

COMMUNITY PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

The best and the worse thing of the life is decided in our interpersonal relations. Our basic happiness or misfortune depends of the quality of our relations. Therefore, every person and every group is conscious of being learning to live together.

Now well, a fraternity improves its relations only when is capable of stirring up dynamics of growth and of ownership in the light of a project shared. Every group in which the people are not found and are not working from a clear and specific project as nucleus of identities shared, sooner or later, enters in crisis. It is the project shared that founds the community. And only the project has the power to guide the brothers toward the encounter of communion.

The encounter of communion, as encounter in which the brothers are welcomed to deep levels, is an unavoidable objective of every life in common. It is what endows the religious life of its fullness, what frees it of the ghost of the solitude and what puts the religious life standing of mission.

The art to live is converted, then, in the art of live-together, in the art to create that luminous, dynamic, and hot space of the encounter with others. Without the encounter with the others, without interpersonal relations of quality, the existence is frustrated irreparably. The person dries inside, the ideals are parched and one finishes being felt a strange one on the earth.

The life in community is presented, then, as a great possibility to grow, as a great gift and as a great task.

As a great possibility: because, the life in community introduces us in an environment of communion based on a solid project that is shared.

As a great gift: first, because the brothers are given to me by the Lord; second, because are the brothers the ones that receive me, and I am not the one who come to help them; and third, because in fraternity I always receive more than what I give.

As a great task because, as all the valuable things of the life, the communion is an ambitious utopia that needs care and work if we want to harvest fruits.

Yes, the brothers are a gift, because they have born from God and because they have been given to me to share with them the project of the Kingdom: to live as children and brothers.

Contemplating them from God, beloved by Him, I can recognize them as children and brothers. The brothers do not born like the friends: by affinity of inclinations, sympathies or common interests. Our community is founded and sprouts from the heart of the Father, which knows each one of us, and constitute us in children and call as to be a family of brothers. (Ef. 1.5; Rom. 8.29; 1 Jn 3.1)

Our God is not a solitary God: is mystery of communion, is relation of people, is the encounter of common-union of the Father with the Son in the Spirit. Being made as image of God (Gn I, 17) it signifies that we are made for the communion and that our fullness consists of advancing toward the life of communion.

But the community, that is a gift from God, is at the same time task of the brothers. Our communion is always incipient, is always threatened and deteriorates easily. Therefore, the community survives only if it built day by day.

The common life is an inevitable source of conflicts. But these conflicts should be contemplated not as threats. The conflict can be an occasion of growth if the brothers are decided, under the look of the Father and the action of the Spirit, to build the common house around the Lord Jesus, the only architect of the fraternity. For it, each one must be ready to work and to be willing to give the best than each one carries inside: faith, quality of communication, mutual welcoming, ownership, resources that the human sciences put to our disposition, time, energies, heart, sincerity and gratuity....

In spite of all, the encounter of communion, being a gift from God and grace that the brother grants me, will continue to be something that cannot be controlled: is free. It is born and grows in liberty. Therefore the life of community experiences the same vicissitudes and risks of a person: advances, he is resisted, he goes back, It is exposed to the betrayal and to the infidelity, suffers, mature, search, wait, reconciles itself, delivers itself... and therefore, the first that requires is to compromise our own liberty...

The life in fraternity is an art at the same time difficult and seducer: is the realization of the utopia of the Kingdom. It puts us in direct contact with the uncontrollable mystery of the person. By personal experience, each one knows that is a mystery and a difficult problem. It is healthy to recognize with Casaldáliga that:

Two are the problems, two:
The others and I.
The difficult others
And the difficult I.
The hard "we" of the communion.

"All the fertility of the religious life depends on the quality of the brotherly life in common" (Juan Pablo II)

1. MODELS OF COMMUNITY

The personal call, the community life and the mission as prophetic immersion in the history of humanity, constitute the three structural moments of the project of the Kingdom, both inside and outside of the religious life. Although the ways of articulating these three moments can be very plural, according to the diverse charisms, a certain balance must always be done among them.

Having presented this outline, let us review some of the models of religious communities that have been appearing in the past years. Each model, in its limitations, it contributes valuable elements and it must be understood and valued inside the historical context in which it arose.

1. Community of observance

With this name I refer to those communities whose ideal consisted in the exact execution of the norms that regulated the traditional life of the convents. The fulfillment of the norm and of the discipline, dictated by the authority, was the sure criterion to be a good religious. To be sure that everything was going well in the community, the

important thing was the function that each one carried out and it was adjusted to those functions that they had commended him. The important thing was to guarantee the unity and the uniformity of all the members of the community around a sure and stable pattern.

This community model responded at the times in which the Constitutions of the Institutes, inspired directly in the Canon Law regulated the life of the religious communities until her last details.

This type of community saved the unity very well, but it didn't tolerate the individual differences that were viewed as a threat to the community. The model of observance created, on the other hand, a strong sense of ownership, an apparently robust cohesion, a community externally perfect, well structured, where each one is with his very clear function and with the same ideal, apparently shared.

However, it was clear that there was the lack of identity and of personal autonomy. These were not appreciated in the pattern of observance, because they represented a threat for the institution that founded in the subjection to the norm the sure approach and the good religious' objective: the religious that observe the norm.

The authority controlled the information and knew things that the other religious didn't know. The authority was the one that knew what was necessary to do and why. The authority alone decided the norm and their execution. The other ones, to do right, didn't have to do more than to obey what was imposed from above. "The one that obeys always do right."

In this model of community life the "depersonalization" risks were unavoidable. The unfolding of the possibilities of the brothers was much clipped, since it was not favored neither by the personal initiative, by the co-responsibility, nor by the dialogue with the base.

The educational pattern of the initial formation looked for to generate submissive and docile people, and then insecure and dependant people. Psychologically predisposed to be considered inferior with regard to people endowed with authority, toward those who would manifest their deference, but only as an external attitude and not as a sign of positive collaboration: it was the passive obedience or the docility of weak people.

These communities of observance have gone disappearing progressively. They have survived something more in communities with great number of members and ages advanced.

This model of community life enters in a strong crisis in front of the new generations that were regulated by other approaches: the primacy of the subjectivity in front of the norm, the crisis of the traditional figure of the superior, the question of the meaning of the big convents, the new ways of communicating and of approaching the conflicts, etc...

2. Auto-fulfilment community

These communities arose as reaction to the communities of observance.

Here what is valued is above all the individual thing, the own personal realization. The community exists in function of the personal necessities and goals: the accent is put in the individual thing with damage of the community and of the institution.

The community sense is misled and also the interaction and growth dynamics.

The community approach is the following one: the community should make possible that each individual satisfies his necessities. When assigning one apostolic activity we must respect and value their gifts and personal desires and necessities.

The community works if it makes happy those that live in her.

This model's great advantage is the setting in crisis of the community of observance, waking up the interest for the person: everybody is been in a personal way, according to their own rhythms of growth. It is recognized that the person counts more than the structure.

Now then, when this tendency becomes exclusive, a community heads toward the loss of the community sense and of ownership.

Many people finished becoming untouchable: they will refuse any change destination or task that is not born of their own initiative. The relationships will also be individualistic: we are together, but in the bottom the important thing is that each one satisfies his personal necessities. The tacit or explicit approach is: Live and allow living. Their relationships with other communities are reduced at minimum. For that reason, these communities easily detach from the renovation programs and from permanent formation that the provincial Institution proposes to them.

This model facilitates that people live on serious psychological inconsistencies, for not having somebody with whom to confront their postures. For an unconscious process of rationalization, they will identify the satisfaction of their desires with the cause of the Kingdom. In fact, they want to make sure of their own kingdom: to satisfy my own necessities without discernment.

In this type community the superior is so democratic that he has practically lost his function of authority. Often he is chosen as superior a weak person that guarantees the "laissez- faire".

3. Community "company"

I call Communities "Company" those communities that are subjected to an activity rhythm and effectiveness that unbalances them in their project. The important thing for them is that the religious responds with effectiveness, social prestige, economic profitability and efficiency in the assigned tasks. Without too much discernment, the task is identified with the cause of the Gospel. The "company" type of community is frequent in those institutes that were born with strong mission awareness.

It is looked for that the religious have a great professional level, so that they can fulfil with competence the tasks that are assigned. But they do not take care of their human, theological, spiritual formation so much, as well as the spaces for the personal cultivation and the community encounters, the self-knowledge, the discernment and the vocational growth.

The youngest usually perceive them as people that live only for the work.

The price that is paid with this model is very high. When being constituted by good professionals, but with interior life and vocational personality little consolidated and contrasted and with little theological-spiritual formation, they can end up feeling mere workers.

The superior is a good manager and a good administrator that looks for the effectiveness and the profitability of the company and values his brothers in function of his professionalism, neglecting other more vital and more personal dimensions.

In a certain moment, these religious can have the sensation of being exploited and they can enter in a crisis of identity, with difficulties to understand and to justify their option of consecrated life. Their jubilation usually outlines an especially crisis to these religious.

4. Community "stove"

I refer to those communities that understand each other in function of themselves. They value the community sense and the own spaces that are shielded what supposes some threat to the life inside. They organize their life, their prayer, their tasks, in function of themselves and they don't allow that anybody perturbs their peace once they have completed their "hours of service." They make a functional sense of the mission. Mainly they control the visits of people unaware to the community.

They are communities that forget that all community is "community for the mission" that they have been summoned to be sent to the world and to welcome the world in its best, to be Samaritans.

But, mainly, this reclusion of the community on herself is revealing great group insecurity and it takes all the signs of spiritual and cultural asphyxia, of lack of creativity and of autonomy for the members.

Their tendency to be protected takes them progressively to be isolated of the world and it disables them for the mission.

5. "Insert" community

There are communities that have arisen with vocation to live inserted in social, cultural, environment (ambience) that is secular or marginalised.

Although they are priests, their form of life is usually more laical than clerical. Its way of evangelizing consists in seeking to build the Kingdom in those outlying areas of the city that are more excluded or more punished by some type of poverty. They are fraternities that live from the solidarity with the poorest.

Their evangelism is indirect: first they surrender from a solitary existence and then, when the case arrives, they announce on behalf of who they do it. It is undeniable that there is a evangelical value and a significant force in this type of communities in a pluralistic society, of big social imbalances and with high unbelief.

But these communities also have their own difficulties to live a balanced project of life. As they are welcome fraternities, they find difficult to delimit enough spaces for the sufficiently community encounters to exercise the discernment and the communication of quality. For the same reason they usually have difficulties to find spaces for prayer, personal reflection and study.

Due to their new way of understanding the religious life, these fraternities are not usually accepted easily by the most traditional communities.

6. "Programming" community

The programming is born of the felt necessity of balancing the different moments of the project: contemplation-action, individual-fraternity, and mission-insert. That programming of the different aspects supposes, without a doubt, a progress on the previous models of community. This programming is usually done with the participation of all the members of the community, that which endows them of a great moral authority and the best guarantees to be welcomed. The community makes sure that in this way there are some minimum spaces for the different dimensions of the community life. Without a doubt, it is a great achievement.

But the limitations of a programming are evident. On one hand the programming tend to generate static community models. Acts schedules, commitments are carried out and with it one has the conscience of fulfilment. In certain form, it becomes a new model of observance, only that it is more democratic: now the schedule and the norms are not imposed by the superior, but rather they are agreed among all. At the end the community falls in the formalism again, instead of understanding the life of the community like the art of raising dynamic of growth that transcends all norms. But this

is achieved when the mere programmings are overcome and we begin to practice the community discernment starting from a clear project.

7. Community that walk toward “the communion encounter” starting from a shared project

In the previous types of community we have pointed out perhaps more the negative aspects than the positive ones. But it is undeniable that they are all constituted from some important central value.

It is frequent, for example, to think about the dilemma of if the fraternity should be to the person's service or if the person should be to the service of the fraternity; if the fraternity is before the mission or the mission previous to the fraternity, if the “meaning” is decided in the option with the poor or in community relationships of quality. These dilemmas don't have solution, because they are not well outlined. The solution is not in subjecting a pole to the other one. The solution is in integrating the different moments of the project of the Kingdom: person, community and mission are to the service of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is not something that happens only in the last moment of the project, but rather the Kingdom spreads circularly in the three moments of the project. The Kingdom happens in the moment of the personal call, in the moment of fraternity and in the moment of the mission.

A fraternity is not valid for the fact that it helps people to satisfy their own necessities. Neither to help people to be sociable, more effective or more insert. All that will have to take care of it, there is no doubt. But the community is valid only if she invites its members to know themselves, to be expressed in freedom and in mutual acceptance and to take the responsibility of its shared project: God and their Kingdom.

It is not the programming of the project, neither the effectiveness in the tasks, neither the prospective of the future. The decisive thing is to share the own truth with the brothers, to wake up dynamic of personal and community growth in an open dialogue and to look for, in discernment, the communion that God wants of us as basic approach of mission.

In this line, the CP becomes a valid mediation. Let us summarize some reasons.

1. - The CP has the value to make explicit in decisive moments of the fraternity that which constitutes the reason of being of our live in community: God, their Kingdom, the fraternity. With too much frequency we leave in the land of the implicit things, which constitutes the source of the motivations of our option of life
2. - To live in project key means to live awake to capture the novelty of the Kingdom that emerges every day. The project reminds us that life is a provocation of God, continuous conversion, change, path, “sequela”, dynamic process of growth...
3. - The CP is a call to the co-responsibility of all the members of the fraternity to discern and to specify the contents of the will of God here and now, defining this way a mark of community obedience. ...

We no longer depend on the possible personal wishes of a superior, but rather we all obey a project with which we all have committed freely, because we have seen in her the will of God and our own reason of being.

4. - The community project establishes a new way of exercising the service of the authority. The superior, on behalf of the fraternity, has the mission of reminding the brothers the community project, as expression of those commitments that the fraternity has identified as proper. This appeal to the community project must not be juridical but charismatic, as somebody who reminds a group of its more intimate desires. The superior veils so that the fraternity will be faithful to herself, to her project.

5. - The project facilitates the evaluation, in a climate of relaxation and of trust, the attitudes of the brothers in order to be faithful to the commitments and facilitates also the dynamic in which is living is option for the Kingdom.

6. - The project, with the programming of the daily, weekly, monthly and annual acts discussed in fraternity, educates us to plan in advance, avoiding the risks of the improvisation, the arbitrariness of the superiors and facilitating the presence of the brothers in the strong moments of the life of the fraternity.

7. - The community project seeks, ultimately, to put in creative movement all the possibilities and dynamisms locked in a religious community.

2. AS A NEW MEDIATION...

In the renovation movement that continued to the post-council, all the religious Institutes hurried to renovate their Constitutions and to publish documents that will allow the recreating of their own charisma.

This renovation effort has gone maturing in a double dimension:

a) A new mentality and a new theology of the religious life and of their own charisma has been born.

b) New mediations of community animation have been incorporated, in agreement with this new mentality.

We can also see, this change of mentality, in our congregation when we scan through the abundant documents of general, provincial chapters... etc. But at the same time the local communities and the confreres begin to feel a certain fatigue of so many documents that are often passed directly to the files, when are not passing to the dustbin.

The difficulty, perhaps, is in discovering new mediations that can help us to apply and to complete this new mentality. The mediations have a decisive importance. As Tagore says: "It is not enough with knowing the destination, it is necessary to know the road that drives us toward it"

The community project is without a doubt one of those mediations that I believe has not been taken advantage of or used in our local guanellian communities.

The mentality of the community project is aimed at helping us to no longer understand the community life as "state of perfection" but as "a dynamics of processes and of the brothers' uninterrupted growth."

The COMMUNITY PROJECT:

* it is aimed at making the community feel protagonists of their own history,

* it seeks to wake up dynamisms of personal and community transformation

*it wants to unblock the resistances and to liberate the best things that our communities take inside themselves as principles that transform.

It is then an instrument of animation and community growth. It doesn't seek the change of

behaviors or a better functioning of the community, but helping people to grow, with the goal of

facilitating internal processes of personal transformation.

The PC wants to be a discernment mediation to wake up and to mobilize the dynamisms of fidelity

and of growth that the members of a community have inside at the human, spiritual, professional and mission levels.

A graphic illustration with a human figure can help in showing the vital aspects of people and community we have to regenerate before elaborating the PC.

1. The Mind.

I change ideas. To regenerate a new mentality that has gone emerging with the modernity.

a new person concept, (primate of the subjectivity)

a new conception of the vocation as life in process,

a new theology

a new community idea,

a new idea of authority,

a new idea of obedience....

a new valuation of communication,

of the meaning of conflict,

of the community dynamics,

2. The heart - attitudes (conversion)

Importance of the world of the feelings, as a force that determines the man's basic postures: their affections and their radical attitudes. A person changes in the measure to which he/she commits and changes his/her heart.

The quality of a PC depends on the affective intensity to which each member of the community commits himself.

3. Hands (dexterities)

They are dexterities that should help us mainly to favor dialogue and communication, to know ourselves and to accept ourselves better, to manage the conflict, to a fraternal correction that reinforces self-esteem,... to train in the analysis of reality, in the discernment...

It is not enough to appeal to the good will and the conversion of the heart, they certain structural changes are also necessary and to familiarize ourselves with certain dexterities that facilitate the real change of a group.

4. Feet (Dynamic of growth)

The PC doesn't point to objective and definitive models of perfection, but to processes: to wake up dynamisms of interpersonal interaction. To live in permanent exodus in the path, it is necessary to be with the sandals on.

The hand-feet without mind-heart are blind compulsive.

The mind-heart without hand-feet loses the power of transforming the personal and structural reality.

The mind and heart guarantee the effectiveness of the hands and the feet.

The hands and the feet demonstrate the truth or the lie of the mind and the heart.

3. SPIRIT OF THE COMMUNITY PROJET

All mediations need to be understood and used by the light of its philosophy and spirituality. Let us see together the anthropological, theological and psycho-social presuppositions.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

We will center ourselves on the understanding of one of the human basic structures: the person made for the communion encounter. The community life has this basic anthropological principle. To reach this encounter, it is necessary to travel a long process along which we will achieve a difficult synthesis between two of the person's powerful antagonistic tendencies:

- A) Tendency to personal autonomy,
- B) Interdependence,

A) Personal autonomy

- * The anthropocentric vision: the value "man" is erected to decisive approach of all other realities, including the spiritual. (Anthropocentrism opposes itself to the Christian faith when it is not sufficiently human. Theo-centrism opposes itself to anthropocentrism when it is not sufficiently divine, especially when it ignores the revelation of God in Jesus' humanity.
- * Primate of subjectivity of human person: of his/her dignity, his/her autonomy and the sacred respect that he/she deserves.
- * This recognition of personal sovereignty is translated in the community life as a demand to deposit a basic trust in the person, to demand his
- * Co-responsibility in the march of the community life,
- * Subsidiarity with his capacity to collaborate with the community to discover the road of the Kingdom.

B) Interdependence

M. Buber tells us that what defines human existence and what facilitates its unfolding is to live it as encounter. "All true life is encounter..." (Buber)

Man is an open and incomplete reality. What I lack, I can only find it in others, and I can only fill it as a result of a paradoxical encounter: from my un-surrender personal autonomy I go out to the communion encounter with the others. To be man means "being-with-the-other". To live is to live-with.

Encounter is the fundamental and essential relationship of man and the best definition of himself.

A good relationship is above all, the capacity of communication and communion.

What do we understand by communion? It's not a coalition, not a total identification, but an encounter that occurs when two people synchronize at existential and affective deeply levels.

The conditions for a true communion are: the authenticity of each person with his own truth, the communication of one's intimacy, the respect to the identity of the other person and the synergy in vital interests.

The essence of the CP is to share vital interests, and in discernment, to facilitate community processes of growth toward the communion encounter.

"It is necessary to remember always that the realization of the religious and the nuns pass through their communities" (Fraternal life in community n°25)

Religious life tries to advance toward the encounter of communion based and impelled by the Spirit that constitutes us in Children and it encourages us in the task of becoming brothers. To carry out this task ahead we need two things: to make our appointment in God as the foundation of the brothers' encounter (to celebrate the gift: theological presupposition) and to put hands to work with the instruments within our reach (task: psychological presupposition)

THEOLOGICAL PRESUPOSTS

* Primacy of God. What defines our religious community is that the brothers coincide in the recognition of the primacy of God as a common Father.

* The three essential elements of the Christian project are very well defined in Marks' gospel: 3, 13-16: "He went up to the mountain and he called those he wanted. So they came to him, and he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to proclaim the message..."

> **Call-vocation:** Jesus called those he wanted. The personal call constitutes the fundamental experience of all vocation. The personal project seeks that the person centers his life on this listening and personal obedience.

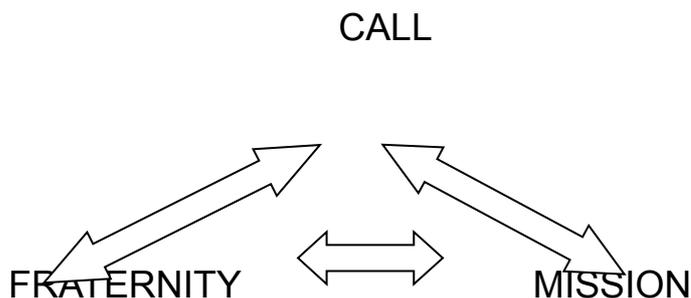
> **Community:** "so that they were with him". If the call is personal, the mark and the womb where one lives and carries out that option and that "sequela" is always the community. When Jesus calls, he calls us to remain in communion with him (Jn 15, 4-8). For that reason it is essential that all our programming, dynamics and techniques of resolution of conflicts, of negotiation of objectives and mediations are located in this theological mark. Prayer doesn't solve problems magically but it generates new attitudes that qualify us to accept people as they are and to approach the conflicts in a mature way.

> **Mission:** "To send them..." Jesus summons us to his "sequela" in community and from it, to announce, and to build the communion of the Kingdom in the history of humanity. The communion reached by a community, is already the first mission, as soon as that testifies that the utopia of the Kingdom is realizable: to build a human community of brothers and children. All our mission tasks are under suspicion when we intend to build outside, what we are not able to build inside. For that reason, fraternal life is the first and fundamental mission.

* These three moments of the Christian vocation genetically follow the order:



but they are in dialectical interaction, they are self-determined and they claim synchronously. For that reason the real outline would be the following:



If one of the three moments fails the whole project disappears.

Each Christian project is constituted around these three essential encounters:

1. My personal encounter with myself and with God
2. The encounter with my community
3. And the encounter of my community with the world and the history.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

We said that to live, is to live-with and that, it is only in the interpersonal relationships of quality that the person realizes himself and feels alive. But to start to walk on this path of relationship it is necessary that the brothers are willing:

* to be welcomed effectively and affectively,

* to learn how to manage some dexterities to communicate, to achieve a mutual knowledge, to confront the conflicts...

The exercise of the fraternal charity passes today through the learning of those dexterities... The condition of Children and brothers are given as a grace, but the grace doesn't usually skip the laws of the nature, but rather it acts in them.

Social psychology, as well as anthropology tells us that the person grows only in the vital space of a healthy interpersonal relationship. Therefore not every type of relationship is good to promote the life and the growth of people that live together. To learn how to relate is an art and a task to learn every day of our life. For its incidence in the life of the community, the world of the relationships will be considered in the community project as a topic of primary importance.

Social psychology tells us that to have interpersonal relationships of quality within a human group (like that of a religious community) each member of the group should satisfy in himself three basic necessities:

1. Inclusion (the necessity of ownership),

2. Control (the necessity to influence and to have power in the group)

3. Affection-being valued. (Necessity to give and to receive affection and of being valued)

In the traditional formation the accent was pointed towards the Ideal and the necessities were not kept in mind or worse still, they were considered as something negative. When these necessities are denied the person experiences a deep frustration that is translated in bad humour, aggressiveness, susceptibility, authoritarianism, gossip, envy, affective immaturity, intransigence, conflict situations without exit... The grade in which the members of an association satisfy these necessities, determines the grade of cohesion of that association.

The community is constituted by a group of people whose place of encounter and cohesion are located in the person's more radical and deeper level: in those values that constitute the least sense of their life and the reason of their existence. What founds the believing community, the Church, is to know that we are children around a common Father. On the other hand what bases the religious vocation is to know that we are invited by that Father to follow Jesus, poor, obedient and chaste, in community and with the mood and the specific personality of the charisma of each institute. The objective of the CP consists in working on this aspect.

There are two possible ideological deformations, frequent in the religious community:

Spiritualistic reduction

The community is built only insisting in the radical and fundamental values of the community, appealing to the single conversion of people, subtracting importance to the psycho-socials factors.)

Psycho-social reduction

(The opposite) To think that all community should be constituted by homogeneous people: with the same sensibility, with the affective links already solved, with psychological and natural likeness...

Why do some brothers sometimes give themselves so much outside and so little inside?

The number

Social psychology has demonstrated to us that the number of members of a community is an element that conditions the quality of the communication and therefore the quality of the interaction of a group.

Too numerous communities usually have big difficulties such that for their members to establish relationships of quality, the natural tendency is to the division in sub-groups. On the other hand very small communities, (of less than five people) they are usually not very efficient to develop a good community dynamics.

If they are four they can polarize in "two at two", if they are three it is frequent that one of them is set apart in front of the other two that understand each other.

It is considered that the ideal number for work groups is from 5 to 7, but for groups of community life the number rotates around 9. A number that on one hand, increase the contribution of each member of the group, at the dynamics of the group and, on the other hand, everybody has the possibility to express himself sufficiently.

Evidently the number is not more than a structural factor and, therefore, has its importance, but relative.

IMPORTANT DEXTERITIES FOR THE ELABORATION OF THE CP

1. Communication and the mutual knowledge
2. Mutual acceptance
3. Feedback
4. Fraternal correction
5. Conflict

1. Communication and mutual knowledge

Without sincere communication, ability to transmit certain levels of intimacy, feelings, desires and convictions, a community neither advances humanly nor spiritually. The quality of the communication is one of the best scales to measure the health of a community.

The dialogue-communication allows us to advance in mutual knowledge; it unites people and groups, and facilitates the advance towards the truth and towards communion encounter. The community life doesn't consist in being always together, but in sharing the life, one identity and the necessities.

Usually we distinguish several communication levels:

Level 0: Silence: People are avoided because they are rejected or are ignored and they don't have anything say.

Level 1: Communication of common sentences. (Greetings, the climate...)

Level 2: Of news. (Gossip is located at this level)

Level 3: Of intelligence. We communicate ideas, thoughts and convictions.

Level 4: Interpersonal feelings. It is the affective and emotional level of communication. If a community doesn't end up communicating feelings its levels of communication they will always be poor.

But it's not enough to only observe if the feelings are expressed or not, but also how they are expressed, and our emotions controlled.

Some guidelines on how communicate feelings:

* To speak in first person (I think...) and not in second (it is that you...)

* Not to make judgments of value, not to moralize, not to attack to the other person, nor to incriminate, but what one perceives and feels.

* To formulate the feelings in a clear way but without hurting.

* To treat others as you would like others treat you.

Level 5: Of communion. It is the deepest and committed level and the level that increase more the growth of people. It is a communication not only at the level of feelings but also of values and convictions that guide the one's life, the level of deep motivations. It is the reciprocity of intimacies.

“In the renewal of recent years, 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. To do this, it is rather important to communicate more extensively and more deeply. Today, more attention is given to various aspects of communication, although the form and the degree may vary from one institute to another and from one region to the next”.
(Fraternal life in community n° 29)

2. Mutual acceptance

To accept a person is to welcome him positively as he is.

Acceptance is not identical with the natural sympathy.

When we don't like something in the other person, we are easily pushed to reject or to change him immediately. In this way we make his growth and transformation difficult.

“Nothing can be known if it is not loved” (Saint Augustine)

“Brothers have been given more to be loved and to be served, than to be changed and to converted. (José Luis Pérez).

A person only grows when he is respected and welcome in his difference, when he is valued, when he perceives that somebody believes in him and in his possibilities of growth.

But to advance in mutual acceptance, a community has another more solid foundation than that the psychological ones expressed so far: the believer finds in her faith a powerful motivation to welcome the other person in her difference: the brother is loved by God. We don't choose our partners, it is the Lord who summons us to live together with Him and he entrusts us with the task of building fraternity.

Hints to favour mutual acceptance:

- * To make an effort to feel things like the other person feels it.
- * To be authentic and frank, but valuing what the other person can assimilate
- * To reinforce the positive feelings of the other person
- * To give signs of wanting to approach to the other person
- * To show interest for the person of the other.
- * To be patient in listening.
- * To be interested in the world of the other one, mainly in their feelings.

The chapter on mutual acceptance is an arduous task on the way to a fraternity.

3. Feedback.

It consists on learning how to read the answers that other they give us as reaction to our behaviours. What facilitates us a better self-knowledge.

To give feedback means to inform somebody of the reaction that causes in me what he says or do.

For it to be useful and effective it must have the following qualities:

- a. It must be descriptive, before being evaluative
- b. It should be concrete, not generic or abstract.
- c. It should always take in consideration the necessities of the one who receives it, and not the necessities of the one who gives it.
- d. It should go to aspects of behaviour that one can control
- e It should be given in a favourable moment.
- f. It is always necessary to check if it has been well interpreted in their words.

- g. It must be direct
- h. It must be requested.

4. Fraternal correction or constructive critic.

It is the way of feedback that should locate the negative connotation specified inside the person's positive global valuation. It always looks for the good of the other one and not the personal affirmation in front of the other one.

Counsels for a good fraternal correction: (p. 101)

5. The conflict

Conflict is unavoidable in community life. It is even necessary for the growth of the community. It acts in the group similar to the pain in the body (example; a toothache warns us that there is a cavity?).

Conflict indicates to us for where the fraternity should advance. Therefore, we should value it positively and then learn how to manage it, because if it is used badly, it can double the tensions in the group.

Group like place of harmony (where it is necessary to avoid the conflict)

Group like confrontation place (where it is valued the conflict positively and is elaborated healthily) (Outline pag.104)

Resolution of conflicts doesn't have another exit than the negotiation in which we all can come out winning although we have to renounce something.

Basic attitudes to face the conflict well:

- a. Not to fall in the trap of attributing the blame to certain people, but assuming among all our part of responsibility.
- b. To outline the conflict as a confrontation exercise, centering the attention on the analysis of the objective situation that provokes the conflict.
- c. To recognize the differences and to value the positive aspects of each other.
- d. To create attitudes so that the collaboration is bigger than the competition.
- e. Not to fall in the trap of looking for an expiatory goat.

The analysis of a community problem, of a community conflict should not begin with the question of "who is responsible for the non-functioning of this group" but "what is happening in this group, what mechanisms are functioning."

We have to avoid to ignore the conflicts and to approach them improperly.

4. METHODOLOGY FOR THE ELABORATION OF THE COMMUNITY PROJECT

Introduction

It is clear that the success of the CP doesn't depend so much on the techniques that we can use but depends deeply on the attitude that people may adopt it. But, like all other pedagogic instruments, the project also has its technical part that is necessary to know how to manage. We offer some practical orientations.

The richest and decisive moment in the community project is the **moment of its elaboration**. It is the realization of a good part of the objectives that one intends to get: an encounter of grace in which the fraternity liberates its best possibilities. For that

reason, it is necessary to give it time, and a time of quality. It is the moment in which the brothers are gathering:

- . to affirm our identity and ownership.
- . to be conscious of being summoned by God,
- . to accept and welcome ourselves as brothers,
- . to establish a sincere communication,
- . to solve and to negotiate our differences and conflicts,
- . to discern the will of God,
- . to live an experience of community illumination,
- . to look for the collaboration of each other in order to build the community.

In a word, the moment of elaboration of the CP is a time of grace in which the fraternity, open to the Spirit, becomes the workshop of its own realization. For that reason, the days of the community project are frequently lived as days of community fullness, as summit moments of the fraternal life.

The CP tries to design a strategy of community growth for a term of one year. As the processes of growth in a group, are usually very slow, nobody should make illusions that in one year the community will radically change with the project.

When a community begins to make the community project, it can seem him a little complicated. With time the community will learn how to be centred in the discernment starting from the mutual acceptance and of a communication of quality that are the essential points.

The community project should land, at the end, in one schedule, in an allotment of tasks and of responsibilities, etc. It is an indispensable consequence. But it is not the essential thing. It suits to be alert, for not falling in the temptation of reducing it to a mere programming of tasks. The community project look, mainly, for internal dynamics of the growth of the community in general and of each brother in particular. It is not easy to capture these dynamics in the writing of the project. This is something that one lives inside the dynamics of the elaboration of the project like their most important part. The elaboration of the CP has the power of waking up processes of change, without these processes the programming doesn't serve a great thing.

Summarizing, the CP reminds us that the reason of living in community is the risen Lord that summons us, and not our sympathies or our natural attraction, for "The Love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 1, 5)".

The CP is a time dedicated to know the will of God on my community. To get it, we have to find a simple method that allows us to apply all that to the life of my fraternity, so that together as a community, we achieve that illumination, that "insight" or "conscience" that makes us to see the step that we can make, that motivates us and liberates those dynamisms that my fraternity possess as its best potential, to grow and to prepare us to listen to what God wants from us.

Some previous observations

1. Each community project is provisional in as much as it represents only a stage of the path of a fraternity.
2. To never forget that the most fertile and more valuable moment in the CP is the time of their elaboration: it constitutes one of the summit moments of fraternal life.
3. For that reason the elaboration of the community project requires, an appropriate climate, a welcoming and calm place, free of telephones and of homemade services, a personal and community atmosphere of reflection, a climate of dialogue, of mutual acceptance, and a prayer setting.

4. it's a very wise option to choose a calm and welcoming place, outside of our own house.
5. The more suitable time for the elaboration of the CP is the one that proceeds immediately at the beginning of the course.
6. At the beginning it is not necessary to seek for the perfect project. Truly the important thing is to train oneself in the mutual acceptance, in the communication, in the community discernment, in working out the keys of the community life. The formulation of the project is secondary and it will be better with time.

Criteria to keep in mind

The technical part of CP should be inspired and guided by four fundamental principles related with of the old method of “to see, to judge and to act”.

1. Principle of realism

It consists on learning how to look and to accept the reality as it is, this is:

- a) to learn how to analyze and to take clear conscience of the real situation in which is the fraternity here and now, in order to individualize and make clear as much as possible their internal and external problems.
- b) to accept ourselves just as we are, and in accepting others such as they are, without judging them. This is the first condition. If I know that my brother accepts me and he knows that I accept him, we will have the necessary freedom to begin to speak and to tell ourselves what we feel for one another.
- c) When we prepare the objectives and the priorities we should not allow ourselves to be taken by the momentary enthusiasms, but rather the principle of realism has to take us to intend only what is possible to reach by all and responds to the true necessities of the community.

2. Principle of utopia

It consists on being clarified in the ideal - values that give sense and consistency to the shared vocation and that act as orientated approaches to reach new goals and objectives.

The religious communities usually have in theory, clarified their identity and ideals for the Rules and Constitutions, etc. In very brief form, almost of aphorism, they could be reflected at the beginning of the project, either with a founder's quotation, or a Rule or Constitutions' quotation.

When a community has not well defined its identity, the first thing that it should do is to arrive at a consensus and to define those central values that are shared by everybody and set up the community. Without a clear identity it is impossible that a community works and very difficult to prepare a community project. In all projects, in a very concise way, should be fine to express the essential features of the identity of the community.

The community project is a way to remember, to develop and to “aggiornare” the conscience and the motivations of the own vocational identity and to discern Jesus' call here and now.

The cohesion of a group depends fundamentally on the force with which these ideals and common objectives are shared. A group without ideals and without much defined objectives that energize their life is not a community. A religious doesn't abandon the institute the day he goes out with his suitcases, but the day that he stopped to share the project of his life. The value of the CP is in fact to make explicit the values and the motivations, pronouncing them and formulating them in a new, concrete and significant

way, strengthening in this way the sense of ownership and the vocational vitality of the brothers.

The CP has like one of its objectives to recreate and to give concreteness in the time and in the space to the foundational charisma of each fraternity.

3. Principle of operability

It consists on tracing a strategy of *objectives, priorities and mediations* as wise means to advance and to grow as community of Jesus, it is to guess right to design and to choose those mediations that will help us to walk from the situation we are, towards the objectives that we have illuminated and will help us to follow Jesus in the building of the Kingdom,

These objectives and these mediations must have some qualities:

- a) They have to be clear and concrete, that is to say, they must be understood by everybody and everybody must see that they are executable and how,
- b) They have to be easily evaluable, that is to say, one can easily measure if they have been gotten or not,
- c) They have to be suitable and effective in order to get those objectives that the community has intended to reach.

4. Principle of subsidiary (co-responsibility)

The CP is the expression of the will and the discernment of all the members of the community. But this will be reality in the measure that all the members of the community have intervened actively in their elaboration. For that reason it is decisive that all participate in the illumination and in the taking of decisions of the CP. The superior or the moderator will take care of it.

The CP will be then a program of life not imposed from outside but inborn, accepted and loved freely and autonomously for each member of the community, as something needed and wanted.

The CP tries to harmonize the personal necessities and interests with the group's necessities and interests. To achieve this harmonization is usually one of the most difficult parts and at the same time more important in the elaboration of the CP. It is the invitation that the motion nº 5 of the XVIII General Chapter propose to the local superiors: "The local superior urges and helps the Confreres to elaborate and integrate the personal Project of each confrere in the community Project."

It is normal and unavoidable that, besides common interests and objectives, coexists in each member of the group, personal aspirations and goals. It is not to subject the individual to the group. The CP wants to focus well and to show that the community is the great mediation that we all have to be able to live that project. A serious conflict between the personal interests and the community interests always constitutes a serious danger for the balance of the fraternal life. The major or minor coincidence in the individual interests with the interests of the group depends on the grade of the individuals' motivation for the community life.

Anyway, in the very important decisions it must be avoided, as much as possible, the idea of voting, so that there is not winners and losers' conscience. Although it could be a little more painful, it is preferable to continue negotiating until reaching the unanimous consent. This negotiation must be done, not from calculations and purely human strategies of effectiveness, but by the light of the Word and in the freedom that emanates from prayer.

Decalogue

(To remind before the project' elaboration)

1. - The project is a time to build the fraternity and the communion encounter, not to destroy it.
2. - To build the fraternity is possible only by cultivating attitudes of the brotherly welcoming.
3. - The quality of a project depends on the measure in that each brother is implied and communicates at deep levels.
4. - We are not a small company that has to work, but a community of Children and of brothers. I have to see the others as seen and loved by God. I have to see my fraternity like the community that is built in the Spirit.
5. - The community is a human group. As such it is subjected to all the psychological and sociological laws that govern the human groups. For that reason we can be helped by the human sciences. The grace becomes active in human mediations.
6. - When confronting the conflicts or when making the feedbacks and the fraternal corrections, we must respect the rules of game, mainly with those people that you have less affinity.
7. - The community project is not a place to defend my ideas neither my interests, but the interests of the fraternity and of the Kingdom.
8. - It is not possible for a good design of objectives and of mediations to be achieved without a good analysis of the reality, illuminated by a good communication.
9. - Each project is a time in which the fraternity looks for knowing what is God's will in this moment: "Lord, what you want from us."
10. The time of elaboration of the CP is the most fertile moment. Take care of a lot of its preparation and the environmental conditions.

STEPS IN THE ELABORATION OF THE COMMUNITY PROJECT

I propose an outline for the elaboration of the CP.

Preparation

Awareness session

Before a fraternity decides to work its CP for the first time, it is indispensable that it is motivated for it and that he/she knows its keys: their philosophy and their methodology. For it one could make some courses, in which will be explained their reason of being synthetically, the budgets in which he/she is founded, the possibilities that he/she offers, their dynamics and structure, etc.

Immediate preparation

If the fraternity already has enough information on the topic and is sufficiently motivated for it, it would be necessary only to prepare some certain details: when, where, materials that must be used, some questionnaires of help, perhaps a person that could accompany us.

Elaboration

I suggest an approximate schedule.

DAY 1°: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE REALITY.

To create a conducive climate

Once located in the chosen place, try to create a relaxed climate, of trust, of reflection and of prayer.

Opening prayer

The fraternity will have present in all moment that is working and deciding its life's project. For that is important to put the work in a climate of prayer, truth and reflection. The superior, or moderator, will have to take the initiative here.

It can be opportune to remember some nuclear evangelical text, the founder's text or of the CCGG.

Presentation of the plan

To propose and decide together the basic order of the day, but flexible, according to the circumstances. To avoid falling in a very common trap: to appeal to the project of the previous course to make the analysis of the reality. This is worth for the evaluation but not for the elaboration of the project. It is a trap that takes us to analyze the project and not the fraternity.

For the analysis of this reality, I propose two levels of fraternal communication: self-revelation and communication with the community.

Self-revelation exercise:

I share with others HOW I SEE MYSELF.

Personal time

Time for personal reflection so that each one enter really into himself/herself to take conscience of his/her feelings, expectations desires, necessities, difficulties, fears, illusions, projects... etc. In front of the new year and new mission that begins.

To facilitate the personal reflection and the ulterior communication in group, it could be good to examine some questionnaires:

1. What is your state of spirit at the beginning of this new course?
2. How do you feel in this community? Have you satisfied your basic necessities or do you experience some important hole?
3. How do you see yourself (concerns, desires, expectations, projects, fears) before your work or your field of mission?
4. What would you request from your community for this course that begins?
5. What did you want to communicate to your community of your personal project?

Sharing

The fraternity gathers together to share the personal reflexions around the questionnaire. This first communication step will be richer, if the members of the fraternity have elaborated their personal projects previously. (We hope that the help that the P. Alfonso has given us yesterday will stimulate us to carry out our personal projects). It is not to communicate the personal project in all their lines, but those aspects that can help us to be located in the group.

It is very important to communicate your basic restlessness and those aspects that are good and that the others know about you. We remember that it is fundamental that the communication goes along with the whole encounter, is not given only at levels of ideas, but especially of feelings and of convictions with those that one feels committed.

Each one expresses what he thinks without entering to discuss anything. One can request some explanations. This first communication doesn't usually have to be included in the final document of the CP.

Communitarian exercise: Analysis of reality or diagnostic of the community:
I share HOW I SEE THE COMMUNITY

Personal time: Reflection on the situation of the fraternity and the most important problem or problems of the community.

How is the situation of the fraternal life? Each one makes a personal reflection about the situation of the community during the last course: their strengths, their weaknesses, their blockades, the things that make it suffer; those that make it valuable, the dimensions that would be developed.

If at the end of the previous course, we do the evaluation of the project, we will find important hints there for the diagnosis. But the analysis is not of the project but of the community life.

We suggest the following questionnaires:

1. What are the positives aspects of your community? How does it describe three qualities of your community?
2. What are the negatives aspects of your community? What are the problems or important lacks you find in it?
3. What would you like to be reached/achieved in your community that at this time is a lack?
4. What are other personal necessities/experiences in your life that you want your community to support you to reach?
5. What problems, blockades or lacks do you believe that it should confront your community like priority?

Sharing: I communicate to the group how I see the community.

Each one exposes their own vision of the fraternity, both positive aspects and deficiencies. If something has not been clear, explanations can be requested, but not discussion.

Each one will take note of the analyses. This information is indispensable for the ulterior phases of the project.

DAY 2: ILLUMINATION IN DISCERNMENT

Prayer, mutual acceptance and discernment are the elements to situate the new step.

Today the fraternity exercises in discernment, with the purpose of arriving to an **illumination** that will help to define its central topic and will motivate the community to walk with excitement. It is a time of grace and salvation. God builds the fraternity.

Personal time: Personal discernment

We begin with a personal time of about 45 minutes.

The intention is to find the main problem, necessity or urgency that is affecting in a significant way the life of our community. We have in before us the notes taken the day before about the situation of the community.

Procedure

Each member chooses the two most important aspects, among all those that were said the previous day in the analysis of the community. Each member will also add the

reasons for this election and how these problems are affecting the life of the fraternity in general.

Each one tries to formulate it in a clear and concise way in writing,

Each one tries to meditate and discern what God is requesting from him personally and from the fraternity to face that central difficulty or difficulties.

Community time: Toward the ILLUMINATION of the CENTRAL TOPIC:

First moment: personal sharing.

Each one communicates to the fraternity his personal analysis. Explanations can be requested, but there is no discussion. A secretary is needed to take note and to organize the information in a black-board in view of all.

Second moment: Trying to arrive together to the consent of which is the central topic and trying to formulate it.

Once all have spoken, we try to associate the arisen problems ordering them from more mentioned to fewer mentioned.

Start the dialogue in order to agree about one or two problems, Central Topics or Priorities. It is frequent that the same problem appears with formulations and shades a little difference. We try to formulate it again in order to achieve the consent.

It is very important that in this part we arrive to a consent on which it is the problem or central problems that are weighing negatively on the fraternity. One or, at maximum, two problems are chosen.

In the elaboration of the CP you must avoid as much as possible the appeal to quick solutions of voting. Whenever there is a voting, although it is a democratic expression, however it can divide the group among winners and losers. The CP should represent the negotiated will of all.

Those analyses are usually made in negative key: problem, difficulty... It is not necessary to be afraid to see it in problematic key. We will find after the way to come out of it.

When we have agreed on the Central Topic or Illumination, we will try to define it and to describe it accurately and with a clear and brief formulation.

Example: "We see that in the community life there is something that deteriorates the relationships among the brothers and that makes us to gossip in small groups. The reason is that the problems are not approached with clarity and frankness."

Application of the illumination to the areas of the fraternal life

Personal time:

When the Central Topic is defined, it's time to see how this central problem is affecting the different areas of the fraternal life.

Way of making it:

Answering the question on how this central problem is affecting the different areas of the fraternal life:

1. Primacy of God.
2. Fraternal life.
3. Mission, Apostolate.
4. Charismatic identity.
5. Initial or/and ongoing formation.

Sharing the answers, area by area

OBJECTIVES

General objective

Once we have described the illumination of the Central Topic and once we have discovered its incidence in the fraternity life, it is time to land in some concrete commitments in order to improve the fraternity life. First we define the objective or general objectives and then the specific objectives. The objectives should respond directly to the problem seen in the situation analysis.

For example: *We feel the need to clean up the climate of the fraternity and of avoiding the gossip. For that we have to learn how to approach the community conflicts with clarity and transparency."*

If have been chosen two central problems, it would be necessary to define two general objectives.

Specific objectives:

Specific objectives are necessary to be able to improve the current situation.

Example: *to work on the topic of how to face positively the conflicts of the fraternity.*

It's good to be realistic and to intend only what is really possible knowing that the community progress is moving slowly. The specific objectives should be, clear and concrete, evaluable and appropriate to achieve the proposed objectives.

Mediations and strategies

We assign to every objective some solutions through some viable and very concrete mediation trying to fix their circumstances of time, place, etc, trying to be realistic and not dreamers.

Example:

1. To do a course in community on communication and the form of approaching conflicts.
2. To have an initiation encounter with the person X.

Planning of the other areas of the fraternal life

When the objectives and mediations of the central topic are defined, it's time to analyze the other areas of the community life, trying to correct the deficiencies observed in the previous course.

Then we fix the calendars of the ordinary and extraordinary community services and lastly the days of the CP's evaluation. (To do two or three times in a year).

Writing of the project

Somebody takes charge of editing the CP in a synthetic form.

In the writing of the project, it would be well that the following data appears:

1. - At the beginning, the identity of the fraternity: the names of the brothers that form the community, the mission or missions that the Delegation/Church has commended them, the context in which the community is... etc.
2. - The areas that configure the community's identity.
3. - Some significant texts of the Gospel, founder or Constitutions that can head each one of the areas of the CP.
4. - Although it is not usually done, I consider it very important to pick up the most significant points that have appeared in the analysis of reality and in the discernment. These will remind us of the context from where the illumination came out and will allow us to see during the evaluations if we have progressed in some aspects and how.
5. - To describe the illumination in a clear and synthetic way and in choosing the priorities.
6. - The activities with their corresponding calendar.

7. - The date or dates of evaluation

Once edited, the project is presented to the brothers so that they revise it and make their observations. Finally, these observations are picked up and the final writing is made.

It is difficult to be able to complete this entire task in only two or three days. For that reason the community will continue working on the project during the next ordinary encounters of the fraternity, trying not to prolong too much the period.

Approbation

It will be nice to finish the process with a feast/celebration: for example one Eucharistic celebration. Each member of the community receives one copy of the project and the creative ideas of others.

Application and evaluations

The control of the application of the project to the life of the community is a task, particularly for the superior. He should be attentive especially to the times of evaluation. What is not evaluated is devaluated.