

**LIFE COMMUNITIES  
A NEW APPROACH  
"Living in communion"  
Difficulties involved.  
Psycho-affective aspects. (2/2)**

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### **3. Built-in obstacles of community life**

The **intrinsic obstacles** to this human and spiritual maturation deserve a special mention.

In-depth psychology has demonstrated the existence and influence of subconscious and unconscious problems on the balanced development of the personality: its integration does not follow a straight line, but represents a constant **struggle**. As Pascal said, a human being is a "tangled mass of contradictions".

Speaking from personal experience, St Paul gives a striking description of what can happen in practice:

*"I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and I find myself doing the things I hate...I can see that my body follows a different law that battles against the law which my reason dictates. This is what makes me a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death?" (Rm 7,15-24).*

There are clearly conclusions to be drawn from these considerations. If we treat people simply as loving persons without taking into account points of resistance, we do violence to their nature and impose a sort of tyranny. Human relations would be characterised by perfect charity if people were pure spirits, that is, completely known to themselves and to others. There is, however, in each one of us a dark and silent area: we do not know ourselves entirely any more than we know others.

There are obstacles linked to the psychological structure of the person which appear as behavioural problems. Such persons may be in every other way normally intelligent and professionally gifted, but their behaviour is disturbed by typical problems, as are their relations with others: they seem unable to fit in with people at work or socially.

Psycho-affective disturbances or complexes have a paralysing effect on community life. They are characterised by reactive automatism accompanied by an intense emotional and affective content. Reaction is not simply motory: it is an emotional state. Acting as a "system" always ready to interfere in relationships, it is a good illustration of the isolating nature of complexes.

It is a major obstacle to community life. The risk of being "drowned" (taken over) is evidently one of the stages that lead to isolation and moral solitude.

Community life, it has to be repeated, means relationships with others: each one lives in community with others in charity. The identity of the individual is strengthened through a common identity. Community life, understood in this way, tends to dispose people to love others. It is the perfection of charity.

Article 30 of the Rule says the following: *"In community the Brothers maintain a spirit of friendship and brotherhood that gives support to their affective life. They take means to preserve their physical health and emotional stability"*.

As a basis for further reflection on the personal and community level, we can take the words of St. Paul to the Galatians (Gal 5:16-24): *"If you are guided by the Spirit you will be in no danger of yielding to self-indulgence, since self-indulgence is the opposite of the Spirit. The spirit is totally against such a thing, and it is precisely because the two are so opposed that you do not always carry out your good intentions"*.

We return once again to the question of formation, and more specifically, to the holistic formation of religious. Christian formation is not something separate to be added to human formation: forming Christians and human beings is one and the same thing. Human action and divine action are not independent forces: they are completely integrated elements: the effects of one do not cancel out those of the other. All the efforts of educational methodology to promote the fuller development of the personality, far from being useless, increase in value as they take on a supernatural dimension.

The training of **attitudes** is the most important practical application. Evangelical values are not intellectual notions but invitations to action. Behaviour reveals the presence of values. It is not enough to know and accept values intellectually: they have to become a part of a person and be accepted personally. They must give direction to a person's whole life.

Spiritual growth takes on the meaning here of learning to love, of relearning to be society-centred and God-centred. This demands from the individual not only powers of discernment of values, but also a psychological process or, better still, a relational dialectic, which is the basis of training for community life. What is involved here is forming attitudes and the growth of these attitudes: attitudes of openness to others, understanding, communication, communion.

The principal aim of formation must be life, true life. The whole problem lies in "becoming a new man", as St. Paul says. To achieve this, we have seen that the kind of formation needed is not that of preservation or of personal or community influence: the faith of the adult has to be constantly expressed by acts, by activities, by a living acceptance of a doctrine of life which is constantly proposed to him so that he will convert his heart and commit his life.

In this way, individual, community and apostolic life is wholly inspired by **faith**. "The just man lives by faith" in a world in which he must take his place, so that through him the Kingdom of God can be established in it. This is a concrete expression of faith, based on militant witness. This is surely what formation for apostolic community life should seek to achieve.

### Conclusion

*"The distinctive character of the Brothers' community is to be a community where the experience of God is shared" (Rule 48).*

This is a faith that unites people. In the context of a community of followers of Jesus Christ, it is the presence of Jesus Christ perceived by faith which, in the final analysis, explains their being together. There could be no other reason for it.

Religious community life can be explained really only in terms of faith. The reason why the first Christians spontaneously chose the most radical kind of community life for themselves lies in the impact produced on them by the Gospel and the urgent needs it revealed to them.

*"The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and*

*shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. They went as a body to the Temple every day but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously" (Acts 2:44-47).*

This is how the Church, the community of the followers of Jesus Christ, began. This is how the Scriptures, from the Old Testament onwards, speak of the Church: it is an assembly summoned by God's final words; it is the human race that was called and which responded. Wherever the call was heard it produced its effect, and a group of people formed itself into a community of followers of Jesus Christ.

St Paul's words in this connection have lost none of their relevance:

*"You must live your whole life according to the Christ you have received - Jesus the Lord; you must be rooted in him and built on him and held firm by the faith you have been taught and full of thanksgiving. Make sure no one traps you and deprives you of your freedom by some secondhand, empty, rational philosophy based on the principles of this world instead of on Christ" (Col 2,6-8).*

And elsewhere, St Paul addresses himself directly to us: *"Examine yourselves to make sure you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you acknowledge that Jesus Christ is really in you?" (2 Cor 13:5-6).* ●

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### Basic reading:

**D. Bonhoeffer.** *De la vie communautaire.* Ed. du Cerf. Paris.

**F.Veldman.** *L'Haptonomie, science de l'affectivité.* Ed. PUF. Paris.