

**Living and working together
Relationships with others... its difficulty**

Br. Paul Griéger

In day-to-day living, with its attitudes and social roles, each of us is aware of a deeper and more secret area; beyond the pressure of habits and desires, there appears the possibility of a richer exchange between people. In fact the presence of another person is not solely a social presence, but it can become a "personal" presence, on condition that, in the words of G. Marcel, I know how to be available, not refusing myself to another.

Philosophers such as M. Buber, E. Mounier and especially G. Marcel argue, in opposition to Sartre, that the other, far from being opposed to me as a limitation, a "wall", can be a growth, a "bridge" to the deepest revelation of what I am...

So only the interpersonal exchange appears capable of causing a full blossoming of each singular me and at the same time bringing the genuine we to reality, where the subjects relinquish nothing of their personality while giving themselves without reserve. This is the "we" which alone deserves the name of communion. This is evidently an ideal: in fact, it is impossible for us to depend on any desire subject to another. "I cannot make a representation of the other except by the intervention of my representation". In the end, I have to withdraw myself while remaining me, in order to "understand" the other as he is in himself.

In the light of modern psychological analysis and of sociometric research, a number of paths lie open for our reflection. We will concentrate on the complex problem of the knowledge of the other person and the relationship with the other.

1. Knowledge of the other person: who is this "other"?

Personalist psychology defines its basic principle like this: "Understand and accept the character of the other person, for it is the necessary path to lead you to its mystery, to shatter your egocentricity and to establish the lasting foundations between you of a common life".

How are we to understand the knowledge of the other person? This, as is known, is on two levels: firstly, this knowledge is objective and mediate; the other person is known by his bodily expressions; secondly, it is transobjective and immediate; the other is grasped in himself. To know the other person on the first level, is to know his body in the way we know any other body; this knowledge which is in the cosmandric order, clearly holds a great place in our lives; and even our industrial civilisations inflate its importance in such a way as seemingly to threaten the other way of knowing the other person.

When I ask myself about the other person, about himself not as an "object" or "function", but about himself as "subject", infinitely surpassing his function... So I pass from the objective knowledge to the transobjective

knowledge, from the cosmandric relationship to the synandric relationship and the knowledge of the other person seems, beyond the knowledge of the man who claimed to appropriate it as an intuitive, immediate apprehension, of one mind by another mind, as the identification, more or less penetrating, of one soul by another.

Sensing and meeting the other person. Before finding another subject with the help of experience, we must look for it... and meet up with it. We shall define the meeting with the other person, the link between contact and distance.

Let us remember that contact is an important event in the knowledge of another person, since it is through this contact that the me begins to come out of itself, to enter into a relationship with another mind which is subordinate like itself.

Contact is only the first stage of the meeting; the second is the approach by which each one seeks to advance further and further into knowledge of the other person proceeding along the axis established by distance. By this one understands in what sense knowledge of the other becomes possible, in what sense knowledge of the other can be called moral.

Approaching the other person... as a person. Three levels of approaching the other person by the me can be distinguished by discerning three stages: him, you ("thee" as object), you ("thou" as subject).

Him is the objective you at a distance, which the me still considers in the third person. This distancing makes him more of an object than a subject; he is spoken about rather than spoken to. He stands out, though only just, from the mass of others. His identifying traits with the others are still not clarified by differences carefully defined... He is more than a neighbour, but not yet someone close. He appears as the latter by becoming a "you" ("thee" as object) by a process which brings him to the foreground.

"You" ("thee") is, in a sense, the accusative of the vocative, "you" ("thou") is the nominative. It is the "thou" living in the "thee" and knowing the determinations of "thee" is only the mediation by which the vibrant relationship between the two subjects is tied.

"Thou" adds to "thee" an interior tension of which we must recognise the axis and the direction to know if it is going to be used for us, against us or simply alongside us.

After this quick analysis, approaching the other must take place on two levels at the same time: first on the general level, from him to thee; then on the individual level, the knowledge of what is unique in the thee, what makes it incomparable and real.

In fact the other person is "other" in two meanings of the word; first, qualitatively, as green is different from red. Individuality in this sense is original by synthesis, as everything; and in this everything the defects of a nature must be understood just as well as its virtues, sometimes less important than the lacunae for the life of the individual.

But the other person is "other", no longer formally, but "materially", in fact numerically. This other, this really other is the centre of its freedom, which I must be aware of in my relationships with him. He can conceal his identity, lead me without my knowing it, fit me into an overall plan, can change so that certain factors by which I knew him as a distinct individual, cease defining his existence and his action.

2. The "idiological" understanding of the other person.

The privileged moment of knowledge of the other person is in welcoming him and endeavouring to understand him. The etymology of "to understand" is "take in everything", what is visible and what is not seen.

Each person is a mystery, something absolutely unique and incommunicable, whom only God can know fully, because he is at the very origin of his individuality. But if we succeed in understanding something, it is to the extent with which we love... Love gives a capacity for intuition for what is not seen, for what is not said or because it dare not be said or cannot be or does not want to be said.

To understand the other person, following these considerations, is to do so from top to toe, from the general to the particular. It is to wed the forces with which character moods give rise to a kind of natural orientation of the me. Then it is to join with the experiences with which, in the life of the other person, these moods are refracted by events in his past and his way of accepting them. It finally emerges on to that personal, concrete, supreme design which alone is capable of allowing his destiny to be understood, to the extent that this destiny depended on him.

The characterological approach, understood in the scientific sense, by which is meant the knowledge of the substructure of the individuality, shows us the permanent situation where the individual is to be found. But this basic situation has created problems for it, whether contradictions have sprung up between these elements of character, or whether this character is in conflict with its ambience.

At this level, the knowledge of the other person is no longer the knowledge of the structures received by an individual from heredity or education, it is knowledge of the problems which come to the individual from deep inside him or from his relationships with his milieu.

It is at the heart of these problems that freedom is evident to the consciousness with the most dazzling evidence. The more qualitative the knowledge of the other person is, the more it holds elements of the individuality of the other person, and also the more it associates us in the intimate action of his personal liberty.

Beyond those conflicts which history can only grasp from the outside, in its practical and social manifestations, this ideological understanding introduces us to the intimacy of the struggles in which the person is formed to the extent that it produces actions. It makes us guess at the options by which the individual acts out his destiny, fulfils or misses his vocation, goes downhill or enriches himself.

3. To live in communion: “together and by association”

“The Brothers fulfil their mission together and by association”; “each one exercises his apostolate as a member of a community by whom he knows he is accepted, supported and entrusted with his mission” (R16).

The sense of the spiritual evolution here takes on a new form. For the subject it means not only a capacity for discerning values, but a psychological process, or better still, an interpersonal dialectic which we are going to refer to briefly.

The personalist psychology speaks of the formation of attitudes and the growth of these attitudes. Three of these attitudes deserve a particular attention: attitude of welcome; attitude of communication; attitude of communion.

a) **Learning how to welcome:** the new style of community and apostolic life poses a major problem to formation: knowing how to welcome. The first act of the person is to welcome the other, the others; norms, feelings and, finally, institutions must be characterised by this respect for the person.

“To welcome the other person, in the full knowledge of

his existence, of his personal being, and at the same time, of his community and social being, is the first path that the Church must take in accomplishing its mission; it is also the fundamental path of the Christian community, a path laid down by Christ himself” (RH14).

This maturing of the interpersonal relationship grows and strengthens the person in each partner. To treat the other person as subject, as a present living being, is to recognise that I cannot define him, classify him as an object, that he is inexhaustible, full of hope; it is to do him credit. The credit of generosity is infinitely fertile.

True love is a creator of distinction, recognition and will of the other person as another person. Sympathy is again a disposition of character, love is a new form of existence: it addresses the subject beyond its nature, it wants its fulfilment as person, as freedom whatever its gifts or its failings which count more essentially in this respect. Love is blind, but with a clairvoyant’s blindness. The act of love is the strongest certainty of man, the irrefutable existential “cogito”: “I love, therefore the person is”, and life is worth living.

b) **Learn to communicate...** with people. The passing from spontaneous (or functional) Relationship to the spiritual reaction, implies an interiorisation, going beyond disturbed structures and professional situations. Professional situations, particularly, often seem to let slip from their grasp what is deepest in human relationships. They reach only the appearance, the social, the interesting, what pertains to the shell, not to the persons.

At the personal communication level, it is “your” feelings, “your” thoughts. “your” problems which interest me... For me the presence of a person is not merely a social presence, but can be also spiritual, intimate, on condition that I know how to be available.

Renewed formation in community life implies this apprenticeship in communicating with others. First of all, it is essential to learn how to listen, how to be available to the other person, to other persons, how to question oneself. Then it is necessary to try to understand the message by putting oneself in the place of the listener: “to find his wavelength”. Finally it is necessary to learn how to express oneself; to adopt a language adapted to the participants, the members of a group. Learning to put oneself in the place of the listener is the primary principle for establishing good communication in a life or work group.

c) **Learn to live in communion.** The two ideas, person and community, at the centre of our reflection, are not solely psychological and social ideas, but also spiritual and moral categories. We have seen how personalist philosophy opposes the world of the second person, of the living being and of love, to the world of the third person, one of having. In the expression “another me”, and Latin seems to express it more forcefully, an “alter ego”, there is a kind of contradiction. Logic does not suffice to overcome it: love is needed. Only love can recognise in another person the same existence as in me, an existence independent of mine and yet on which mine depends and without fusing with it is such that I can no longer live except through it.

The ultimate manifestation of genuine love is, then, not submitting a person to oneself; but motivating him... Love in this sense is linked to sacrifice, which assumes the value of a true metaphysical experience. No love without mortification in the strict sense, without the voluntary destruction and death of selfishness in oneself. Love imposes a kind of prior dislocation of oneself, and for that one says: “to love is to suffer”. So philosophical reflection justifies the deepest and simplest intention of friends: “love is stronger than death, because to love is to die continuously in order to rise again” (J. Lacroix). •