is 'with' and *unitas* that is 'unity' and it denotes the life of many in unity.¹ Learning to work together, sharing possessions, planning, creating and depending on each other will strengthen our sense of community. In a genuine community every member feels free to think and to work, for the members love and support one another without selfishness and without destructive competition,² so that each person may be able to become a good reflection on the community. The early Christian communities bring before us the model of our religious community life.

2. EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

The early Christian communities provided an example of community life. The most fundamental reality of early community is that they shared the Trinitarian communion among them. The community 'is the place where the daily and patient passage from 'me' to 'us' takes place, from seeking my things to seeking the things of Christ, the things of the Father (*Fraternal life in Community*, 39).

The early community is an inspirational force both in ecclesial communities and human communities. In the Acts of the Apostles (4:32-37), there are seven elements in the community gathering of the early community:



These are the necessary elements which the early community has offered and the religious community should follow.

Early Christians lived as we read in the Gospel of St. Luke, loving God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their strength and with their entire mind and loving their neighbors as they loved themselves (cf. Lk 10:27). They devoted to the apostles' teaching and fellowship and fulfilled God's commandments. Their model of life is an inspiration to everyone in the community who needs to feel loved as part of the community and who wishes to live, like the early Christian community, with one heart and one soul in all the places wherever our service is needed. The most fundamental reality of early community is that they shared the Trinitarian communion among them. Therefore, the community of the apostles and the Christians of the primitive community of Jerusalem stand as a model of the religious community.

3. A COMMUNITY OF COMMUNION³

Webster's Dictionary defines communion as "a sharing; possession in common; an intimate spiritual relationship; a group of people of the same religious faith." Spiritual relationship among Christians is created by sharing the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ. St. Paul says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1Cor 10:16-17). By becoming one with Christ by participating in his body and blood we also draw closer to one another. The bread and wine used in the Eucharist are symbols of this communion. They are made by many grains of wheat and many bunches of grapes coming together and becoming one. So too communion can be established only by people coming together and becoming one.

3.1 The apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* reminds us that consecrated persons are called to be “true experts of communion and to practise the spirituality of communion” (46). Jesus’ deep communion with his beloved Abba and his disciples ever remains as a perfect example for this. In order to incarnate, embody and en flesh this divine communion in our communities, we must follow Jesus Christ himself — who is and makes the Eucharist — the Christ who broke the Word to the multitudes, who preferred humans to the Sabbath, who called people to repentance and accepted them unconditionally, who built a community on the basis of love, who even went out to the gentiles to embrace them as God’s children, who offered his body as a sacrifice, who brought peace and wholeness by means of his death.

3.2 The religious are called to form communities of communion and this call is offered by God irrespective of age and sex, colour and culture, customs and traditions, temperaments and personality differences. The common denominator that can unite us is love and faith in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word.

3.3.1 *A Community of Faith*

Faith is a total commitment of the person to God. It is commitment to the Father and Jesus in the Spirit that brings people together to celebrate the Eucharist. If not for the faith they share they would not come together for the Lord’s Supper. While it is faith that brings us together, the Eucharist is also a means to grow in faith. In coming together and celebrating, we bear witness to our faith and become confirmed in it. The penitential rite at the beginning of the Eucharist invites us to examine the depth of our commitment and take the necessary remedial measures. The liturgy of the word illumines the various areas of our life of commitment. The offertory beckons us to surrender ourselves totally to God to be transformed by God. The memorial of the passion and death, and communion inspire us to break ourselves for others in imitation of Jesus and in obedience to the Father. So every part of the Eucharistic celebration invites us to deepen our commitment and relationship to God and to others. Giving freely means that we give with no strings attached, that we give without counting the cost to the extent of even shedding of our own blood. Thus the Eucharist becomes a source for the community to grow in faith and become a community of faith.

3.3.2. A Community of Praise and Thanksgiving

The word 'Eucharist' comes from the Greek word *eucharistia* which means 'thanksgiving.' *Eucharistia* is an equivalent of the Hebrew word *berakah* which means 'blessing' or 'thanksgiving'. We often think of 'blessing' as invoking God's favour on someone or something. The favour or grace received by someone is also known as a blessing. But these are not the only meanings of the word 'blessing. 'To bless' is also to praise and thank God for the many wonderful things that God has done on our behalf. Thus when food is blessed before eating it, we not only ask God to sanctify it and make it nourishing for those who partake of it, but we also acknowledge and proclaim the goodness of God who has given us food and thank God for the same.

At the last supper, we are told that Jesus said a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving over the bread and wine (Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:14-20). What he did in the context of the Passover meal would have been to proclaim the great deeds that God had done on behalf of Israel and thank God for them. It is from this action of Jesus that the Lord's Supper came to be known as the 'Eucharist.' As a prayer of thanksgiving, the Eucharist invites the community to gratefully recall and celebrate not only God's gift of Jesus but also all the other wonderful things that God has done for the world and for itself. Only a 'remembering' and 'grateful' community can celebrate the Eucharist well. The community must constantly praise and thank God for each of them as well as for the numerous other blessings that it has received from God.

3.3.3 A Community of Sharing

Communion in a community is not mere togetherness but a meaningful, spirit filled presence of one to the other. This type of presence to each other is sharing. The Eucharist invites us and leads us to share.

In fact, from the earliest times the Eucharist has been known as the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20) and the breaking of bread (Lk 24:35; Acts 2:42). The grains of wheat and the bunches of grapes give themselves totally in order to become bread and wine. Then they offer themselves as food and drink to others. They exist to be eaten and drunk, to be for others, to be shared. And through bread and wine Jesus makes a self-gift of himself to us.

The creation of a community calls for such type of sharing, a gifting of oneself to others. The mere external, superficial, physical presence in a common place does not make a community. What makes a community is the willingness on the part of the members to share what they are and have. It often happens that members of a

community are willing to share what they *have*. They may give themselves totally to 'doing' things. But they may not share what they *are*. They may remain a 'mystery' to those around them. Sharing becomes complete only when together with putting our talents at the disposal of others and working for them, we share also our 'being,' that is, our self, our faith, thoughts, feelings, joys, sorrows, strengths, brokenness.

3.3.4 A Community of Service

One form of sharing is service, coming to the aid of those in any type of need. The Eucharist is a model as well as a help for this. As Jesus came to the help of those in need all through his life and crowned his readiness to come to the aid of others through his passion and death, all those who break bread together are called to spend themselves for others in imitation of Christ.

Having been fed on the sacrament of complete giving, of self-emptying and enriched with a deep communion with the Lord through the hearing of the word, we are sent forth from the altars as ambassadors of Christ, to share what we have experienced and received. Although at times we enter the sacred place as strangers, we step out as friends; although we approach the altar self-centred, we return other centred. If the daily celebration of the Eucharist does not make us more loving, more human, more committed, more self-giving, then it ends up being merely a ritual.

3.3.5 A Community of Reconciliation

It can also be a sign of reconciliation as in the case of persons who were estranged from each other coming together for a meal to celebrate their reunion. The Eucharist can be an expression of the communion already existing and at the same time be a means for creating communion as well as of bringing about reconciliation. Because of this it is to be celebrated not only by a community that is in communion but also by one that is in need of reconciliation. The Eucharist can bring about reconciliation because it is a memorial of the passion and death of Jesus where his body and blood were broken and shed for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:26-28).

If a community stands in need of reconciliation, it should indeed work so that it is in fact what it proclaims itself to be in word, namely, Christian community. Reconciliation calls for humility. It requires humility to offer forgiveness as well as to receive forgiveness. To be humble, one has to break oneself, break oneself of one's pride. Then only can there be reconciliation. No wonder that Jesus broke the bread to pieces, and let himself be broken so that broken humanity may become whole again!

3.3.6 Religious Community as a Place for Brothers and Sisters

From the gift of communion arises the duty to build fraternity, in other words, to become brothers and sisters in a given community where all are called to live together. From accepting with wonder and gratitude the reality of divine communion shared with mere creatures, there also arises conviction of the need to make it always more visible by building communities “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52).

In our days, and for our days, it is necessary to take up again this “divine-human” work of building up the community of brothers and sisters, keeping in mind the specific circumstances of present times in which theological, canonical, social and structural developments have profoundly affected the profile and life of religious community.

3.3.7 Religious Community as a Mystery

In its primary mystical component, every authentic Christian community is seen in “itself a theological reality, an object of contemplation”(28).⁴ It follows that a religious community is, above all else, a mystery which must be contemplated and welcomed with a heart full of gratitude in the clear context of faith.

Whenever we lose sight of this mystical and theological dimension which binds religious community to the mystery of divine communion, present and communicated to the community, we inevitably come to forget the profound reasons for “making community”, for patiently building fraternal life. This life can sometimes seem beyond human strength and a useless waste of energy, especially to those intensely committed to action and conditioned by an activist and individualistic culture.

The same Christ who called them, daily calls together his brothers and sisters to speak with them and to unite them to himself and to each other in the Eucharist, to assimilate them increasingly into His living and visible Body, in whom the Spirit lives, on journey towards the Father.

Prayer in common, which has always been considered the foundation of all community life, starts from contemplation of God’s great and sublime mystery, from wonder for his presence, which is at work in the most significant moments of the life of our religious families as well as in the humble and ordinary realities of our communities.

4. THE THEOLOGICAL MODEL OF COMMUNION IN COMMUNITY LIFE

4.4.1 The Trinitarian Communion

The origin, source and model of community life, and specifically religious community life, is the Trinitarian communion. In the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John we find frequent references to this communion (Jn 10:30; 14:20). The theological model of communion starts from the fact that God has intervened in history and has revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Three are revealed to us as living such a high degree of communion that they are forever one. And the Trinity is made known to us in the life and practice of Jesus. In Him we also come to understand what we mean to God, and to what extent the three Divine Persons have committed themselves to us and the communion to which they call us (Eph 2:4-9).

4.4.2 The Apostolic Community

Jesus came to fulfill the plan of the communion of the Trinity. Thus he is presented to us during his public life as forming a community with the apostles, as a paradigmatic realization of the mystery of unity: he named twelve as his companions whom he would send to preach (cf. Mk. 3:13-14; 1:16-20). Jesus had three years of intensive formation and apprenticeship for his disciples. During this period, he taught them what true discipleship was all about. Jesus in fact realized how difficult it would be for the disciples to be in communion with one another. He knew from his experiences that they would not give up their egos so easily and that each one would strive to be the first and the greatest and that they would fight till the end to occupy the top posts (Mk 9:33-34, 38; 10:35-37). Perhaps these attitudes of his disciples even after being with him for three years and having undergone intense period of formation urged Jesus to solemnly pray for them to his heavenly Father in his last days saying: “that they may all be one” (Jn 17:21). This is the unity he referred in the image of the vine and branches: “I am the vine, you are the branches” (Jn 15:5). This image sheds lights not only on the deep intimacy of the disciples with Jesus but also on the necessity of a vital communion of the disciples among themselves. Of course all are branches of a single vine. After the resurrection of their master, indeed the disciples of Jesus “were of one heart and soul” (Act 4:32) and as a result “with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all” (Act 4:32).

4.4.3 Recent Ecclesial Pronouncements

Late Pope John Paul II who insisted so much on communion writes in his apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*: “communion begets communion: essentially it is likened to a mission on behalf of communion. Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other to the point that communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: Communion gives rise to mission, and mission is accomplished in communion”. On another occasion, he says: “The effectiveness of religious life depends on the quality of the fraternal life in common and a search for communion and community”. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, he speaks of “communion for mission” and “mission for communion” and insists that communion and mission should go hand in hand. The Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life affirms stating: “All must be reminded that fraternal communion as such is already an apostolate; in other words, it contributes directly to the work of evangelization. The sign par excellence left us by our Lord is that of lived fraternity: ‘by this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13:35)’”.

4.4.4 Characteristics of a Religious Community

So to understand what a religious community is, the following characteristics can give an integral view: Consecration, Charismatic nature, Common life, and the Call of the grace

4.4.4.1 The primary characteristic of the religious community is the fact that it is a community of consecrated people, i.e., the religious community is composed of people who have built their lives around the evangelical counsels as a particular way for perfecting charity.

4.4.4.2 A second characteristic feature of the religious community comes from its being a charismatic community. This evolves from a common call to share the same charism with other brothers and sisters. At the root of every religious family is the particular experience of the founder or foundress.

4.4.4.3 The third element is the life in common, which gives ecclesial communion a specific pattern of its own, making it visible in a stable common life.

4.4.4.4 And the fourth element is concerned with how the relationship between its members is established through their call to come together.

And so we can say that the religious community possesses a particular identity of its own in the ecclesial communion because it is composed of people consecrated

by vows, its specific charism gives it particular feature of its own, it practices a concrete and stable common life, and it does not possess any prior human bonds – relations between its members are motivated only by the call of grace. Community life, which is one of the marks of a religious institute (Can. 607.2), gathers all the members together in Christ and should be so defined that it becomes a source of mutual aid to all, while helping to fulfill the religious vocation of each (Can. 602).

5. GROWTH NEEDS NOURISHMENT:

Human beings need bread if they are to grow. And if they are to grow spiritually, they like plants need sun, water, air and soil. The soil is the community — the place where they are planted, take root, grow, give fruit and die so that others may live. To grow on the journey toward wholeness which implies a deepening of personal life in peaceful encounters with God and others, while living community life fully and assuming responsibilities towards society, the church and the universe.

5.1 Prayer

A community is born of prayer. Activity builds up. Activism destroys. Activity pays attention to prayer too, integrates it. So it is constructive. Activism is a mad rush into action. It pays little attention to prayer, to persons and to the community. So it is destructive. Communion in prayer is a corner stone of community life. God listens to the cry of the community: ‘a community which prays together, which enters into silence and adoration, is bound together by the action of the holy spirit. God listens in a special way to the cry which rises from a community. Togetherness in prayer engenders belongingness.

The health of a community can be measured by the quality of its welcome of the unexpected visitor or someone who is poor, by the joy and simplicity of relationship between its members, by its creativity in response to the cry of the poor. But it is measured above all by the ardor for and fidelity to its own essential goal; its presence to God and the poor.

5.2 Community built by and founded on the Word of God

The word of God, of Jesus and of the Gospel is a bread of life of which we can never have enough. They touch our deepest being. Every religious community has to rethink and review its life and activities in the light the word. How far the community is alive to the word of God can be measured from its activity. A community driven by the word of God is the dwelling place of the spirit.

5.3 Eucharist:

Communities are places of communion before being places of cooperation. This communion must be nourished. Mascarenhas, the Servant of God presents to us 'the Eucharistic bread as a symbol of our communion'. As the Eucharistic bread composed of different grains together, mixed and baked to make one bread, so also the hearts of the community members belonging to diverse cultures should be ground together, mixed and baked to become one heart and one mind to grow in our consecrated life.

In his *Corpus Christi* homily on June 20, 2014 in the courtyard of St. John Lateran, Pope Francis spoke about what the faithful must "eat" and must avoid in order to be spiritually nourished. In the Eucharist, the Pope said, the Lord communicates "a love so great that He feeds us with Himself," with a "selfless love, always available to every hungry person in need," which gives renewed strength. "To live and experience the faith," means allowing the Lord to "feed you" Pope Francis reflected.⁵

There was a magnificent tree. It was sturdy, graceful, and shady. Its branches loaded with fruits, leaves and freshness were gently swinging in the cool early morning breeze. On one unhappy day, the branches began complaining to the tree. One of them said: "I am not prepared to remain forever a mere branch! I want to be a tree like you with roots and trunk! I want to stand on my own feet and be independent!" The tree replied: "You are part of the tree as all other branches. You, and your leaf-laden swinging in the breeze, give us vibrant beauty and life. All of us make the tree! Another branch complained: "why should I have only leaves and hardly any fruits? I want to have as many fruits as the branch next to me! It's not fair that I should be treated differently." Very gently the tree said: "What does it matter if leaves and fruits are not evenly distributed among the branches? All that belongs to all belongs to each! Were not for your leaves, there wouldn't be so many fruits on the other branches! Don't forget! We all are one single tree!" Still another branch rejoined: "I am fed up of having so many flowers. Insects come to me for nectar and pollination and give me no peace; even passerby wound me to take my flowers away! It's not just. Why should I suffer more than the other branches?" The tree responded: "Darling, beauty goes with suffering. You are the most beautiful branch. Suffering is the price. Your flowers are our flowers. Your sufferings are ours, as our leaves and fruits are yours too! Remember we all make one tree! At last some other branches complained: "Why should this orchid grow in me? Why do they rob me of my sap and drain my strength? Why should I only of all the branches bear this pain and loss? I do not want to belong to the tree!" With great patience

and kindness the tree remarked: “The precious orchids cannot live without us. They need our support and service. They give to our tree an incomparable beauty and teach us to be generous. It is because of you that all of us, all the branches can show compassion and love to our brothers and sisters in need! It’s we, not you, not she alone, not I. It’s we all together

It may be useful to recall that in order to foster communion of minds and hearts among those called to live together in a community, it is necessary to cultivate those qualities which are required in all human relationships: respect, kindness, sincerity, self-control, tactfulness, a sense of humour and a spirit of sharing.

Recent documents from the Magisterium are rich with suggestions and indications helpful for community living such as joyful simplicity (38), clarity and mutual trust (39), capacity for dialogue (40), and sincere acceptance of a beneficial communitarian discipline (41).

6. COMMUNICATION

Communication has been recognized as one of the human factors acquiring increased importance for the life of a religious community. The deeply felt need to enhance fraternal life in community is accompanied by a corresponding need for communication which is both fuller and more intense. In order to become brothers and sisters, it is necessary to know one another. Today, more attention is given to various aspects of communication.

6.1 Communication within institutes has developed considerably. There are a growing number of regular meetings of members at different levels, central, regional, and provincial; superiors often send letters and suggestions, and their visits to communities are more frequent. The publication of newsletters and internal periodicals is more widespread.

6.2 Regular meetings at the community level, often on a weekly basis, have also proved very useful; they let members share problems concerning the community, the institute, the Church, and in relation to the Church’s major documents. They provide opportunities to listen to others, share one’s own thoughts, review and evaluate past experiences, and think and plan together. Such meetings are particularly necessary for the growth and development of fraternal life, especially in larger communities. Time must be set aside for this purpose and kept free from all other engagements.

- 6.3 Be “of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. In humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others”. Your mutual relations should be founded on the fact that you are united to Christ Jesus (cf. Phil. 2:2-5).
- 6.4 The considerable impact of mass media on modern life and mentality has its effect on religious communities as well, and frequently affects internal communication. A community, aware of the influence of the media, should learn to use them for personal and community growth, with the evangelical clarity and inner freedom of those who have learned to know Christ (cf. Gal. 4:17-23). The media propose, and often impose, a mentality and model of life in constant contrast with the Gospel. In this connection, in many areas one hears of the desire for deeper formation in receiving and using the media, both critically and fruitfully. Why not make them an object of evaluation, of discernment and of planning in the regular community meetings?

7. FROM ME TO US

Religious community is the place where the daily and patient passage from “me” to “us” takes place, from my commitment to a commitment entrusted to the community, from seeking “my things” to seeking “the things of Christ”.

In this way, religious community becomes the place where we learn daily to take on that new mind which allows us to live in fraternal communion through the richness of diverse gifts and which, at the same time, fosters a convergence of these gifts towards fraternity and towards co-responsibility in the apostolic plan.

During the time of formation, all good will notwithstanding, it may prove impossible to integrate the personal gifts of a consecrated individual within fraternity and a common mission. It may be necessary in such cases to ask, “Do God’s gifts in this person make for unity and deepen communion? If they do, they can be welcomed. If they do not, then no matter how good the gifts may seem to be in themselves, or how desirable they may appear to some members, they are not for this particular institute.... It is not wise to tolerate widely divergent lines of development which do not have a strong foundation of unity in the institute itself” (55).

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of small communities, especially for reasons of apostolate. These communities can also foster closer relations among religious by prayer which is more deeply shared, and a reciprocal and more fraternal taking up of responsibility (56).

8. SUPERIOR

Every community is under the authority of a superior (Can. 608), who resides in the house (Can. 629). ‘The authority which superiors receive from God through the ministry of the Church is to be exercised by them in a spirit of service (Can. 618). The vow of obedience is effectively emptied of substance where there is no superior to whom one is accountable. Hence the Code envisages that every community shall have a superior, a human and frail spiritual head who, however unworthily, “holds God’s place” (PC 14). The institute supplies members with all they need to fulfill the purpose of their vocation (Can. 670). On the other hand, all that a religious acquires by personal labour or on behalf of the institute belongs to the institute (Can. 668 # 3). These provisions regarding temporal goods and the practice of religious poverty aim at consolidating the sense of community.

CONCLUSION

The concept of community is deeply embedded in the Christian tradition. This tradition acclaims God as the perfect community, a community of love. Life in community is the primary way in which God prepares us to participate in the divine life. The deeper we enter into community, the more we prepare ourselves for our relationship with God, both now and in the life to come. Community is the place where we grow in holiness, experience the healing power of Jesus and are challenged to live our vocation as holy women and men. They further remind us that community is basic to our human nature. The longing for community touches each of us at the very core of our being (CCC. 1879).

If our religious communities are to reflect, radiate and manifest the communion of hearts and minds willed by God a *metanoia* has to take place where internal attitudes and external behaviour fall in line with the Eucharistic spirituality. When efforts are made towards this, we will grow in our commitment, which is a passionate love for God expressed visibly in communion and missionary spirit. It is possible to reap a harvest of joy daily, if the Eucharist is celebrated as Christ did it in the upper room with his disciples, sharing generously. Giving freely means that we give with no strings attached, that we give without counting the cost to the extent of even shedding of our own blood. It means, in the end, letting the Gospel permeate and transform the deepest states of our hearts and transfiguring the ties that bind us together, making them in effect Christians.

Endnotes

¹ ALOYSIUS KATTADY, *Life is Relationship: Reflections on Consecrated Life*, Mumbai 2003, 59.

² GEORGE KAITHOLIL, *Communion in Community*, 13-14.

³ MARIETTE CRASTA, “Communion in Communities”, an article published in *Kristu Jyoti Theological Journal*, Bangalore during the Jubilee year.

⁴ CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Fraternal life in community*, Rome, 1994.

⁵ ZENIT, “The World Seen from Rome”, *Weekly dispatch* on June 22, 2014.

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