

PREFACE

The Intercapitular has just ended. Together with the provincials, we have seen the journey mission and our communities should undertake.

The community is the normal place for the fulfilment of the missionary. It is an imperfect community in which every one is responsible for the other and for his growth, ready to help him and to accept his presence with faith. These are the internal attitudes which should be stimulated continuously and which must be initiated in the first formation.

*Our formation taught us to care for privacy, for our own life and interests. The true formation of the person is based rather on meeting the **other**: the "**relationship**". Very often, in our communities, relationships are poor and this gives rise to many conflicts. In Christian spirituality, the other is the one who helps me to understand who I am, who becomes my neighbour, who maintains me on my journey towards God, towards the brother and towards my very self.*

The community is born out of sharing the goods of the Spirit. The fraternal bond, that is strong, central and vital, is what brings us together. The Proclamation of the Gospel is the community action in which we show, by our life, the face of the Triune God who sends the Son who in turn sends us (Jn. 17, 18-26). This demands a daily journey, undertaken together, which for the greater part is still to be done, and is the challenge and the content of the Ongoing Formation (OF).

All provinces carry out concrete activities for animating the communities and give "particular attention to the formation of local superiors" (CA:128).

The Province of Portugal, in April 1998, held a meeting for superiors and vice-superiors of the communities directed by Fr. Gaetano Beltrami and, in collaboration with many participants, produced a booklet entitled: THE SUPERIOR, ANIMATOR OF THE COMMUNITY.

The meeting dealt with the following themes: Identity, functions and spirituality of the superior, animators of dialogue and community discernment, animator of the community.

Our gratitude goes to Fr. Beltrami and to the Portuguese Province that has made this precious booklet available to us.

The Central Commission for Ongoing Formation (CCOF) presents this material to all the provinces in order to help the communities to become that little Cenacle of Apostles according to the dream of Comboni. A Cenacle which is born of "that charity set alight by a divine flame on the slopes of Golgotha and came out of the Crucified One in order to embrace the whole human family", the charity which pushes us "into the arms of the most miserable of his brothers and give him a kiss of love and peace" (Scritti 2742), beginning from our house.

Rome, 12 December 2000 - Feast of OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE
Central Commission for Ongoing Formation.
Fr. Danilo Cimitan

INTRODUCTION

The texts, contributions and the dynamics which have been collected in this brochure are the fruit of a journey, short but made together and shared during one of the most meaningful experiences a religious province can ever have: the meeting of those responsible for community animation.

For us, the motivation for this assembly was very clear and convincing: our last Chapter saw the ministry of the superior as the one who *helps the members to be faithful to themselves, to their consecration and to the mission, fostering their continuous renewal* (CA:126). Coming back to the *Rule of Life*, the same Chapter repeats that *every superior must be a person capable of listening, of discernment and of deep spirituality, knowing to assume the role of a helper and a fraternal guide in moments of crisis, weakness, and discouragement of the confreres* (CA: 127). Therefore, the ministry of the superior is viewed as an indispensable human mediation in our life, especially now that we have so much need of convinced testimonies, lived values and reliable points of reference.

The first undisputed protagonist of this experience was, without doubt, the Spirit of the Lord, who has sustained and guided us in the search for the truth and for our greater good and that of our communities. We have prayed to him and we have felt his presence in the different moments of our meeting. Side by the side with the Spirit, we have also felt the presence of our Founder, who always guarantees our fidelity to the journey he himself trod: with him we have felt present to all our Institute, the actual challenges of the mission and the missionary significance of our presence in the Portuguese Church.

Other protagonists of the assembly, invisible but always present, are all the confreres of the province and every single community. To them, our constant attention turned so that the ministry of community animation and the service of authority may always be stimulated to the renewal of the concrete situation of the life of

all and of each one in this very moment, characterised by the search for new styles of life and mission. It was remarkable that in a climate of freedom and mutual trust there started a journey of corresponsability on the provincial level in the way every local community was administered and in those individual realities that need more fraternal attention

We did not treat theories nor did we dwell on abstract contents: we wanted to see, evaluate and propose once again the ministry of authority in the province by analysing our life and trying to find together the dynamics and initiatives which can help us discover new ways of animation with greater trust, renewed enthusiasm and with a prophetic spirit.

The journey has just started and now it awaits to be started by each one in the concrete and daily life of each one's community. It is also for this that we thought of giving this brochure to all. Every day, the biblical symbols of *the pastor's staff* and of *the fraternal table*, of *the broken bread*, of *the sandals of the apostle*: *God, the Community, the Word-Eucharist, the Mission...* May these realities be lived not only by every superior but by every confrere so that together and in corresponsibility, we may build Comboni communities which are always more attractive, not only for our greater happiness, but also to express to all our Christian joy and the extraordinary beauty of our missionary vocation.

I fraternally wish you all a serene journey for the service of the poor and of the mission.

Gaetano Beltrami, mccj

1. Personal, vocational and community identity and the role of the superior

a) "Personal and vocational" identity

* Identity means fidelity to oneself, always, but at the same time growing in being and becoming oneself, with persistence and harmonic development, fidelity and innovative creativity, stability and change, in a continual and progressive identification with Christ.

* When we came into the world, we "started to be born" for a continual becoming and growth towards maturity and wisdom. "Be patient with me: God is not done with me yet.... the day I will die, I will finally have finished being born" (B. Franklin). Person and vocation grow together until the last day. In this continual construction of person and personal vocation, the help and the correction of the others is important. One cannot grow without difficulties and conflicts: the crises are modalities of passage, dynamic processes, which should be accepted and loved as possibilities of growth for the better, until the end of our life. From the obscurity of the mystery to the certitude of faith: this is the paschal dynamic that starts from the passion, through death and on to the resurrection.

* A mature person is one who has a good heart, a great humanity; one who puts one's intelligence at the service of the heart, of love, free from the slavery of impulses in order to fulfil himself in self-transcendence...

* The Vocation is the great call from God that invites us to collaborate with Him. It is a self-realisation done in self-giving and solidarity with the others. It is a gift that has to be discovered, developed and rediscovered over and over again in order to be brought to both fullness and maturity. This is why we are constantly called at all stages and ages of life. The person called is not dispossessed but cultured and loved by God in all his originality. This is the way God loves us...

* The vocation "evolves" within one's history, within one's culture and within the cultures in which we are called to work as missionaries. Today, we live "breathing" ideologies that devastate the true sense of life and of personal vocation. For example: "to want all, immediately and always" is the law of universal gratification; "all together, but each for oneself" is the law of personal profit and private property that does not seek the common good. In this way, we also run the risk of dissociating life from faith: "full of everything and dead from hunger"! Even our consecrated life can become poor and dried up if we don't keep free from these

"influxes" and remain creatively faithful to our values.... It is in fact possible to become egoists once again and even leave the mission in order to retake what we have left. It is also possible to live in continual conflict and dissociation without true identity: "the feet are here, the heart is elsewhere".

b) "Community" identity

* Today our consecrated life and our missionary communities are facing big challenges for which we are not well prepared: apostolic communities, insertion among the people, the need for evangelical coherence, new forms of poverty, risky and frontline situations, life in danger, new criteria of discernment, political, social and economic situations in which we have to live, lay people in our houses...

* There are difficulties in defining our identity today: to have faithful and at the same time creative communities ...It is difficult to be superior in a reality that is both diversified and changing... And yet God continues to call us, even today, in his eternal fidelity to serve his sons and make brothers of them all!

* From traditional communities (hierarchical, structured, pre-conciliar, stable and sure, which "covered" the limitations of the person) we need move to renewed communities, in which the person is more important than the structure (roles and services) and where differences between persons become a common enrichment. Diversified communities that welcome otherness with respect, communities which are no longer homogenous or uniform (space for the aged, the sick and those with problems... the young and lay people).

* Passing from "I" to "us" is a process of human maturity and faith. God wanted us together and we did not choose ourselves. An "hypertrophic" and individualistic "I" instead, must live alone because it is always right, it knows all, and all it does is well done: it has no need of others.

* Feeling the need of the others is a reciprocity not of roles but of persons. It is from encounters and participation that the community is born. The consequence of this is pardon, which is indispensable for living together in community and becoming realistically and evangelically credible. The "limits" of the consecrated person are not a scandal for the young people of today, nor should they be for any of us; they constitute the realism of the incarnation.

* It is important that every confrere is set inside the community contributing positively to its evolution: personal and generous contribution for building the community always anew and better however it may be.

* Involving the confreres in the problems and decisions generates active participation: the confreres grow in freedom and responsibility as consecrated persons. Lack of involvement produces aggressivity: people become individualistic, nervous, discontented and counter witnesses of the values of the Kingdom.

* The importance of the authentic personal relationships is fundamental to dialogue in the community. Dialogue among confreres is like a ministry that can never be completed, a gift that we can never appreciate enough in our life as consecrated people. Dialogue in fraternal relations is the heart of the community based on the Trinitarian and consecrated model.

* The importance of community discernment is possible only when there is communion of life, complementarity, and corresponsability in the common project for the good of the Church, avoiding hurry and unwillingness, inopportune emotionalism and the defence of one's own image. Without discernment, collision and superficiality are inevitable.

c) The Role of the Superior

* The role of the Superior is based on subsidiarity: there are no more subjects (too subdued or rebellious or continually discontented and always recriminating), but confreres with whom one can discern the will of God in a spirit of corresponsability.

* In community, the superior should stimulate and engage the fraternal and apostolic life, coordinating it and harmonising the style of community life with the values of the charisma. This is what is called animating for an active participation of all members, so that each one can contribute personally and originally, rendering the best of himself for the good of all.

* The superior is involved in "mediations" recognised in a spirit of faith, always paying attention to the person and to the vocation of every confrere, to the life of the community and of the Institute in creative fidelity to our charisma. For this he:

- programs together the community journey, the contents of the community charter or common project;
- accompanies, sustains and corrects, when necessary, every confrere according to his nature and needs;

- provides spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral elements according to the needs of the community and of each one;
- verifies, through personal dialogue and community discernment, the journey which is being made together;
- sees to it that there are environmental and community conditions which favour fraternity, dialogue, encounter and discernment.

* The burning issues that every superior today should know very well if he is to carry out his role effectively are:

- the loss of the living experience of God in the journey of faith and the life of prayer, the love of one's vocation and the sense of life in general, in some confreres; a fact which provokes crisis of identity, dissatisfaction, the search for various compensations and even psychological problems;
- interest and care for the community charter, understood as the real "membership card for recognition and presentation", indispensable not only for the new comers but also for the smooth running of community life and the good of all its members;
 - to present an "attractive", i.e., a joyful and meaningful image of the community to the people and especially to the youth with whom we come into contact (the vocational proposal of "come and see");
 - to keep alive at all costs our missionary specificity even in the case of supply ministry;
 - to use charity, but also boldness, in possible double affiliations (Comboni missionary + member of some other ecclesiastical movement) in order to avoid vocational ambiguity, personal fragmentation and loss of identity;
 - to manage with patience and respect the difficulties of community life, coming from different sensibilities and the types of formation the confreres underwent: age, theological and liturgical formation, personal experience of faith and prayer, different ways of understanding the Church, the mission, the Institute, the community, etc.; uplifting and changing the quality of our consecrated life, without common consensus, can lead to the exclusion of some confreres;
 - to see to it that the type of communication in the community does not remain on the cognitive, rational and verbal levels: one should know the importance of communicating on the affective and non-verbal levels;
 - to try, with courage and good will, to build a positive culture of the relationship between authority and obedience as our Rule of Life proposes, overcoming and correcting the idea of superior which we have in the Institute: a superior who is more of an administrator and organiser of ac-

tivities than a person of confidence and of personal help (brother, friend, a councillor even in spiritual matters), and a point of reference; this would perhaps be the journey we should undertake together in order to overcome the individualism which has been so much denounced by the assembly and which prevents people from feeling the importance of the common good and looking at the superior as a person of confidence for the whole community;

- the promotion of maturity in participation: it is possible to think differently and not to agree with the other confreres, but the opinion of the others and the decision of all should be accepted in corresponsable humility and fraternal respect.

* Other practical points for the role of the superior are:

- facing the current problems and stimulation with evangelical discernment, gathering from them the seeds of the Spirit and throwing away what blocks and dehumanises;

- trusting the confreres with a very human approach and with a relationship that fosters participation and solidarity;

- a sound pedagogy not only to the young but also to adults and the elderly: with "agreeable violence" one can overcome many self closures and cure many wounds; a "sound brotherly provocation" which stimulates positively with much love and endless patience;

- not to take for granted the static and sometimes negative image of the community: it is loved by God, and therefore the recuperation of its members and their vocation is possible;

- recuperation in these days implies facing the complexity of guiding the community seriously and with ample preparation: this needs passion and love for the others. Life is full of surprises and we throw ourselves into it with trust, ready to face the challenge of reawakening in us and in our brothers, the gift of life and vocation that may be weakening or already dead: this is the proclamation of the Gospel, the permanent and victorious formation!

- formation in and respect of human values: so many times we, religious people, neglect the human values and needs in our life (encounter, dialogue, affection, smile, friendship...) sacrificing them for duty and for roles which enhance our pride; in this way, we are a working group and not a community of life. This is why we have no place for the very weak, the sick and the old... The one who produces has value and can consume, the one who does not produce has no value and is "eliminated"....

- to lift the "threshold" of patience on personal and community levels in interpersonal relationships; accepting the prevailing frustration is not only a spirit of sacrifice but an evangelical attitude because it maintains the search for the common good and helps to overcome the actual terrible evil of individualism, which closes the person in himself, exposing him, little by little, to perishing narcissistically;

- flexibility for passages or phases of life, availability to the changes according to age or personal history: to be faithful and at the same time creative. Faith has always the same content but the ways of expressing it in life and in all its manifestations change. It must be so if we are to be faithful to creation and to the incarnation: the work of God cannot be closed inside or outside the heart of man. This is the paschal mystery: joy for the novelty of life despite of feeling pain for what one has to leave behind;

- do not to get discouraged about asking the confreres to face the truth of their own crises: do not speak about them behind their backs! Show recognition and satisfaction even in small things: notice, thank, give value and affection... Do not let the person decay or grow old, submerged under criticisms and coldness;

- God loves and tries those he calls: Accepting and overcoming crises is a sign of maturity and faith. The superior has this ministry, which is a service of counselling and of sustaining the community.

* Finally, if the superior has to remember always that he is at the service of the person in the first place and then at the service of the structure, he must also remember to respect his very person: he must grow and take care of himself... he needs time to pray, to reflect, to organise, but also to rest and relax!

Conclusion

"I hope that this assembly will help the superiors and our communities to assume more and more their function of acceptance and regeneration, especially when shaken by the inevitable conflicts and relational problems found in daily life; and when they are "disturbed" by the presence of persons in grave difficulties of health and of balance. In the logic of the life that comes from the paschal mystery of death and resurrection, we should know how to develop and increase the enormous potential of the present life in the single persons, even if at times it remains unexpressed" (*P. Venanzio Milani*).

The superior who has participated in this assembly has certainly touched the complexity of his role and service of charity, but he has also caught a glimpse a new light for undertaking a new journey dictated or paved by love.

For the superior, "charisma and cross" must necessarily go hand in hand remaining faithful to values our Founder transmitted to us. And, if there is any reality, particularly today, which the superior should not lose sight of in his ministry of service to the confreres and in his very life, it is the personal, vocational and community identity, which has been the theme of this assembly:

* personal identity: being ourselves in the continuous changes of life;

* vocational identity: being as God wants us to be and to grow continually in faithfulness to his call as Comboni lived it;

* community identity: being a Cenacle of Apostles for a truly credible announcement of the Kingdom of God in the whole world.

2. Actual Role of the Superior according to the 1997 Chapter

How to start again from Mission, the individual person and the people?

With such words, which we read in the post-capitular message, the new general council synthesizes the mandate entrusted to them by the chapter for the next six years. We have in front of us a very precise task: to take a new start in a new way, new style of both personal and community life, new style of being with the people...



The sense of this Assembly is very clear and simple. It start from the point of view that-if a mediation is needed between the Chapter (with its documents, contents and orientations) and our concrete daily life-such a mediation is in the person of the superior of the local community: the superior considered in his ministry of animating, supporting and guiding...

A tradition in this sense does not exist in our Institute: the superior has always been the organizer of work, time-tables, activities...,not a "father", a "helper brother", a "friend" to whom refer to talk with about ourselves and our problems...

In spite of this, since it is not possible to start anew without its help, the Chapter tries to give to the local superior a certain shape and identity. This is what we want to see together so that, starting from this new awareness, a new range of practical and creative attitudes may arise, which help the confreres in the community to walk in newness of life and take a new start themselves from mission, the individual person and the people.

a) Self conscience: the Minister of authority according to the Chapter

The overall motivation (CA '97,122): *“The urgencies of mission, the danger of being overwhelmed by an increasing activism and an efficientistic mentality (cf. CA'91,4-6;29.1),as well as the demands related to the physiomy of the institutes which is changing, call upon each Comboni missionary to enter in a continuous process of renewal and growth”* (cf. RL 85).

The CA, in the chapter on the attention to the individual person and precisely about animation of the community, they state the followings:

- *The ministry of authority helps persons to be faithful to themselves, to their consecration and to mission, fostering their continuous renewal (id.126).*
- *Each superior, therefore, should be a person capable of listening, discerning and with a deep spirituality, and of assuming, in the moments of crisis, weaknesses and discouragement of the confreres, the role of strengthening and fraternal guide too (cf. RL 107)(id.128).*
- *Due to the importance of their role, particular attention must be given to the formation of the superiors with adequate initiatives (id.128).*

b) The "hot points" for the ministry of the Superior

The Comboni formation in these last years, both basic and the on-going one, has been and continues to be challenged by precise facts:

a) on one side sad events and emergencies-of many countries in which we live, stimulate within us the need for a deep revision of our concept of mission and our missionary methodology: *the need for a new style of being missionaries. And consequently the formation of people more centred on values and rooted in a strong Comboni identity* (id.119);

b) on another side the persistent and negative influence on our persons and communities of styles of life and types of behaviour massively proposed by the post-modern culture: *the influence that modern society plays in us and in our communities* (id.119);

c) thirdly we face the renewed challenge of Internationality in our Institute for the constant increase of candidates and confreres coming from Africa, Latin America and Asia, alongside with the continuous decrease of European confreres (new "vocations' geography): *the increasing of nationalities in the Institute. And consequently a formation that educates to Internationality* (id.119)

Starting from Mission we have oriented in a particular way our attention on the person of each Comboni missionary, making all together a revision of the formative iter. Only one and continuous, in fact, is the process of growth and self-renewal which each one of us -a subject of personal formation-is called to fulfil together with his confreres in the community, from the moment of his call to the end of his life (cfr. VC 65) (CA' 97, 120).

Moreover, in these last years we face a variety of human vocational phenomena in our Institute: many young candidates in our formation houses have left; young professed ask to leave the Institute; missionaries who, just after some years, don't feel anymore like staying in the missions and ask to go back to their provinces of origin; confreres of middle age who feel already "pensioned" and do not wish to go to mission anymore; confreres unable to accept their age on sickness; Comboni missionaries of various age who feel no more motivated, without identity or suffer from depression, apathy, human and spiritual immobility; the presence, sometimes very marked of different forms of individualism in our communities; a certain bourgeoisies which makes us ambiguous and no more transparent in the eyes of the people and of the local Church, communities which suffer because of lack of mutual acceptance in the diversity of characters (no tolerance, impatience, extremism...); elderly confreres, some also sick, who loose the sense of their identity and sometimes even of their own life; Comboni proved by stress or by the situations of risks and peril in the missions and who carry with themselves wounds difficult to be healed.

The Chapter summarizes all this when stating: *"We are worried about some human and vocational situations among ourselves: confreres worn down by stress, by risks and dangers in the mission; confreres who*

feel demotivated, maladjusted, unable to try again or to cope with advancing age; young missionaries who after a few years of consecrated life lose their enthusiasm for the mission, unable to bear the solitude and the difficulties... these confreres need special attention” (cfr. CA '97 n. 123).

All these facts make us understand that most of the difficulties and problems that the Institute faced and still is facing at the level of personnel, structures and commitments, are mainly due to the problematic situations in which confreres were involved. Therefore, it comes spontaneous to ask ourselves if our Formation, both basic and on-going one, have been and still is adequate or not to help facing the modern challenges of the Mission in contemporary world and history of the Institute. Which formation, then, should be the more adequate for our life? What kind of "Comboni" we have to form and accompany for him to be sufficiently adequate in facing the increasing challenges of mission, of the world and of our history, not only of today, but also of the coming future?

Problem of values and personal identity.

It is good always to remember that the dimensions of the Identity of consecrated persons-therefore-of each one of us also in the Comboni charisma-are the following:

- 1) Mystical experience: personal experience of God... constant point of reference...
- 2) Ascetic growth: continuous growth of conversion in fidelity.
- 3) Sense of belonging: personal certainty that 'this is my life and my family'...
- 4) Apostolic commitment: for us is mission, from where always to take a new start...

These four dimensions are comparable with the four legs of a table: all must be of a same length, none can be shorter... lest the table (which is me!) fall down! Faith/prayer, continuous conversion, community, mission/commitment...

c) *Fields of intervention of the Superior*

The first experience of the disciples, preceding the sending, has been that of "staying with Jesus" (id.27; cfr. Mk 3,13-15) called to build up "the family of God", where we make experience of mutual care, solidarity, warmth in relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust (EA 63; CA' 97,28).

We feel, therefore, the need of improving the quality of relationships between persons in our communities, so that they may become places of communion where people live mutual sharing, forgiveness and reconciliation, acceptance of one another and the healing strength of the Father's love-Specifically because of being a place of communion, our communities will be signs that lead people to follow Christ (id-29; cfr. VFC 60).

It is important that each community makes a serious discernment in order...:

- to find human and spiritual dynamics of a sound community life...*
- share together our experience of faith and prayer committing one's self to discern, plan, work and verify together the activities of the community;*
- to cultivate fraternal relationships so that our "do" be the reflection of our "be" (id.30).*

In concrete, the superior should make sure that in his community:

1) The identity of each confrere is reinforced

This means a 'change' from a style of life mainly based on the "role" ('to do') to one mainly based on the "values" ('to be'). From here the necessity of a formation adequate to today's challenges.

When our formation (or even self-formation) is not centred on a true identity of the person, that is the values of our life (human and affective maturity, faith, vocation, consecration, self giving etc...) slights necessarily in a formation to the 'role' (things to be done), to which the individual holds firm as to the unique sense of his existence, that is of his identity. This identification of the individual with the 'role' bears serious consequences on the serenity of a person, because when he is called to change (and in our Institute many change too much and others never change role) of that role, somehow the person himself breaks down, gearing not only temporary uneasiness and pain, but also depression and sometimes even serious de-motivations, by which confreres close themselves in their world (he doesn't wish neither to change role or community nor to go back to mission; he takes refuge in various compensations, internal or external they may be: friends, travelling, food, TV...)or even ask to leave the Institute.

As a normal consequence, this style of life provokes necessarily the phenomenon of incoherence and ambiguity of life: outside we appear in one way (the image we give of ourselves supported by the esteem of

our people) and inside in another one (the true reality which each one of us knows very well if one is honest with himself); outside and in words we proclaim ourselves poor, chaste and obedient, but in the reality our hidden life goes in a different direction and one can be really stinky, of cool heart and individualistic.

And it is just this what many young people detect, when they come nearer to us in a first moment, they even enter in our seminaries, to go away after a while with delusion and badly impressed by our style of life ambiguous and incoherent, not to say schizophrenic.

A formation which tends to consider our life and vocation as "something to be done", especially when a person is young and healthy, is typical of an institution that follows the strict laws of marketing and consumerism of a Holding which "prepares, produces and makes use" of persons until they are young and healthy and then "throws them away" once they are old and/or sick. This is "an activist conception" of mission, but also the typical modality of managerial economy.

2) *People be trained to a true spirit of Community*

Looking ahead and to be faithful to its charisma and mission, alongside with formation of its members to vocation values rather than roles, our Institute must aim also at the formation of truly "communitarian" people(not rough and clerical - as said during the Chapter), that is capable of producing and building apostolic communities, and not only consumers of it.

We are well aware of the presence of a certain individualism amongst ourselves, not only at community level but also in the apostolic one: someone said that, though we are religious, in the reality of way of living is that of "organized diocesan" , independent, lone sailors and often "free launchers", especially in the fields of economy, of works and commitments. We are convinced, however, that we must evangelise as a community and not individually, since the experience has taught us that initiatives and commitments linked to a single person, even if with the best intentions, cannot resist to the impact of time. Without continuity all initiatives are doomed to fail.



For our missionary and apostolic life it is necessary to have the capacity of living "with" and "for" the others, in a continuous self-giving attitude, whose first test is the daily community life. For this reason is not enough to say that I am a person: I must be a communitarian" person, who really knows how to live with others, share and plan together, building continuously ties of fraternal union and self giving.

Such a characteristic must be very present in the process of formation from its start and practiced till the last day of life.

Here it is what the Chapter at n.125.2 suggests for the formation and growth of each Comboni as "communitarian person":

a) in our meetings let us share more what we 'are' rather than what we 'do';

b) discover and appreciate the personal and cultural richness of the confrere;

c) share in every activity, overcoming individualism and protagonism with moments of evaluation and discernment of community's plans;

d) pray together as to be able to interpret, events of our daily life and of mission in the light of the Word of God;

e) give time to prayer and personal study

f) include in the community Charta a communitarian project of on-going formation;

g) be available and attentive to concrete needs of the community.

3) We live as persons "open to internationality", open to the other different from me.

The third aspect about formation that the Chapter suggests is about the urgency of becoming persons 'truly international', capable of mutual respect, of enculturation, living with serenity with people of other cultures.

We thank God for the gift of so many candidates from Africa, Latin America and Asia. At the same time we are also aware that this new 'vocational geography' in the Institute presents areas of doubts and difficulties.

The increase of Internationality, in fact, is not merely a question of numbers and geography: it touches the deepest roots of our living together and demands alongside with the recognition of the one common charisma adequate practice of sharing together, so that the interaction with other people's values may really become mutual enrichment

Such a "catholicity", which was in the wishes of our Founder, cannot be magically created: it must be prepared and formed, even in its

more concrete side-aspects (economy...) with adequate programmes and experiences since the first phases of the formative iter.

The Chapter states: the 'new geography of vocations' is changing in a significant way the human physiognomy of our Institute which becomes ever more 'catholic' as the Founder wanted it (S 944). This implies a new sensibility towards internationality at all levels, to which we must be trained and formed continuously (id.125).

In order to be such 'catholic and international persons', as Comboni wanted, each one must first of all be a person open to the confrere, respectful of diversities, attentive to his values, understanding and charitable in difficulties..., starting from the real confreres who live with me day by day... The other, what is different from me, is not a danger and even less an enemy, but an opportunity of enrichment... a dream of God put into practice...

d) Particular attention to young confreres, elderly and sick and those in difficulty.

These are the three categories of confreres upon which the Chapter paid particular attention; these are the same that each Superior must take into account and upon which he must invest his best energies of animation.

1) YOUNG CONFRERES (id.129-130).

The importance of following young confreres in their early year of missionary experience. Suitable communities are needed for the young confreres

2) ELDERLY AND SICK CONFRERES (id.132-135):

The presence of these confreres helps the Institute and stimulates it to care for them and live together also the stages of sickness and elderliness as natural and privileged point our missionary vocation (cf. RF 526).

We consider our elderly and sick confreres as precious and most valid part of our family and we invite them to feel always active as missionaries I thanks to their contribution of prayer and suffering, faithful to the Cross with our Blessed Comboni, in perseverance and apostolic fecundity (cf-RL 15.2;VC44).

3) THOSE IN DIFFICULTY (id.136):

Considering the increasing number of confreres with difficulties in vocational identity and personal balance, after the indications of RL(42.4)

and *RATIO* (527), we stress once more the importance of an adequate care with the help of the following instruments:

- the support of the local community;
- attention and care of the Provincial and local Superior;
- eventually the help of qualified persons, even in apposite centres.

e) Suggestions for our communities

1) Role of the Superior as true "Animator" of the community:

- a person of authenticity (without ambiguity), identified with his vocation, with life of faith and prayer that helps him and sets an example for the others.
- he must be aware of positive and negative influx to which confreres are exposed because of the materialistic and relativistic mentality of nowadays (press, TV, ...) and be able to make confreres aware of it in an atmosphere of attention, trust and dialogue (personal and communitarian): very few people talk about this with serenity;
- he must care for and fraternally correct the strong tendency to individualism in its various manifestations (use of time, choice of activities, use of money, personal commodities, various forms of compensation, etc...);
- he must foster an atmosphere of fraternity: one must feel well in the community; sometimes it's a question of small forms of attention that make happy the other;
- most of all he must safeguard the Comboni Ideal (love for mission, the poor, interest for our missionaries and their reality, charisma and Founder...) ... so that it may be present not only during prayer but also in dialogues and other activities: clear sign of this is the constant presence of 'the desire to go to mission', though sometimes for various reasons (health...) cannot be possible.

2) Role of the Community as such:

- atmosphere of mutual trust and dialogue (and not of suspicion, criticism mixed with jealousy and small revenges);
- capacity of good interpersonal relationships, fraternal, of help and attention to everyone's situation, especially of those who go through difficult moments: it is the capacity of exposing

oneself for the sake of communicating personal interiority and richness and also limits and needs;

- it can be done in moments of prayer, in other communitarian moments, but also in private conversations;
- our life is "an open task": we are continuously in growth; if we don't grow and go on in the human, Christian and vocational dimension we first don't move, and then we withdraw and everything loses its sense.

3. Animator of Dialogue

a) Solution of conflicts

1) Conflict is in the essence of life

Who among us did not have an experience, at least once or repeatedly, of what conflict means? From experience we acknowledge the existence of persons with conflicts, situations of individual and institutionalised conflicts, at national and international level, and the reality of conflicts as an essential part of life itself.

Let us just consider the biological level: an animal must maintain a certain degree of temperature different from that of his habitat, it is exposed to heat and cool, it must retain a humidity degree which will give impulse to thirst stimuli and a balance between hunger and satisfaction. Life is always challenged by opposites: this is why we struggle and burn energies until death.

Considering life in itself, we see that the simple fact of being born situates us in the realm of conflicts. Living together in society is already a conflict of characters and personal interests, culture is a conflict between the natural and the artificial and, for each individual, is the conflict between personal identity and aggregation or, if we prefer so, between personal demands and those of the group or the community in which we live.

Only where there is no life there are no conflicts; only stones or cemeteries are free from conflicts...

If conflicts play such an important role in our life, then the ability of solving them is one of the most important human values as well.

2) Aggressiveness – typical evidence of conflict

We would like to emphasize here that which is the most common evidence: conflict generates tension, which produces frustration and emerges as aggressiveness. A further psychological principle is that ag-

gression generates aggression. A snow ball effect then takes place which becomes an 'avalanche', so to speak: a great amount of repressed aggressiveness changes an interpersonal conflict into intra-personal conflict and it is the former to be left without solution.

Aggression and violence are some of the major problems of today's society. Their proper solution means harmony, progress, happiness, their wrong solution means destruction and chaos. When conflicts accumulate energy that is kept under pressure they become a potential source of hostility and violence.

As it originates frustration it becomes hostility and produces destructive feeling towards who causes it or appears to be its originator.

It is a cause for anxiety, depression and worries, which in turn generate psychosomatic symptoms like headache, insomnia, digestive problems etc.

It causes an urge for activism: diverging opinions urge everyone to express oneself, to defend and realize one's own views.

The opposite may also happen: the feeling of impotence in front of the conflict that lowers the capacity to and the efficacy of studies, work etc., thus the person is inhibited or withdrawn.

It helps to create and consolidate, in the person, realism, typical of the adult. The child is egocentric, does not accept contradictions nor limits; cannot bear frustration and tries to do everything in his own way.

Conflict enlightens ideas, feelings, the critical characters of the members of the group or the community and induces the establishment of clearer and more widely acceptable norms for the group or the community.

When a conflict is not within a group but rather among groups, it actually unites the group, however could create impenetrable blocks.

Other repercussions of conflicts tend to proliferate and to form chains or masses. Discovering them and solving them adequately is the key to human conviviality and authentic maturity.

3) *The worst way to solve conflicts*

Mistakes in the solution of conflicts are frequent and it is necessary to uncover them:

- To revolt and pretend to solve them completely, forgetting that conflict is inevitably part of life.
- To provide extreme remedies: on one hand repression which hides without solving it, condemning it to become repression and forgetting that burying a strong feeling is like burying

someone alive; on the other hand choosing the explosive way which offends, destroys and creates new aggressions.

- Dogmatism and rigidity: stubbornness, inflexibility, intolerant and strict mentality (“I am always right”).
- Incapability to negotiate which translates into assuming extreme positions to want to get “all or nothing” instead of trying to find out points in between, not far from one or the other side.
- The common sin of “labelling” others, to be found in the single and in the group as well, negating flexibility and ability to change in one’s own life.
- The monologue under the disguise of dialogue, when the person listens more to oneself than the other party.
- The illusion of being able to solve conflicts without proper documentation and sufficient information, failing to distinguish between personal problems and group conflicts.
- The confusion between discussion and polemic: to discuss is to reawaken or stimulate; to be polemic means to fight and shatter.
- The neurotic inclination to exaggerate conflictive situations and looking at them as if with a magnifying glass: it is like seeing tragedies where they do not actually exist. This exacerbates things, causes a loss of serenity so needed to judge and to put people before their own distressed and chaotic emotions.
- To let one’s own emotional state explode is oppressive and causes a loss of objectivity and reliability.
- The “Me/all” egoist attitude: I have to gain and obtain everything, thus forgetting the respect for others and others’ different viewpoints. We all have the right to make mistakes, and the duty to recognise that.

4) *The right solution of conflicts*

- Acceptance of the human condition that makes of life a succession of conflicts, appreciation of these as character forming, stimuli for development, promoters of change and progress. When there is a negative conflict it is important to learn to live with it in serenity and be able to face it rather than avoid it.
- To nurture a taste for community living and that of building relationships with different people.
- Do not blame conflicts on others’ poor will; accept people as they are, with their own ideas, different from ours; do not convert real conflicts into personal conflicts.

- Learn to dialogue with the party in question whenever there is some misunderstanding or difficulty; don't stay silent and swallow because this creates biases and divisions. There are values that are above everyone and need to be the only and constant reference points in conflict solving.
- Induce in oneself and in the group the mental and emotional attitude of "win-win" instead of the "win-loose" approach (i.e. "I win, you loose").
- Know how to peacefully tolerate difficulty: such attitude means firmness, confidence, constructive force, backbone of all negotiation.
- Manage aggressiveness avoiding the two extremes: repression and outburst (i.e. destructive violence instead of channelling energy for the good of all).
- Diagnose the problem after having questioned attitudes and behaviours that contribute to create or maintain the problem, and clarify one's own values in such regard. This helps into meeting all the possible actions with a real desire to improve things. Only in this way a decision can be taken on the best alternative available and the common strategy to adopt together till the end.
- Develop in oneself and the group the skill to negotiate: begin without harassing, listen trying to understand in order to integrate anyone's contribution, create cooperative attitudes, emphasise values held in common, every one has to surrender a little in order to find a middle ground.
- Bring the issues to a voting, if necessary, and when there will be clarity, reach an agreement.
- Resort to the mediation and evaluation of people esteemed by the conflicting parties. Values are above all and must be the real reference point.
- Practice relaxation techniques in order to have peace of mind and manage properly one's own emotions.

b) Authentic interpersonal relationships as the foundation of dialogue

Premise:

A feature typical of our time is the great need to be together (need for communion) and at the same time the great need to be and to act alone (narcissistic individualism) with the consequent crisis of the community.

1) *Initial assumptions:*

- there is an ambivalent attitude of the human being toward dialogue: deep anguish in having to accept a person and at the same time the unavoidable need of openness to the other.
- the faulty structures of interpersonal communication (dialogue) tend to create early “anxious” situations; if these linger then aggressiveness or fear and others appear.

+ DIALOGUE IS A MYSTERY, a never ending task, A GIFT

2) *How do human relationships come about and develop:*

- there are different stages in the evolution of human relations (childhood, adolescence, adulthood);
- it is necessary to acquire a sufficient emotional autonomy in order to make way to dialogue (a certain level of adult maturity);
- a skill for “empathy” is needed (difficult for many), it is the ability to put objectively oneself in someone else role;
- recognition of the other as he is which demands a capacity for dialogue, otherwise there is rejection, indifference, compromise, formal and diplomatic relationship, exclusion, etc.



3) *Dynamics of human relationships*

- the ways to make contact (look, approach, position, emotive welcoming or rejection, communicativeness, etc.);
- the demands of interpersonal relationships: rich inner awareness, look out over the professional role, richer exchange between people, encounter with people = the greatest gift that has been given us;
- how to grow in attitudes of dialogue:
 - i. listening attitude
 - ii. non judgmental
 - iii. self-criticism
 - iv. know how to communicate
- how to come to communion through friendship (where and how it is possible): the highest ideal which dialogue and human rela-

tions can have. Self-giving love: I exist for others, love of communion: deep spiritual relation.

4) *Concrete consequences:*

- a) favour the communication process (the need for encounter, save personal otherness);
- b) ensure 'continuous' information (answering to implicit questions that others put continuously to which we do not always reply – free exchange – personal dialogues – community meetings, etc.);
- c) walk towards a communitarian "we": different roles and participation that are reached after communication and dialogue.
- d) the specific task of animating:
 - creating a favourable climate
 - facilitating exchanges (about work, emotions, spiritual progress)
 - favouring initiative, creativity and complementary roles.

c) Specific environmental and communitarian conditions that favour dialogue

Premise:

Having seen the difficulties, someone would make dialogue redundant... It is about something arduous, frustrating; can there still be something yet to be tried?

- The problem of large groups: dialogue, if present, takes place firstly between people or small groups whereas the larger group is absent
- Psychological principles that regulate small groups do work in a laboratory or in psychology textbooks, in reality things go differently...
- Always at a premise level, locate the extremely conditioning role of "disharmonic" personalities...

1) *Sources of psychological difficulties for dialogue in the communities:*

- a) in general:
 - bad organization of internal communication
 - discomfort without cause at times
 - physiological tension in the communities in certain time periods
- b) personal

- conflicts due to personalities (bad character or other)
- informal relations (hidden)
- c) negative
 - solitude and isolation
 - psychological complexes (withdrawn people)
 - cases with character anomalies

2) *Solutions to be provided at the environmental level (community ecology):*

- "habitat"... that is homely...
- "humane" timetable, with the right amounts and space between work, prayer and rest
- suitable meeting rooms (community rooms)
- sensible scheduling time for meetings and community gatherings
- space for free announcements

3) *Conditions that favour community dialogue:*

Organize community, assemblies, meeting, gatherings, etc. in such a way that it is possible to:

- **Express oneself:** express oneself in freedom, be listened to (but careful to the amount of time used: a certain equality helps the shy and restrains the talkative);
- **Give explanations:** to provide a possible necessary clarification of problems and issues (the methods of seminars, preparatory commissions, etc. are useful);
- **Relax:** foster a progressive relaxation of the common atmosphere (do not put work programming, organizational matters, production, on the foreground rather the affective climate that is given by the character of people than need to cure their inflexibility...);
- **Dissolve gangs:** continuous source of envy and fears (especially if made of people who are cold, paralyzing, unable to understand others but ready to demand understanding from others: persecution phobia).

4) *Practical conclusion for community animation:*

(small norms for a dialogue therapy)

- a) Mutual knowledge and mutual understanding
- b) Awaken or reawaken positive energies
- c) Follow up the most difficult personal cases (also using firmness, once their objective good has been guaranteed)

d) Use group techniques (with criteria and preparation)

Exercise:

- * lay down a scale of urgent matters according to the environmental and communitarian conditions (indispensable);
- * give to such urgent matters a priority order and an appropriate time for realization;
- * ask for the supervision of a competent person on the work done.

d) Builder of Community

1) Communication and dialogue:

*(Cfr. Testimoni, March 15th 1998, N° 5, pag. 4-5: Building the community together: **The Secret: Communication**)*

If we want to build the community together, it is essential to increase the communication. The fittest instrument to favour it is the dialogue, so that it does not remain on the surface but reaches deeper levels.

In the document "Fraternal life in community" of 1994 chapter II, entitled: "The Religious Community, the place where we become brothers" n. 29 says: "To the strongly felt need for the increase of the brotherly life of a community, there is a corresponding need of having a broad and more intense communication... in order to become brothers it is necessary to know one another. To know one another an important factor is to communicate in a wider and deeper way."

There is no doubt that communication is the lifeblood of the community. Without it there would be no unity of hearts and intentions, and the community would be reduced to just living together in juxtaposition, living physically near but spiritually and psychologically far away.

We can point out five levels of communication:

- The most common and at the same time the most superficial level is the neutral one. It is the level of business. The communication with another person happens not because he is this or that person, but entirely for the role he plays or because we are in need of him.
- The second level is more personal but superficial: the exchange of communication still remains external. For example: when we

meet in the refectory or in the TV room, we talk about time, sports, or about the news, but we don't say anything of ourselves nor of our feelings.

- Instead amongst friends, the communication can reach a deeper and internal level. It comes through the exchange of opinions and feelings. The person makes himself known, but there still remain some protected areas.
- The next level, intimate and deep, is only possible amongst few real friends. It's the level in which we give and receive, presenting ourselves as we are, in which we feel free to express our joys, worries and pains. We can cry with them and be sure that they will also share with us. In their company we can be indeed ourselves. We don't have any pretence to be different from what we are. This is the most fruitful level for the personal growth. It is the level in which few words are enough and where even the long pauses of silence don't cause any embarrassment.
- Finally, there is the level of communication with God where nothing remains hidden. This takes place in the depth of our being with the being of God.

The most suitable instrument to favour the communication is the dialogue. But what is it? St. Paul gives the best description of this when he writes to the Ephesians (4,15): *"to live the truth in charity."* This means to desire the growth of one another. To be able to accept others without any conditions, leaving them free to be themselves. To accept their gifts, their prejudices, their ways of relating and communicating, their wounds, gaps and masks, but always trusting in their desire of sincerity, honesty, truth and in their kindness. It means to listen with respect, leaving them the freedom and the space of silence, to avoid interpreting, judging and investigating. It also means to accept ourselves and ask the others to accept us as different.

It means to share what I am, not so much at the level of ideas, without any attempt to change the other or to drag him to my point of view. It demands that language, gestures and suitable moments be chosen. In this relationship each one takes a risk: to be oneself, without masks, to be rejected, or misunderstood. Above all, it takes the risk of listening to God who speaks through others.

Five are the ways of dialogue that help the building of a community. They are compared to a journey in which one travels from one level to another, as the dialogue gets deeper.

- *Shared prayer.* Through this type of prayer we enter in communication with others and we reveal something of ourselves. It's not just matter of saying prayers, but sharing our feelings (hearts). An example of this is Jesus' prayer to his Father during the Last Supper.
- *Life communication.* This takes place when one shares this decisive moment in our life: joys, worries, and sorrows. The mutual listening has to be full of respect and not as of somebody who judges. And naturally it is necessary to respect the privacy of each person.
- *Revision of one's activity.* It is the evaluation of what we do, our successes and our failures and the reasons. The common good must be what guides our decisions and not our own "whims".
- *Revision of community life.* It is similar to the previous one, with the difference that this concerns the internal life of the group: community atmosphere, climate, how one feels, expectations, style of life, roles, services and so on.
- *Mutual support and the encouragement.* It's the most difficult but also the most fruitful. It must not be confused with the brotherly correction taught in the novitiate, which was more referred to the negative aspects. Here, instead the group enables each person to discover the talents one has but he is not aware. The gifts and talents are given to each one for the benefit of everybody. This type of dialogue can achieve its aim only if there is openness, otherwise it could bump and hurt, whereas its purpose is to heal. Normally, we see ourselves through the eyes of others, but this only happens when the others have eyes and hearts compassionate.

Lastly there remains the *dialogue of verification*. Here are some sample questions:

- Did I cooperate to create favourable conditions for the dialogue?
- Did I listen to all with my heart or just with my ears?
- Am I able to distinguish between sharing of knowledge, ideas and sharing the truth of what I am?
- Did I make a monologue or dominated the group?
- If others dominate, do I love them enough to tell them, in group, or in private?
- Was I hearing but not listening, thinking on what I wanted to say while others were speaking?

- Did I make pressure on someone to speak or did I put someone off at ease knowing that he didn't want to speak?
- Did I fail to give my contribution willingly when I would have been able to do it? Why?
- Which other difficulties did I realize that could enlighten the group?

To promote dialogue at all these levels is not easy and there are few communities that succeed in doing it. It takes good will to agree on the times and the rhythms of the meetings and give them the priority. A difficulty is due to the fact that the communities are composed of persons with different mentality and there are few of those who remain for long time unchanged.

Every time a person joins the community it's necessary to start right from the beginning. Besides, there are those who don't feel like entering in this type of sharing. These too must be respected. The presence of a person who is unwilling, hinders the journey of the community, jeopardizes the opening and the mutual trust. But one should not be allowed to block the way to others in these encounters of dialogue. It is always necessary that we ask ourselves what is better for the common good.

However, the dialogue is neither a simple technique nor an exercise. It is an attitude of the Spirit; it is a style of life. Without the dialogue, indeed, can we call our groups, apostolic communities in the evangelical sense of the word?"

2) Dialogue and community meetings:

(Cfr. Testimoni, 15th April 1990, an article of A. Manenti)

It is not easy to come to a true dialogue in the community meetings. The fear to speak of oneself and to be judged, and also the fear to discover one's own difference block the dialogue, particularly on the start, on the very moment one should "break the ice."

To relate with one another in a meaningful way it's never spontaneous, not even when our characters are much similar. An effort is necessary to overcome our natural tendency not to speak of ourselves. Why does our community journey go so slowly? Why are there brothers that never speak? Why our dialogues are not anymore deep and personal?

a) The fear of opening oneself

We all know that the objective of our gathering is not recreational, it demands our personal involvement: we meet at personal level but our

relationship with the others is not meaningful nor spontaneous not even in cases of the so-called compatibility of characters. It takes courage to break the natural reluctance to the confidence. Why is it that our way of fraternizing proceeds so slowly? Why are there people who never speak? Why do we remain so superficial in our dialogue? We want to see what can happen when we talk of ourselves. But, here fear arises. We see it at the beginning of every meeting, which demands involvement: perhaps one has even desired it, but the difficulty remains, at the start, to break the ice because of silence or embarrassment. And yet before the meeting started, members were all speaking and laughing. At the beginning an artificial atmosphere of caution is created. Who starts? There is the fear to expose oneself first.

Here is the first critical point and the first question that emerges: it is true, even if one agreed to speak, but to meet for social amenity and something else to speak of oneself: how much will he know to welcome it? Various techniques are established for the purpose of making others begin, then to make the rules of what it is all about and how to intervene.

b) Techniques of delegation

- We let the superior act: one expected him not only to lead the way (this is his competence) but also to give contents and information in such a way that we may remain in an attitude of passive recipients, commenting within our hearts on his interventions without expressing it.
- Issues above people's interest: we speak of superficial things which do not involve anybody's feelings, in such a way to change the confronting group into an informal group of sharing opinions.
- Formation of alliances: when we start speaking we search unconsciously someone that is equal to us, without involving everybody. Thus some silent couples are formed: the shy ones, the observers, the intellectuals... at the end of the meeting it is easy to see that each one goes to look for his allied.
- The push to the massacre: first, we search for someone who exposes to see what happens. Usually, the one who accepts the invitation is the good person, the one that has less to defend.
- The defensive leader: someone who knows the business is asked to start and control the situation. He draws the attention on himself and lets the others to look on.

c) The fear of judgment

The list could continue but what matters is to notice this: the inevitable fear of the other when the subject matter touches people so closely. The root of the fear of expressing oneself is the fear of being judged. If I open myself what use will they make of my feelings? It is important to note that the fear is not of the other as enemy but of me in front of the other. This happens even in front of a friend, or of a confidant... whenever something increases the intimacy. We can be very sure of the other, but this is not enough for us to open ourselves.

The nature of this fear concerns our self-image: we are afraid of looking at our nakedness. It is the natural modesty of ourselves. There are aspects (also positives) that we even don't want to say to ourselves: these would make us feel so proud (if they are positives) or humiliated (if they are negatives). Then we prefer to let them go.

This fear becomes acute in the group and takes the form of fear to express ourselves in public: "I don't have anything interesting to say, I only have certain problems, and I don't want to show myself"... And it might be useful to remember that this common fear of being judged can be really the shame related to the interior transparency.

d) The fear of the diversity

The second fear of the difficulties of self-expression comes from the fear of diversity. Since our groups are characterized by values of common reference point, presupposed that these must be equal to us, erroneously not only in the ideals but also in the attitudes. And when this does not happen we look for the guilty one.

Why such a naïve presupposition? Because there is the fear of the differences. The person with a different view, creates anxiety, above all if he lives among us. The different one disturbs because it provokes a confrontation: he forces us to remove in us the air of infallibility, confront us with the diversity that maybe shows our gaps and this makes us suffer.

The fear to be judged, the fear of the different: these initial difficulties to dialogue can act undisturbed and hinder the evolution of the group. These become concrete communicative barriers. The dialogue remains, to a certain level, formal and private. Each one knows how far one may go.

Sharing becomes simple communication: after having shared mine, I can feel exempt and leave the others say theirs. Or it becomes a rally of opinions. Each one, from his greatest role can communicate something but without exposing his own role.

In order not to stop us to this respectful privacy, which is really the fear of intimacy, and with the time the source of loneliness, we try not to

consider as respect, tolerance or listening of what is only perhaps the fear of personal involvement.

e) *The dialogue as the search of the common good*

The community dialogue brings us to the common good, which is true maturity.

It is a key instrument for the growth of the individual and of the community.

Unfortunately we put some conditions for a community dialogue. Let's see some:

- *The personal utility*: we presume that the dialogue has been useful if it brings us fruit. Instead it can happen that it can make waist energy: to clarify superficial things for us but not for the others, to return on points already discussed... In these situations, we go out of the meeting with the impression of not having received anything and therefore it appears as wasted time.
- *The respect to one's own personality*: it presupposes that the true encounter is based in being spontaneous; each one should relate as "one feels" and be welcomed "for what he is". The criterion that guides it is only at internal personal level and if the other does not respect my way of expression, it means that he doesn't accept me. The true character is taken as an incontestable action that demands respect and welcoming from the others. Contrarily, the common good can also demand adaptation to the other's behaviour and therefore to change and limit oneself.
- *The idea of the resignation*: the years have made us shrewd and experts. The suggestion that it could be done better generates a bitter ironic smile. I remember a young priest assigned to a new community: he proposed to the other fathers to say the Sunday Evening Prayer together; the answer was: "but this is a parish, not a novitiate."

A resignation like this takes two common shapes. The first one: "it doesn't depend on us." This means that: non responsibility taken and wait that the solutions come from above. The second: "this group is not the real life." This disappointing verification means that around the table we can make all the beautiful proposals we want, but then daily life will show us things and disenchant us.

1) *Changing the clauses*

Beyond the examples it is important the concept: to a certain point of it's evolving, the community demands to see again the bases of the relationship and pushes to make the passage as the criterion of the gratification to that of the values. The relationship, sooner or later, demands to be brought forward not because it is gratifying, but because it promotes the good of the community. To pass from one's own personal good and interest to the preoccupation for the common good; from the pretension of "taking something for oneself", to the liberty of "giving it for the common good"; from the desire to "let others drag me on" to the initiative of "pulling others": this is the point.

2) The transgressions

The theme that the group has to deal with is the transgression as a fact of the group and not only as something that happens in the group. It means to de-personalize what happened; if it is not done, it is left free to three useless reactions to the transgression: mutual reassurance: we are not as he is, criticizes to the transgressor and his sentence process of guilty on the "if we had done, if we had said..." The uncertainty of one reminds the uncertainty of all. In this way, the drawback can become occasion for a new verification of the real availability of everybody.

3) The risk of power

A second way to develop in us the care of the common good is to ask ourselves on the theme of power. It seems strange but it is really like this: intimacy can be used for a dominion on the other. Some examples: if you love me and have trust in me, do as I tell you. It is not rare the use of the affective bond to force, seduce and to influence!

The common good requires previous availability to give and take care of it. It means to accept the responsibilities towards the others: to put on the load to interfere in the others' business with the right "aggressiveness" however, without forcing it. This altruist influence in the life of others, forces the person, who does it, to be always attentive and discern his love for the neighbour.

4) The mutuality

We can verify our maturity in our relationship with the others, by the way we face our problems. These arise in a context that respects the individual and the community at the same time. It is known how to distinguish the community walk from that personal one, for which nobody ties the fates of his own identity indiscriminately with those of the group, but

on the other hand, it is felt responsible for the construction of a common good.

The relationships are lived with open minds: one feels free to express independent convictions, determined not by the need to feel protected and not even from that contrary to attack; it avoids to make a coalition in defensive groups, but each one knows to walk toward a precise and demanding ideal and in the function of this interprets his true stay in the community. These persons have established some relationships of flexible self-determination that it says the ability to take personal decisions with the help of the others, but respecting their liberty and taking each one his responsibility. If he loves the other for what he is and what he can offer without the anxiety but insists constantly.

In short, the group reaches its maturity when one who participates knows how to use it without being dependent. He produces a fruit that goes across his limits and persists beyond the existence of the same group. He has so reached his purpose to be the spring-board for the persons that take the journey together, but they also know how to be by themselves (alone).

f) The Superior's role as animator of the community

1) Animating the search for God's will

In the first place, we speak of the function to animate the search for the will of God because the superior or animator has as principal responsibility not only the administration of the

community from the material point of view, but also the creation of the communion from the spiritual point of view. In the first place it is a service referred to the identity of the religious community. Therefore, the superior is not so much called to guide or govern the religious

members to do this or that, but because through their being together and doing the apostolate puts in light the specific religious task of the community. The important aspects referred to animate the search of the will of God are the following:

- In the first place, the discernment. The superior, together with his brothers and helping them in a suitable way, puts himself in front of the Lord asking what he wants from the community and



also the type of religious life required by the specific charisma of the Institute. The animator therefore is responsible of the identity and of the image that the Institute expresses through the community in the local Church and in the society. The animator must take care that in front of the people and of the social and cultural reality in which they live the community may shine with its specific characteristics. To this respect, the type of work (relief, educational or of pastoral service) is quite relative because in whatever activity it is possible to become sign and instrument of God's love, by the specific life-style of the Institute. Keeping this in mind it is necessary that the offering of its own services and the self-image of the community are evangelical provocation and not only the fulfilment of services. The superior has to beware of the temptation of efficiency which might push the community and confreres just to work for the best results. Doing so they could also fulfil great services because they are men that make available totally the wealth of their person for purposes of productive utility. This is an abuse and a betrayal of the religious life. In times of crisis, such as the one we now live in, it's necessary to know how to defend ourselves from the egoism of people or also from certain sectors of the Church that pretend such efficiency. Above all, it is necessary to make the community able to bring qualified services in answer to the charisma, also in spirit of provocation in reference to the type of society in which we are inserted. Then the discernment on the sense of the community and of the persons' work is fundamental. In the first place the animator has to take charge of this assignment. This is very difficult, but if he aims at it together with the community as a principal objective, he can do a gradual priority. Discernment is the way with which the Lord sees the religious life and the answers that the community is called to give, for which it judges and evaluates the questions of the people and answers in terms of the will of God. This is perhaps the most difficult and binding aspect of the religious life.

- The choice of a methodology as that inherent in the community and apostolic project becomes essential to make operational the choices that the community has done in the discernment. Therefore, we would have to link discernment and project. The project is a methodology of rationalization and intelligent organization of what has been seen through the discernment. To plan means to

divide out the sectors of intervention and determine in every aspect some objectives, to work out some choices and to individualize some methods. When the discernment is well done, this enters in the project. All the persons that work in the community are more organized, they are more serene and they are also defended. Because a community without project goes like a free wheel driven by everybody. A religious that doesn't live in the community project is isolated and doesn't have much apostolic effectiveness. The project, then, is a technique of organization on the light of principles of faith and human wisdom, but the project becomes effective in the measure in which the community is able to let it know, it is almost like an identity card of the Institute; and the community in front of the civil authorities, the people with whom they work, in front of the priests and the parishes where they are inserted. It shows the specific face of a work with its motivations and its choices. And the community animator is, in certain way, the warrantor of the community project.

- The third aspect in the search of the will of God is the function of magisterium that the animator also exercises according to the constitutions. The superior is one who "makes the memory": it is gift of God to the Institute because of the charisma, he is the mediator between the superiors, the chapters, the councils, the constitutions and the single brothers. He is not a proud teacher that sees things only in his own way but one who puts himself at the service of reality, which is the patrimony of all the confreres and does it because they are in need of it and they are the recipients of the mission. The magisterial role is a delicate and a humble service. Therefore, the animator has to remember that he has a responsibility before each single brother in testing the fundamental aspects of the Institute and he has to know how to do it, in a humble and wise way. It is a type of fraternal magisterial role that does not put the superior himself in "cathedra"; for he is a brother as the others, together with them is anxious to remind himself and the others the most important things of the Institute and to safeguard them in decisive moments and contexts. Therefore, no lessons or specialized depths but a discreet intervention of memory, persuasion and motivation. In brief, it is a role to remind motivating.

- Besides, the animator's preoccupation is to conserve, guarantee and develop the spirituality and the religious values that are entrusted to the community. Usually, the spirituality of an Institute is specific and comes to be lived in a style proper to each religious family. Every Institute, through the traditions and reflections that it has done, possesses in this field a lively and rich experience of spiritual life. The animator has to become the warrantor of the spirituality of the Institute. He should not disperse it or neglect it perhaps going in search of other spiritualities. This is a delicate job that calls for discretion and a good equilibrium and in respect also of the personal journeys of particular persons who could have, by a gift of God, also touches of other particular spirituality, etc... however reminding himself and the community to live the values proper to the spirituality of the Institute. A community emerges also in front of the people of God if it preserves its specific spirituality. To this respect, a community in a certain sense, cannot be replaced by another with respect to the work she accomplishes. Other styles proper to apostolate even those that are pedagogical-educational, differ from Institute to Institute. This is a richness, which we cannot eliminate. The role of the animator therefore, owes to aim above all else on the specific objectives of the Institute. For this, a superior is loved, accepted and truly defended because he defends the real good of the community and the people. Without his work of spiritual mediation, the community would risk being frustrated, unbalanced, dissolved and would lose its identity and apostolic effectiveness.
- Besides the work of the community as such, there is also in addition the individual relationship of guidance, stimulus and encouragement in favour of the individual confreres. Individual listening is however discreet and delicate but also a little systematic and structured in the dialogue form. In this relationship, the individuals feel being made objects of particular attention of listening, of guidance and also of spiritual direction on the part of the superior. This discourse is outlined in various ways in the different constitutions but the individual relationship has not been forgotten by either of them. Rather this relationship, done in support, in listening and encouragement for the overcoming of difficulties and tensions is fundamental and this is to be considered among the jobs that the animators do in the search of the will of God. The document "Perfectae Charitatis" that put the burden on the superior to

listen to the religious, is worth also for the local superior and not only for the Provincials because it is not so much and only a matter of investigation and “snooping” or of knowing the personal acts but a privileged means for which the religious feels a living part of a fraternity and is fully involved, because in that community he can both sanctify and be sanctified. Then he should be listened to regarding the health, the satisfaction or more or less his life: If he is in problems; if it is possible to come into contact with his particular demands. This is a very important fraternal job for clarity and support. Obviously, a friend could also do this, but the superior has a proper and specific role in this sense, in as far as he presides over the whole community and he ensures the obligation of the search of the will of God with respect to the community and of all the individual confreres. In listening, it is not prudent to immediately invite the other to see everything in the light of God, saying, “*have faith and try to be good*” immediately passing to the hortative way, appealing to the will, but listen creating the occasion whereby the other can speak, communicate, even open himself (unburden) and probably reconstruct himself without the need of us giving him some pious exhortations. He could even do this alone once he has recovered his trust, has found himself and the sense of his life.

2) *Animator of Fraternal life:*

The second function is the animation of fraternal life, that is to say, of the community taken as a structure of communion and of service. In the community-communion prevails the wholeness of personal relationships and even the suffering, the incomprehension and conflict have big significance. One can be in a community even communicate but at the same time suffer a lot. This is an intense way of living in communion, joining “*charisma and Cross*”, an sure arduous exercise of adult and mature persons. Conflicts too are to be confronted and “*administered*” for the good. Different is the case when instead they have put into action and perpetuated errors of planning. In the face of such, it is necessary to have patience, ask God’s pardon and look for ways to correct the errors. This is not the case to invoke faith, to almost saying that the errors are good. Errors don’t quite go well and it is necessary to correct them.

Beyond this, the community as a life of relationship involves moments of understanding, interaction and collaboration which are integrated in the normality of communal life. The community where there is this

kind of relationships, sometimes even with conflicts, is a structure of service to the people of God for the salvation of souls. The apostolic and religious life has a missionary purpose. The community is not only for the reciprocal support of the persons, but it is essentially for the mission.

There is, in the community, the problem to harmonize the individual needs, legitimate as they may be, but demanding always the sacrifice of some personal needs, with the demands of the common good. This task asks for equilibrium, wisdom and great capability on the part of the superior.

The Code insists a lot on the respect for persons in the community. It is not thinkable that a superior may not take into account the legitimate and just needs of the members. To animate fraternal life in the communities means, first of all, with respect for the persons, to preserve the flexibility of this structure for service. It does not matter whether the community is big or small, formed in one way or another. The models of community life are changing more and more due also to the change of pastoral and missionary answers to be given, through the different charisms at the ecclesial service. Therefore, the superior is not 'per se' a guarantee of a formal preservation of habits, in charge of maintaining the sacred obedience. Today it is necessary to renovate, not only preserve. The fundamental and unchanging values must be kept, but at the same time it is necessary to have a spirit of renovation, a capacity to read the signs and to look at the future. Thus, ongoing formation calls for mental elasticity, as much as possible, and a good deal of conflicts in the Institutes. Religious life cannot be blocked just because there are a few persons who cannot understand or are always putting obstacles. To animate fraternal life demands that this structure of service becomes elastic, flexible, and open to service.

To animate fraternal life means first of all to animate religious values, safeguard spirituality, to know how to discern, to present the proper spirituality to the persons of our time. In the community, the superior must make sure that some determined spiritual demands are met, giving possibility and creating possibility.

He also animates fraternal life when he organizes and brings harmony to the style of life in fraternity. The superior creates opportunities for the community to live fraternally in all aspects of the life in common. So, he makes sure that the traditions of the Institute, the style of the communities be present and safeguarded through some determined options: this presupposes a planning of the time for work, rest and fraternal recreation. The how of animating fraternal life depends of the kind and size of the community? And it is necessary great mental elasticity. It is

prejudicial to have a fixed and preconceived image of the community. Today the structure of the community is linked to the social and cultural changes taking place. What is important is that the confrere changing community changes also according to the style of the community he is moving to. This is a very difficult problem. Many problems arise because of the difficulty of 'migrating': sometimes one changes house, but there is not a correspondent interior migration. When preparing for obedience it is necessary to care more of the interior dispositions of the change than of the material change: the latter sometimes is a very small thing compared to the assumption of new ways of being and living with other persons. This is what must be prepared and assumed at the interior level. For this reason, an animator must, in a way, 're-programmed' himself, define himself in relation to the community and according to the community he is moving into, because today each community is different from the others due to the transition context in which religious life is lived and expressed.

g) Animator of the communitarian discernment

What is discernment?

- The capacity to judge events, situations and persons using criteria of prudence and faith.
- It requires the gift of counsel.

1) The role of the superior in the community

- Favour the search for the will of God (discernment, community charter, spirituality, formation, personal encounter).
- Coordinate fraternal and apostolic life (tasks, roles, time, and means)

2) The superior and communitarian discernment

- Criteria for communitarian discernment
 - . growth of the person
 - . building up of the community
 - . answer to the charism
- Methods for discernment
 - . have meetings of true communion
 - . stimulate the will to search together
 - . respect the rhythms of real communitarian discernment
 - . see: analyses and understanding of the problem

- . judge: confrontation with evangelical and religious criteria
 - . act: dynamics of decision
 - The discernment is learned:
 - . with personal attitude which is reached with prayer, reflection and ascetics
 - . with the communitarian objective, which is necessary to suggest with wisdom and discretion, respecting the graduality, ductility and flexibility.
- 3) *The superior as animator of the community*
- The superior is in the realm of the human mediations, acknowledge by a spirit of faith
 - . with the goal and the responsibility to guide, animate, support, verify and reach what is useful for the growth and realization of all.
 - . in communion with the whole Institute and with fidelity to the charism.
 - Roles and tasks of the superior's job are to:
 - . Help discern the presence, action and the signs of God's will
 - . Accompany, support, correct according to the needs of each one
 - . Speak with the witness of his own life: coherence and transparency
 - . Verify the way done in view of reaching the proposed goals.

4. A spirituality to govern

1) Spirituality of the superior

Our Institute too has some good rules of life and good directors in every province. What could be missing is the good spirituality to govern. There cannot be superiors and subjects, rulers and ruled. On the contrary, there must be a communal responsibility in order of our life and mission. The government is the basis of our fraternity which makes us free to be useful to the announcement of the Gospel. The Su-



perior and the whole type of government in our life points out, necessarily, towards the defence of this liberty to love and serve for the announcing of the Gospel. The contrary of liberty is paralysis. We cannot assume the language and forms of action similar to those in a factory of automobiles where there exists the director responsible, the head of department and operations, the personnel etc.... When a child is born in a family, the mother and father do not say that the personnel of the family have increased. We are a family that is open to all for the mission. Each confrere is a gift of God and given because of us, as responsible, we can accompany him, forming him for the mission and liberating him (defending him and animating his genuine liberty) so that he can remain available for the annunciation of the Gospel.

To be a superior, in this way, -so as to govern – has to be derived, necessarily from the contemplation of the mission. If it were not so, we would be doing pure administration (schedules, activity, money and personnel).

Today it is difficult to bring together the confreres around the common mission that our founder left us. It is the current enormous challenge provoked by the massive entrance of individualism whereby a person lives personal liberty as self-determination (and not as collaboration to a common project) and to feel the others as interferences and obstacles. We are not called to *“till our ground”* but rather to collaborate with one another. Our Institute does not have the need just for evangelisers and pastors but also for formators, economists, animators, superiors, etc... We do all the parts for the same common project.

We have a difficulty in speaking about or in hearing power being spoken of in our life...It does not enter within the atmosphere of fraternity that we are called to live. Despite all this, when we do our vows we put ourselves in the hands of other confreres because they tell us where and how to serve better the communal project. Whether we like it or not, each one has to have a certain power on us. It is a necessary human and Christian maturity and mutual trust to accept that the other indicates to me the way to follow, but with the liberty that serves to love and not with fear of who feels retrenched in his rights of self-determination.

If we look at Jesus we see that he had a lot of power but at the same time he exercised it in absolute respect of the liberty of others. A good superior should live his relations of power and authority following the same model, giving power to his confreres instead of weakening them. This supposes becoming vulnerable in the most mature sense, for true strength supposes vulnerability. To be strong means to be ready to get wounded. An angle cannot be strong because he is not vulnerable.

All of us have authority, each one in his field of preparation or in conformity to age. A good superior acts correctly when he knows how to recognize and respect the authority that each confrere has, or rather, the qualities and the values, the experience and the service... Departing from here, it is possible that authority and confraternity go together and there exists no conflict between authority and obedience, between superior and confrere. However, the authority of each confrere (old, young, Parish Priest, formator, financial administrator, etc...) cannot be absolute otherwise it offends the fraternity of all those who converge towards the common mission.

The risk of freedom: being free and responsible! Mutual trust is necessary knowing that the risk to misuse liberty always exists. At times the superior (supposedly in good faith) can fear or have the doubt that the confrere(s) is "*taking advantage*" in some way. In this case he has to take the risk and to accept him, also knowing that the other can stumble. The true role is that of animating and educating in the continuous order of true liberty. However, this does not mean that I leave the other to drown, even if this is what wants.

We must be responsible for one another. When we take our vows, we put our life in the hands of the superior of that period: a gesture of extraordinary vulnerability, over that of strength and trust. We entrusted our life to the Institute without knowing exactly how it would have been used and in what. Now we understand that we are in each other's hands, each one responsible of his confrere. I am responsible of your fidelity and you of mine, you help me to grow and I help you... Each one of us has the power to destroy, demolish, to annul or to weaken the confrere... but also has the power to make him happy and realized in relation to the life and vocation. Entrusting one to the other is an effective sign of maturity in the most integral manner.

Searching together the will of God: It's not dealing with majorities; the democracy in our life is something different from that used in politics. It is to seek the will of the Father together. Something that calls for intelligence and imagination. The superior has to know how to listen and to balance his conceptions: each confrere has to have something of the truth in what he says and does also when it seems the contrary. Our family or community reunions can be boring but they are too important to leave them aside or to cut them down. Also when it comes to vote for something, it is not the matter to see if one point of view wins or the other but to see instead what builds the community and favours the common project. If it were not so, I could also have won, but who loses is the community and the good of all.

Varied levels of governance exist (General, Provincial, Local), but we must keep present the fundamental principles:

1. *The temporality*: No confrere should remain superior for a long time. Carriers and promotions do not exist in our life. There are just shared services and for a determinate period.
2. *The utilization of each individual*: The superior works towards utilizing to the maximum the talents and values of each confrere. Every confrere has the responsibility of helping the superior in his service or ministry, animating without weighing on him the challenges and the limits: we have to let him help in the execution of our program of communitarian animation.
3. *The discernment of the common good*: There are confreres who are assigned to a community in which they don't want to live or for a commitment to which they don't feel prepared. This creates tensions or nervousness. It is necessary to find a special form for helping these confreres to accept, if possible, their situation, resorting to values of faith and growth.

Provocations and challenges

It is necessary to promote the co-responsibility: the superior does not have to overload himself with all the problems; instead he should help all to share them. The superior is not the local "magician" who must solve alone and without any help, all the problems of the community, including the small things. Everybody has the responsibility to promote the common good, without delegating to others the entire burden.... Attention to the most timid and the strongest... without letting anyone get humiliated. The importance of the community project is that all work more or less according to the foreseen vision... Today, after our most recent chapter, there are important challenges that are not faced by all: the change of our personal and community life-style, the style of mission, the influence of mass media on our life of the vows and of the community, the internationality as a great number of our confreres come from the south, the lay missionaries, the immigrants, the promotion of the "peace and justice".

2) Exercise of authority (in the light of the washing of the feet)

1. With humility

The word authority comes from Latin "augere" - to grow. The parental, civil, religious and community authority is there to help the persons to grow and to mature in liberty, justice and truth.

Nevertheless, too often it's exercised for the honour, glory of the one in authority and for the privileges that one can get. Jesus, washing the feet of his disciples, calls them to practice authority humbly, as servants.

Many children have not had affectionate parents. Some have known an authoritarian father, who controlled everything, who limited their freedom; or one who did not try to understand them and to encourage them. Others, on the contrary, have known fathers who were too absent and did not care about their parental role. Others had depressed and possessive mothers who, because of their possessive tendency, keep them attached and dependent leaving little room for growth.

Well, the conflicts between parents leave the child in a state of insecurity and ambivalence toward them. In these cases the authority is ill-viewed because it hurts. The child does not accept this kind of authority that does not give security and does not care about his freedom and happiness. But for a harmonious growth, the child needs an authority that loves and respects him, an authority that gives a clear point of reference and a real assurance in life. When a child has suffered a bad effect of authority, becoming adult, he will find it hard to exercise well his authority because he did not have any good model.

Often authority becomes "power". When we have authority, we organize things to the utmost, without caring for all the persons, above all for those belonging to the minority group. We try to control the others and sometimes even try to suffocate their freedom. We begin to like the power we have and the privileges that are attached to it. At this point, we refuse to listen to anything that disturbs, the murmurs and criticisms that can show our mistakes.

Often external authority can reward or hide the lack of interiority. Because of certain vulnerability and interior fragility, we risk to identify ourselves with our roles; to define ourselves by the functions and the honours that accompany them. We feel superior. We have the tendency to consider the others subordinate and inferior. It is easy for a superior to hide behind his own function instead of becoming a good shepherd at the service of others and of the common good.

In chapter 10 of the Gospel of John, Jesus describes the qualities of the good shepherd, the one who exercises authority. He knows every sheep by his name. To know the name of someone is to know his gifts, his qualities and his wounds; it is to know his vocation and his mission in life. This implies that he listens attentively to every individual sheep. The good shepherd walks in front of his flock; showing the way and direction to follow. He knows where to lead his flock. And since the sheep know

him, they have trust in him and they follow him. If the wolf or any danger comes, the shepherd defends them; he dares to enter into the conflict. He risks his life for them and he sacrifices his own interest to manifest his love. The sheep then feel safe and deeply loved.

When Jesus speaks of himself as the good shepherd, he wants to remind us of the essential point about authority which is 'service', that does not destroy but builds the person. [For whoever is a superior] Jesus invites us all to be good shepherd and to practice authority with the spirit of service and humility and in order to help others grow humanly and spiritually. He will give us the grace, the strength and the love necessary.

2. In communion

But, washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus is also calling them to a totally new attitude, a different way – humanly impossible – to practice authority. It is a new and impossible way for his disciples however much his invitation to forgive seventy seven times seven, to love one's own enemies, to do good to those who hate them, to give the tunic to the one who asks, to be docile and not violent. It is amazing how Jesus identifies with the poor and most abandoned: "In my Kingdom the greatest must make himself the smallest".

Jesus asked his disciples to practice authority with love and in communion. And under the action of the Holy Spirit, even with their vulnerability, they will not only be like the good shepherd but rather as a servant, slave and a child. The form of authority Jesus advocates for is the authority from below and with the heart. But this form of authority from below and with the heart, can one dare calling it still authority? Is it not rather love and communion?

It is the child's authority on his mother, of a friend to a friend, of the bride to the bridegroom (and vice versa). They are the ones to serve the others and listen to one another. They accept to be disturbed by others because they live the communion as a gift. The joy of this self-giving and accepting to be disturbed is a sign of their love.

But how can we pass from the "authority from above" or from the superiority to the "authority from below"? The passage demands that some human securities and certainties are abandoned, the familiar point of reference is the head that knows and directs.

The passage however is less reassuring and sometimes also painful. It is necessary then to trust in the Holy Spirit as the source of the new strength. Is it not the grain of wheat that has to die in order to bring fruits? Is it not necessary to pass through the dark night to discover the light?

In this action of love Jesus tries to confirm each of his friends. He encourages them to have confidence in themselves and in their mission. He washed their feet in order to send them walk in the path of life, on the road that the Holy Spirit will point out to them, to live and announce the good news of communion all over the world. [...] Washing the feet of the disciples, Jesus wants to say to them: "It is necessary that you practice authority as I myself have done, as a poor man and as a favourite of his Father. Do not look for honour and privileges. Try to be gentle and humble servants, instruments of my words and my love. And I will be with you everyday: I will give you a new strength and I will suggest the words to you" Jesus has practiced authority, as a child, in total communion with his Father. He never wanted to try to do anything on his own. He always acted in communion with the Father and for the glory of the Father. So also he used authority with love and for love, in a total unity with the Father. Now, his disciples have to do everything in communion with him. They will transmit his word, will wash the feet of one another, and will communicate his love. They will be like Jesus.

Sometimes it is necessary to practice "authority from above", that is to command, to teach, to direct, to organize, to show the way with firmness. But more often we must exercise "authority from below" with the heart, in love and tenderness, trusting the persons in order to make them have confidence in themselves.

During his public life, Jesus has taught and commanded with surety and strength. Washing the feet of the disciples, he doesn't command anymore, but he gives courage. He helps his disciples to rediscover their value and their mission. Jesus doesn't deny the way therefore to practice authority adopted in his public life. He wants that his disciples to practice authority with steadiness and to teach with clarity, but here he points out another way, that of love and of trust, that they are signs of the Reign of God and that they consist in meekness and a new poverty.

"Be like servants who are waiting for their master to come back from a wedding feast. When he comes and knocks, they will open the door for him at once. Blessed are the servants that the master will still find awake on his return; in truth I tell you, he will take off his coat, ask them to sit down, and will wait on them" (Lk 12, 36-37).

The logic of the world has been up-set: instead of serving the master, it is the master that serves the servant... A God who lowers and humbles himself (Phil 2, 6-11). It is the logic of love, nothing more. Also in the parable of the wedding banquet (Lk 14, 15-24) the order of things has been reversed: those who were invited do not go and the room was instead filled by the poor, the crippled and the lame. Those near God are

not the great people, but the lowest. To become a good and just leader is already a resemblance with God, but we are invited to go beyond: to find him in the excluded and in the poor.

Jesus, on his knees in front of his disciples, invites us not to look for the best places in society, but to enter in a community where the weak has his place and is honoured. *Instead when you are invited go to the last place... "Because whoever exalts himself will be humiliated and who is humiliated will be exalted".*

It is not only an invitation to humility and meekness to fight the personal pride that emerges (*The greater you are the more you should humble yourself, so you will find grace in front of the Lord - Sir 3, 19*). He who has authority has to go to meet the humblest persons, the sick, the excluded... who are the signs of the presence of God. Jesus does not force anybody to follow his ways, but he humbly invites everybody, rich or poor, on this descending road, road of impoverishment and sometimes sorrowful, because it is the road of liberation, of peace and of happiness.

Conclusion

Today humanity is tired: it has too much to learn, too much to do. There are competitions everywhere in which we find few winners and many losers. It is necessary to fight continually, even rigorously, in order to live and survive. It is necessary to wear the mask to dissimulate the brittleness of heart and the discouragement... We no longer have time to open our hearts to the others, above all to the poor so that they may find room in our hearts. *"Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11, 28).*

Dear, love one another because love is from God... He who doesn't love has not known God... Who doesn't love his/her brother that sees, cannot love God that he doesn't see... He who God loves, love also his brother (1 Jn 4, 7-8.20~2 1).

With the washing of the feet, Jesus invites his friends to take off the dress which confers on them a special status, the mask behind which are hidden the qualities that introduces the disciples to the humble, poor and vulnerable in front of the others. To become small demands a living heart free from fear, free from human desires and securities, ready to climb to the peak of the love and the communion that gives life. Jesus invites us to follow him on the way of meekness and of communion of hearts, of pardon, of trust and of vulnerability, without abdicating in any moments to assume the role of the responsible called to practice a certain authority on persons and groups with strength and justice, goodness and humility. He who exercises whatever authority has to do it by “washing the feet”, in humility and following uniquely the illogical way of love.

3) The Superior: spiritual and human guide

(Thoughts of Fr. Riccardo M. Casagrande, adapted to our Comboni life)

The superior has to be conscious of his role in this historical moment, to be able to look to the future with confidence and to know how to help his brothers to walk on the right way. He has to have an international mentality, not to be afraid of the “ridimensionamento”/changes, to know how to valorise and take care of the elderly confreres.

To speak of the service of the superior is to speak of leadership, or rather of the role as spiritual and human guide of a community towards which the brothers are called, is to speak of their ability to read the signs of the times or the so-called challenges of the present time, it is to speak of the commitment to collaborate with the provinces and with the Institute as a whole.

Besides we cannot speak of the role of the superior without speaking of the community, rather without speaking as such of the formation of the Comboni missionaries. In fact, the role of a superior depends on the answer to these questions: which formation is requested for the Comboni missionaries today? Which community do we want for this time of history, for this or that region of the world, for this or that culture? A complex and impossible discussion to present in few lines.

The challenge can mean from time to time, a word, an event, an attitude in life, change of opinion, a particular critical situation, a hope, a politico-socio-religious tendency that provoke an answer, a confrontation or a struggle. Accordingly, to accept a challenge means to abandon the stiffness, the calm of the life routine and to be on the move, to assume a role of the protagonist and take some risks.

To accept the challenges is not only a demand that derives from the imminent end of the millennium. Instead it is to constitute a constant reflection on the meaning of religious life. For this reason, it is important to live the present historical moment with a full sense of responsibility and keep our antennas pointing to all the five continents of the world, to share, from the small human cell, that is the religious community, the joys, hopes, the sadness and the anguishes of the people of today. And to be also, in our time, signs of peace, of humility, poverty and service in order to combat the enemies of hatred, of unity and communion, of solidarity. To be aware to be carriers of those energies that will free creation from the slavery of corruption and to introduce the liberty of the children of God.

Which superiors for this period of history? The superior should be a man of God and therefore a man of prayer, a servant of his brothers, an authentic companion, lover of common life and the fraternal dialogue.

An actual and brotherly message for every superior of ours could be the following:

1. Be conscious of your role

Brother superior, first of all, be conscious of your role and be sure of the trust that the confreres have in you. Do not say: I am not able, I am not prepared; I have been elected to cover a hole, they look always for someone to pull the cart. Perhaps you have been a superior at other times or perhaps it is the first time. Put all your energies at this service, all your gifts to succeed in your service well: the confreres of your community will appreciate, the people and so many others will be grateful to it. Do not consider yourself as "factotum" nor a "Cyrenean" in turn. You need convenient time to meet the brothers, to read, to equip yourself with documents, to get acquainted and to organize the life of the community.

Do not advocate for too many things nor accept too many charges lest the confreres feel disresponsabilise and without commitment knowing that you take care of everything. They are there in the community to share the daily burden and not to remain deprived of it. Be aware of the important role that has been entrusted to you in a difficult historical moment and, in some cases frustrating but at the same time, rich in perspectives and worthy to be lived. Do not be one who regrets the past. Look at the present; think about the future with trust, out of the love you have for the new generations of brothers. Help your brothers to be on the move: to always feel missionaries and citizens of the world, integral part of the humanity that God loves and for which he has given his Son.

Suggest to your brothers some useful readings, messages and researches on some current issues and the conditions in which humanity lives lest the community closes itself on its small issues and problems. Bring into the community prayers the challenges, the pains and hopes of millions of our brothers. Convince your brothers to live a simple and poor life without pretensions and without exaggerations. Organize your community and people to take care of those who are poor among you and help the poor who are distant geographically but who, through the information, have become your neighbour. Open your community to the cordial and generous sharing of the economic goods with your province and with the Institute so that among us there are no rich and no poor communities.

If there is so much injustice in the world, so much hatred, so many wars, so many divisions, so many prejudices, show yourself as an upright, correct and loyal person, a man of peace and unity. Exhorts the confreres to sustain the movements that fight against the abuses and those who detest peace and exploit the divisions: Justice and Peace. If there is so much disorientation, so much crisis of values, religious indifference, proliferation of things of the world, concentrate the strength of the community on the mission and evangelisation, on the announcement of the only Saviour Jesus Christ, with the example of life and the *Lectio Divina*, arouse the spirit of collaboration with the laity in this gigantic enterprise of the Church.

If young people in Europe have grown up within a culture that makes them half-hearted in front of a definitive choice, such as the decision to devote themselves to the Lord and their brothers for the whole life, you and your brothers should offer them the joy of your vocation, the gift of your fraternity, of your prayer and your solidarity with those in need. Brother superior, you have an important role in an Institute that is international and therefore multicultural and intercultural... we are all one only family. United by the same ideal of brotherhood, inspired by the first Christian community and the example of our Founder. More and more the future of this Institute will be marked by this ideal. You must walk on this road with enthusiasm and conviction: be the first to value the cultural difference as richness for the community of brothers. Take away from your heart and from the hearts of your brothers racist thoughts and feelings contrary to the gospel.

Build up, with your example, a community that is open and hospitable, respectful and attentive to the Lord who knocks at the door in the person of those who come from other European nations and from other continents that speak different languages from ours that have cultural

roots we might not know. Support and be a builder of the spiritual unity in the province and the Institute.

2. *Be a faithful and creative animator in your community*

For many years we have been speaking of the restructuration of the system of administration in the Institute. This is not a curse nor is it bad: it is simply a necessary step to bow with humility and faith to the historical situation that goes beyond us. Do not be hostile to the restructuration; accept it first yourself and then help your brothers to accept it also with the sacrifices, the renouncement and the difficult decisions it entails. If it means to close a community, it should become a tragedy. The Institute is a living organism, it adapts itself to history: put yourself inside this dynamic rhythm regression and development, inside the itinerancy of the world.

If in your community it is becoming tiring and impossible to face the community and apostolic commitments, if you feel overloaded by the job to the point of neglecting important values of our missionary life, it is a sign that a restructuring now is necessary: do not consider it as a punishment or a failure. Remind yourself that you have left everything in order to follow Christ and that we do not have a stable city in this world, prepare yourself to consider it as a choice of life.

Brother superior, those who have called you to this role, expect that you know how to coordinate well the regular rhythm of the community life of prayers, liturgy, meals, family councils, fraternal community, hospitality, sharing the apostolic work, to valorise each member of the community. It is a big commitment that will demand much effort, much fidelity, much patience and ability to dialogue. It is the challenge that you will meet. Not always collaboration succeeds well, but remember that it is much easier to do nothing than to realize a project, it is easier to divide than to unite. Look at the things that have been realised, at the things that your community can also receive from the involvement with some lay people, whether voluntary or not, it is part of the collaboration and it remains a challenge for the future always.

3. *Be a true brother of the elders*

Probably there are elderly brothers in your community. Perhaps you yourself are aged and elderly. Now this is a normal situation in the communities in Western Europe and North America that reminds us: we

are in front of diaconia – a new commitment that demands and will demand attention.

You hear often people speak of the ancient and new poverties (drugs, AIDS, handicap, unemployment, immigration....) that are proposed as challenges to the faith of the believers in Christ. Do not feel a stranger to these serious social problems, and do not however lose sight of the challenges you meet between the walls of your community.

Be a true brother to the elderly and/or sick of your community. Be near them; inspire in them a feeling of security. Age, pains, sickness, psychophysical limitations reduce the efficiency or put them in condition of helplessness and so they need to be assisted in a continuous and systematic way. You welcome them in your community; valorise what they can do, even if it is little. Valorise above all their human and spiritual maturity, the Christian and missionary experience, the wisdom and the prudence, the example they give: they are excellent values that enrich you and your community and can even be offered to other people.

Concluding, nowadays to be superior it is more difficult than before Do not be satisfied with a kind of community-lodge. Know how to be flexible and tenacious to lead your brothers to love community life, to create a rich community climate from which every body can take advantage to give clear witness to the people of God as disciples of the Lord Jesus and missionaries according to the charism of Comboni.

5. The nomination of superiors

Our religious life has its rhythms and special moments. One of the most meaningful moments of life of our structures is the nomination of the superior.

It is interesting to deepen what happens before and after these nominations, not only to understand better our behaviour, but also to improve our life, our liberty and responsibility.

1. Before the nomination

When it is the moment of voting or to introduce someone, it is inevitable that there are expectations, fears and hopes. We advance hypothesis, we make suggestions, and we search for identity of the ideal superior. In a reserved way, we confide to friends our ideas and feelings, we start to communicate our convictions (today the telephone also serve this

purpose) ... it is difficult to stop this tendency or temptation to suggest, to comment, to desire and, at times we can go to the extent lacking responsibility or being ridiculous.

It is not uncommon that there are those who are indifferent or less interested and those who manifest less apparently their discontentment and try to hide the interior discomfort....

The superior, at the end of his mandate can have different feelings: liberation or a certain anxiety about his future, worrying for what others will tell him. He may have even feeling of sadness, perhaps, for the loss of advantages and personal gratifications.

This period or moment before the nomination is a kind of "test" for the individual and for the group and can be useful to ask oneself why all these feelings come. If we are not afraid of the truth, we can discover many interesting things about ourselves and about our brothers and at the same time about our structure (the province or the community): the system of voting, of sensitisation, the criterion to follow, the gratification of everybody, the clairvoyance of what we want to attain and of what can help us do better our mission, the personal calculations of advantages, pressures on the others....

It is good to be aware of this 'world' on the occasion of nomination of the superior or another commitments because then, it can reveal to us, with some accuracy, the level of our freedom and our maturity at all levels.

2. After the nomination

When the change has already been made, there is always some novelty in the life of the community, provincial or local, in the life of the persons, in the structure, in the life of the local community, in the objectives or kind of presence, and in the apostolic activity itself.

Here are some psychological characteristics:

The new superior can carry out his role and responsibility in different ways: with trepidation, anxiety, satisfaction, preoccupation, distance, desire to change... all possible feelings, come up often at the same time. He might do his service with spontaneity and simplicity and responsibility, or in a defensive attitude, hide his disappointment and overcome his anxiety.

We might have a superior who distances himself from those who shortly before were his friends and becomes more reserved, who is caught up by his job, who now speaks in a different way in accordance with the task he is now doing (and somebody can even say: his is not the

same any more!); or shows power and authority in his decisions to hide his fear and uncertainty; or tries to leave aside everything that is a sign of distinction (reserved place, priority...) or of language (do not call me superior) with the purpose of overcoming his unconscious fear or his profound tendency for power.

A superior can live his task identifying himself positively with it, or identifying too much or too little, or nothing. There are some who can take it as a true service with humility and creativity, others who 'go up' too much so that it is very difficult for them to 'come down' when his mandate ends ('If you do not want to fall down from bed sleep on the floor'); others who do not want absolutely to serve in this way, not because of lack of qualities, but for fear of criticism and failure... And today, in this atmosphere of individualism we live in, it may be quite comfortable to renounce or to accept too easily.

The members of the community may also react in different ways. The more common reactions are the expressions of esteem and appreciation, availability to collaborate, obedience, prayer, and of support for the 'cross' the other carries on his shoulders. Behind these expressions can also exist personal interests, search for recompense, aggressive impulses of rejection for not having been elected in his place, lack of interest and distancing oneself...

Sometimes there can arise difficulties because one is worried that the superior or the previous council knew many personal things that must now also be known to other persons: he feels like a cloth exposed to the sun...

The one who returns to the normal life, leaving his role as superior, can live this change with serenity or with tensions and contradictions: everything depends on his maturity and common sense.

Conclusion

Even if we are consecrated persons, we have in ourselves signs of fragility, immaturity and sin, which, at times, can lead to neurosis. A certain mundane spirit (power, success, appearance, dominion, gaining...) can penetrate our lives and oblige us to live in a non-evangelical way. It is necessary to be honest with ourselves: to know ourselves well, not to have neurotical defence mechanisms, and to accept ourselves with sufficient trust... These are indispensable prerequisites to live the truth in charity.

Jesus reminds us: "*The chiefs of the nations dominate them...It must not be the same among you*" (Mt.20:25-26). Psychology tells us that each role is a structured way to take part in social life. In theology we

must say that each role, task, even that of being superior, is a charism that springs up from charity and service, and must be always understood in the light of the Gospel.

The elections in our religious life are similar to those of politics and of civil life: however, among us it must not be likewise. Something must be different. Something of utmost importance is at stake: the Kingdom of God and the happiness, or the serene realization of each one of our brothers.

It is necessary to cultivate our mental health as believers: hope for the best rather than wait for the worst, try to be always happy in our work, abandon ourselves in the hands of God without being impatient and having egoistic thoughts. John XXIII would tell us: Speak little and pray more, and find always the less sad side of events.

6. An Itinerary of growth for the different ages

It's good for the superior to know and keep in mind the following laws of human development. In many occasions he will feel enlightened and comforted in knowing that many things that happen, or do not happen, are the result of some difficulty in the process of growth or of maturity, rather than of the bad will of the confreres. It's necessary, then, to help them to grow and not to keep on criticising.

1. A look at the 'tasks of development' at the different ages:

** Youth:*

- structure of concepts
- emotional stability
- affective maturity
- interiorisation of values in the project of life (vocation)
- ascetic and apostolic commitment, systematic and with order
- ethical conscience (freedom of choice)

** First maturity:*

- concrete actualisation of the project of life
- spiritually fruitful affectivity
- cultural interest

- commitment to build the community and to the education of the new generations
- awareness of one's objective religiosity in dialogue with life, open and creative.

* Full maturity:

- adaptation to acquired responsibilities
- active rapport with younger generations
- acceptance and adjustment to physical and psychological changes
- give time to cultural activities
- pay attention to tendency to pessimism, negative critic, obsessions...
- choice for interiority and for attitude of discernment
- growth of a more contemplative religiosity.

* Third age:

- attitude for wise reflection (mystery of the cross)
- adequate contrast with the psycho-physical deterioration
- welcome solitude in plenitude
- religiosity of contemplation.

2. *How to build a formative itinerary for the different ages*

* for each itinerary it is necessary to bear in mind:

- the situation (personal, communitarian...)
- the objectives, in connection with the 'tasks of development'
- the resources available (contents, methods, persons)
- the time, divided in immediate, medium, and wide ranges
- the evaluation or verification.

7. *The Comboni missionary as “Alter Christus”*

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jo. 1:14)

“I gave you the example... you do the same” (Jo. 13:15)

“I will be with you always...” (Mt. 28:20)

“Go out to the whole world...” (Mk. 16:15)

EVERY CONSECRATED PERSON MUST BE:

“CRIB”

“poverty”

POOR

- in the house
- in dressing
- in eating
- in goods
- in work
- in service

HUMBLE

- of spirit
- of heart
- in front of God
- in front of people
- in front of himself

The poorer one is and humbles himself
the more he glorifies God
and is of service to the others

THE CONSECRATED IS A “HUMBLED PERSON”

“CALVARY”

“total gift”

DYING:

- to his own body
- to his own spirit
- to his own will
- to good reputation
- to family
- to the world

GIVE HIMSELF

- in silence
- in prayer
- in work
- in sacrifice
- in suffering
- in death

The more one “dies”
and loses his life
the more he finds it.

THE CONSECRATED IS A “CRUCIFIED” PERSON

“TABERNACLE”
“charity”

GIVE

- his own body
- his own spirit
- his own time
- his own goods
- his own health
- his own life

GIVE LIFE

- with his personal faith
- with his teaching
- with his words
- with his prayer
- with his work
- with his example

Become “Eucharist”
Broken bread
For the brothers

THE CONSECRATED IS A “EATEN” PERSON

“WAY”

“mission – witness”

DENOUNCE

- infidelity
- individualism
- incoherence
- injustice
- ambiguity
- lies
- egoism

ANNOUNCE

- peace and unity
- love
- forgiveness
- faith and hope
- warm welcome
- dialogue and respect
- sharing

Become “good news” for others
Joyful missionary and credible witness
Of the Gospel of Jesus in the style of Comboni

THE COMBONI MISSIONARY IS A “SENT” PERSON
“ALWAYS ON THE MOVE”

Appendix - 1

*In dubiis libertas
In necessariis unitas
In omnibus charitas*

(Freedom in doubt, unity in the necessary and charity in all)
(St. Augustine)

QUESTIONNAIRES OF SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

1) QUESTIONNAIRE “To know how to listen” (the secret for dialogue)

1. I like to listen when somebody is speaking.
2. I encourage others to speak.
3. I try to listen even when, for some reason, I don't like the person who is speaking.
4. I listen with the same attention whether the person speaking is a man or woman, young or old.
5. I listen with the same attention whether the person is my friend, or somebody known or unknown.
6. When I speak with somebody I leave aside what I was doing.
7. I look at the person I am talking with.
8. I pay attention to what the person is saying, disregarding what goes on around me.
9. I smile and show that I am following what the person tells me: I encourage the one who is talking to me.
10. I think and reflect on what I am told.
11. I try to understand what they are telling me.
12. I try to realize the true meaning of what I am told.
13. I allow the other to finish speaking, without interrupting him.
14. When somebody finds it difficult to say something, I encourage him to speak.
15. I try to make a synthesis of what I am told, asking myself if it is really what I understood.
16. I try not to judge the other before he finishes speaking.
17. I am able to listen without being conditioned by his way of speaking, by his voice, his gestures or physical appearance.
18. I am able to listen even if I already know what the other is going to say.
19. I ask questions to help the other to explain express himself better.

20. If it is necessary, I ask the meaning the other gives to his words.

“Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? They come from your desires for pleasure, which are constantly fighting within you. You want things, but you cannot have them, so you are ready to kill; you strongly desire things, but you cannot get them, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have what you want because you do not ask God for it. And when you ask, you do not receive it, because your motives are bad; you ask for things to use for your own pleasures... Do not criticise one another, my brothers. Whoever criticises a Christian brother or judges him, criticises the Law and judges it. ... Who do you think you are, to judge your fellow-man?” (Jam 4,1-3.11-12).
 Cfr. Rom.7:14ff; 2Cor.12:7-10; Rom.15:1-7; 1Cor.13.

2) What kind of atmosphere exists in the community

Give marks to each sentence according to the following criteria:

Always	5	
Often	4	
Sometimes	3	
Seldom	2	
Never	1	

Write the number between the parentheses, at the end of the sentence.

I believe the confreres of my community:

a)

1. tell me with sincerity what they think of me	(.....)	A
2. have showed admiration and interest for what I do	(.....)	B
3. allow me to grow and mature	(.....)	C
4. accept me as I am	(.....)	D
5. understand what I really want to say	(.....)	E
6. give me another chance, if I make a mistake	(.....)	F

b)

7. feel good when they point out my mistakes	(.....)	
8. show me esteem with concrete attitudes	(.....)	
9. treat me as a free and responsible person	(.....)	
10. create an atmosphere where I can be myself	(.....)	
11. understand my feelings	(.....)	
12. give me the possibility to reveal something new of myself	(.....)	

c)

13. trust me	(.....)	A
14. respect what I consider important	(.....)	B
15. accept me with patience when I cannot be as I should	(.....)	C
16. make me feel one as the others	(.....)	D
17. understand when there is something that annoys me	(.....)	E
18. appreciate my moments of creativity	(.....)	F

To check the questionnaire

Dimensions		I	II	III	Total
Authenticity	A	(.....)	+ (.....)	+ (.....)	=
Acknowledgement	B	(.....)	+ (.....)	+ (.....)	=
Freedom to be	C	(.....)	+ (.....)	+ (.....)	=
Acceptance	D	(.....)	+ (.....)	+ (.....)	=
Understanding	E	(.....)	+ (.....)	+ (.....)	=
Reaffirmation	F	(.....)	+ (.....)	+ (.....)	=
				Total	=

CRITERIA OF INTERPRETATION

Criteria of interpretation	Score for each dimension	Total score of the three dimensions
BAD	3 – 5	18 – 36
SUFFICIENT	6 – 8	37 – 54
GOOD	9 – 11	55 – 72
VERY GOOD	12 – 15	73 – 90

3) *Adaptation to Consecrated Life*

Read carefully the following sentences and express your opinion about the soundness of vocations they describe. To help you better: imagine that you are a spiritual director and that a seminarian or a religious (male or female) comes to see you and reveals his/her state of soul, using one of the sentences indicated below. Express your opinion, marking a circle around the numbers 1-5 at the end of each sentence. Describe his/her vocation according to the following criteria:

1 = very solid vocation

2 = probably a good vocation

3 = doubtful vocation

4 = probably a lost vocation

5 = surely a lost vocation or certainly inexistent

1.	I am aware I am where God wants me to be	1 2 3 4 5
2.	I regularly have doubts about my vocation	1 2 3 4 5
3.	I was very young when I chose consecrated life. I made a mistake	1 2 3 4 5
4.	I have no difficulty in fulfilling the demands of my vocation	1 2 3 4 5
5.	I go ahead in my vocation without many difficulties	1 2 3 4 5
6.	I am almost sure I will leave my institute shortly	1 2 3 4 5
7.	I am fully happy in my vocation	1 2 3 4 5
8.	I trust in God's grace, but I know my fragility	1 2 3 4 5
9.	I have the feeling I will be faithful to my vocation	1 2 3 4 5
10.	I feel attracted to everything that goes on in the world	1 2 3 4 5
11.	In spite of the normal difficulties in the religious life, I have a deep and lasting peace.....	1 2 3 4 5
12.	Even though I feel very identified with my vocation, at the moment I have difficult obstacles to overcome.....	1 2 3 4 5
13.	I am disappointed of what I have found in religious life	1 2 3 4 5
14.	I thought I was in the right way, but my lack of interest obliges me to re-think about my fidelity in this vocation	1 2 3 4 5
15.	Is not easy to live consecrated life everyday, but the difficulties I find do not take away peace from me	1 2 3 4 5
16.	I thought consecrated life was something else	1 2 3 4 5
17.	I think that in getting ready for the vows (or living my consecration) I am doing God's will	1 2 3 4 5
18.	The superiors are inviting me to think whether it is better for me to stay in the institute or leave it	1 2 3 4 5
19.	Often I feel insecure on my vocation	1 2 3 4 5
20.	I do not find in consecrated life the peace and serenity I was searching .	1 2 3 4 5

4) How we are facing our crisis (or the moments of difficulty)

1. Which attitudes must the community take with a person who is in crisis because of a “desiquilibrium” in this vocational identity?
2. Which personal experiences can one share with others when there is a real positive identification?
3. From the answers that follow below (positive and edifying or not) in time of crisis, which ones are more common in one (or in your) community?

Choose from the two lists below:

Answers which do not build up:

1. Say there is no problem.
2. Evade the problem (with fantasy, alcohol, excessive work...).
3. Refusal to find solutions or accept help.
4. Incapacity to express or to control negative feelings.
5. Not understand the nature of the crisis.
6. Not search for alternative solutions.

7. Project on others the responsibility of having started the crisis or of not wanting to overcome it.
8. Run away from friends, relatives or other people.

Answers which build up:

1. Face the problem.
2. Deepen the understanding of the crisis.
3. Express and overcome the negative feelings of resentment, anxiety and guilt.
4. Accept one's responsibility in the overcoming of the problem.
5. Look for other ways to overcome the difficulty.
6. Separate and distinguish what can be changed and what cannot..
7. Accept what cannot in fact be changed.
8. Refusal to accept some great aspects of his personal image.
9. Open communication channels with other persons who can be of help.
10. Make a real first step, even if it is a small one, to overcome the problem in a positive way.

Cfr. Rom.1:19-23; 1Cor.1:12

5) How to overcome community conflicts

A drill to overcome community conflicts in a constructive way.

The questions have been done in a way that the confrere who has a conflict with another may answer together with him.

The two must agree on the answers given. If one does not want to answer the questions, the other can do it alone even though it is not the best thing.

1. How do you define the problem that exists between you and your confrere?
2. How does your confrere define it?
3. What behaviour of yours led to the beginning of the problem?
4. How does the confrere, who caused the problem to arise, behave?
5. In which circumstances does the behaviour of one and the other arise?
6. Which is the easiest way to define the problem without generalizing too much?

7. What are the areas of disagreement between the two regarding the problem?
8. And what are the areas of agreement?
9. Point out in a clear manner the ways of behaviour that you find unacceptable in the confrere with whom there is the conflict.
10. Point out in a clear manner your ways of behaviour with the confrere that he finds unacceptable.
11. What exactly caused the conflict?
12. When you answered the questions above, did you think that you were right and that your confrere was wrong? Did you see the negative feelings of your confrere, of which you defend yourself, and have omitted the positive ones?
13. What is it you need to overcome the problem?
14. What is it your confrere needs to overcome it?
15. What are the common objectives that you both want to have to overcome the problem?
16. What are your strong points on which you count to overcome the problem?
17. And what are the ones of our confrere?
18. How can you together verify whether the conflict has been overcome?

Appendix 2

Personal project of spiritual life

1. Project of Personal Life in the community and for the community

The Rule of Life underlines the necessity of making a plan for our personal life and community life (Ref. Analytical Index: *Planning*).

The 1985 Chapter clearly states that “*each and every local community must specify its purposes; it will do so by describing its internal life and working plan in the ‘Community Charter’, which will be reviewed every year*” (CA 83, 85). In other words, each community must make its own Community Project.

We may wonder, though, if it is possible to make a Community Project without first making a Personal Project, without first stating what comes first, either ‘the person’ or ‘the community’.

Indeed, what really matters is a good balance between these two poles, only then it is possible to be able to live and to work together, in the community and for it (Ref. RL 84).

If it is true that a person chooses a community, such a choice will mean that this person makes his own the objectives of the community, on the other hand, when a community welcomes a person it means that this community will do its best to affirm the person with his originality. The objectives of the person and of the community must enter into dynamism where they are reciprocal and where they strengthen each other.

It is also true that the community moulds the same persons who make the community. Community is not any abstract concept and it does not exist in a place where the person stands on one side and the community on the other.

Obviously, in this situation where people are reciprocal in the community, with advantages on both sides, there are inconveniences and things to give up too. The community enriches and limits the persons: the single person builds and spoils the community at the same time. Thus, it is possible to grow in the community and for the community when the single member is not ashamed of his brothers.

And since a community begins because some people get together to share their lives in order to reach a common goal, it seems logical that the common ground for a Community Project is the Personal Project of each member of the community.

At times there are people who have exaggerated needs and expectations; or else, they are incoherent and incompatible with the nature and

purposes of the community precisely because these people do not have clear their own Personal Project. For instance, their identity, their personal vocation, their vocational commitment according to the needs and charisma expressed in the Rule of Life, in the history of the Institute, in the challenges of this time are not clear. These people have not sufficient knowledge of their “defence mechanisms” and they are not clear in the way they view their own existence.

Thus, it is of paramount importance that the people who form a community would take enough time to think and elaborate their Project of Personal Life which is not something artificial, rather it is a decisive means to keep the community alive, to guide its continuous growth towards new horizons, to give it a chance of producing fruits which are tasty and abundant.

The yearly Spiritual Exercises, the monthly retreat, a course for renewal, the celebration of the General Chapter or Provincial Assembly, etc..., are opportunities from which we can receive light and strength in order to elaborate and review the Personal Life Project.

The Personal Life Project can be done in many different ways. We will now explain two possible modalities or schemes which will serve as examples, though, we should not forget that the best way to go about it is found when the person is able to set a scheme which is his own and appropriate.

a) First Scheme

(Adaptation from: Jaume Pujol and Bardolet f.s.c.: *Itinerario de la vida religiosa*, Ed. S.Pio X, pp. 185-186).

1) Who am I?

I must try to give a definition of myself being aware of my qualities and defects. Often, defects are the other side of the coin of qualities and vice-versa. It is not a matter of uprooting defects, rather, it is a matter of finding and addressing our energies. Thus, I will be aware of myself in order to be able to accept myself in my own reality.

2) What do I want to do “in” my life and “of” my life?

I must describe the purposes or the meanings I want to give to my existence in order to live an existence with a task towards which it is worth to commit myself. At the same time I must compare these personal objectives with those coming from the Gospel and those described in the Rule of Life. Then, I must verify if the objectives proposed in the Rule of Life and my own are coherent or not and able to empower each other. There might be personal objectives which must be down graded or which

are clearly not balanced with my choice of living in the Institute of the Comboni Missionaries.

3) *Why do I make a Project of Personal Life?*

If I must elaborate a Project of Community Life with my confreres in the Congregation, it is logical to make it begin with a sharing of the Projects of Personal Life after they have been studied and cleansed from selfishness (Ref. RL 38, 4-7) and greed proper to the single person or accumulated with the time. These first three points, which we have just described, explain the way to proceed for the discernment and cleansing.

4) *Concrete objectives which I would reach in my life*

They must be few and clearly stated. They must be discerned so that I see if they are coherent with the objectives of the MCCJ Rule of Life and, above all, with the meanings assumed in the life of the one who follows Jesus practicing Charity according to the spirit of the Beatitudes (Ref. RL 58).

5) *Concrete objectives for the following year*

- Qualities which I should strengthen and develop ...
- Defects which I should address with much attention ...

6) *Tools to be used in order to:*

- Live up to the full the Charisma of Comboni, Consecration: Following Jesus, vows, community life, personal prayer and community prayer, ongoing formation, ext.
- Missionary service: pastoral commitments, relationship within pastoral activities; local clergy, religious, lay people, authority, etc.

b) Second scheme

(How to elaborate a personal Rule of Life or to personalize the Rule of Life [Ref. Basil Penninton *Oracion Centrante*, pp 128-151])

The four parts, which follow, could be presented by means of four different papers so to have the possibility of adding the new insights, which will emerge.

FIRST STEP

Each and every one writes down as clearly as possible and in the shortest form the goals to be achieved in life, answering the question: What meaning do I want to give to my missionary life and how do I want to live it?

The points must be practical, listening carefully:

- Our human nature (= natural gifts, Ref. RL 83; 83. 1-2)
- Our Christian nature, our vocation, supernatural gifts and charisms (Ref. RL 80-82; 84-85; 20; 56)

SECOND STEP

Knowing our goals in life, we go one step further by listing synthetically, though as clearly as possible, everything one needs to *do, gain or strengthen in order to reach the goals already established.*

The basic needs must be listed starting from the situation of each person (priest, brother, youth, elderly, healthy, sick etc.), followed by the indications given by the Rule of Life and by other specific documents of the Institute and of the Local Church. Above all is the listening of the Word of God.

THIRD STEP

In a climate of prayer, everyone looks back on his life limiting himself to the last few years. Examining this time we must make an effort to *find and understand all aspects of our life* (situations, happenings, behaviour etc.) which affect it in a negative way and prevent us from reaching our goals.

FOURTH STEP

Beginning from the rhythm of the present life, one elaborates for himself a Rule or Program of Life, with a scheme for the day, the week, the month and the year. In this way he will make his the contents of the MCCJ Rule of Life, cherishing the means which it offers in order to reach the goals which had been established and he will eliminate what has been experienced as an obstacle.

2) Practical Orientations

A. THE PERSONAL PROJECT must keep into account:

1. the reality of the single person
2. the gradual development of his own journey
3. all the circumstances the person lives in

4. particular circumstances of the person: first mission experience, after 10 years, maturity, old age, sickness
 5. concrete actions: time and strategies to fulfil the goals
 6. indicate helping structures for the realization: mate, local community and province.
- B. "UNIFYING" CENTRE OF LIFE:
1. Personal friendship with Jesus Christ
 2. Living communion with the Trinity.
 3. Sincere commitment to the charisma of the Founder
- C. BASIC ATTITUDES IN CONTINUOUS GROWTH:
1. Awareness of being a "SON" (Marian and divine dimension)
 2. Living as a "BROTHER" (affective and communitarian dimension)
 3. Personal dedication as a COMBONI MISSIONARY (apostolic dimension)
- D. DAILY COMMITMENTS
1. The first moment of each day is important: giving oneself wholeheartedly
 2. We live with open eyes the present moment (activities, commitments, ext.) as will of God
 3. We live each day of the week up to a concrete value.
(setting an example as follow)
 - *Monday: Peace (within and outside) ... Unity ... Mission ...
 - *Tuesday: Trust-Self giving ... Suffer ... The poorest ...
 - *Wednesday: Love (letting oneself being loved, believing in love)
 - *Thursday: Gratitude... Eucharist... Service... Charity... Priesthood ...
 - *Friday: Compassion...Forgiveness...Community life...Cross ...
 - *Saturday: Mary ... Marian attitude ... Consecration ... Vows
 - *Sunday: People of God ... Humanity ... Silence and Prayer ...
 4. We give lots of importance to daily prayer as a real personal experience of God ... time for readings ... spiritual and theological updating ...
 5. We live the Eucharist and the sacramental communion and reconciliation as moments of recharging ourselves and integrating with ourselves and with the community
- E. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION:

1. We keep in contact verbally or in writing with a “spiritual director or friend” ...
2. Regularly and frequently

F. SYSTEMATIC DEADLINES

1. Monthly Retreat
2. Yearly Spiritual Exercise

Appendix 3

The community Project

Our 1997 Chapter states that the community is the privileged place for OF (CA. 124) The best way to organize concretely our Ongoing Formation in the community is the community project, which is not only a technical plan of time tables and activities rather it organizes a journey of growth of the group and for the confreres with the experience of Jesus and faithful to the mission.

1) Why the Community Project is important

It is a new way to live community life when the most important thing is not just what the superior organizes in the daily external activities, rather all confreres, taking the project seriously, they share and take part in it.

The **Community Project** is not just a matter of observing the rules, but it aims to the Glory of God by sanctifying the persons as they live their mission. In fact, God has consecrated us to follow Christ in order to fulfil a mission in the light of the charisma of our Institute planted in a particular or local church.

2) Indispensable contents for an authentic Community Project

- a) We make an Analysis of the reality surrounding us; what are the needs and challenges?
- b) We look at the reality of the persons and the group to analyse their realities. Thus, to begin with, we must look at the personal projects of each member and establish the needs, which the person requires and asks for and offers to the confreres in order to grow and be faithful to the mission.
- c) We make memory of the contents of the Rule of Life that we want to deepen during the year in order to live up to the needs of our vocational reality and missionary identity with the Comboni Missionary.
- d) We address the goals we want to reach and the means, which will allow us to reach them.
- e) We look at the priorities of the community for the year to come

- f) We indicate the criteria of action which will lead us in living up to the priorities we have established.
- g) We make a concrete planning.

3) Basic methodological steps

- a) What does it mean to be an “incarnated” Comboni Missionary here and now? What are the signs of the time, which God gives to us to live as a Comboni and to serve him as ones? In which way to be visible signs, understandable witnesses, carriers of true evangelisation? What does all this imply? How to answer to the challenges of our daily work in the different sectors of our activity?
- b) We must remind to each other the great values of our family: evangelisation and mission, the poorest and most abandoned, the style of personal and community life: when are we coherent and when ambiguous?

YEARLY PRIORITIES

- a) In regard to our *'being'*
- b) In regard to our *doing* and *acting*
- c) Being in communion with the plans of the province and of the Institute

CRITERIA TO PROCEED

- a) Living mystically the way we help each other and the special attention we pay to the single confrere in his individuality
- b) Promoting ways to help the persons in their vocational growth
- c) Building a familiar way of living where everyone feels at ease, loved and understood: thus, we imply that each one *builds* community rather than *taking advantage* of it only.

4) Practically

In the community project, the following points are requirements that must be found!

- a. Brief history of the community
- b. Description of the reality in which it is present

- c. The principle elements that makes of it a Comboni Community
- d. Purposes for it to be present in that particular place
- e. Description of the roles and relationship among its members
- f. Organization of the apostolic and religious life
- g. Indicate in the CP times and ways of updating the project
- h. Indicate what kind of help is required from the province or from the institute in case of issues overcoming the capacity of discernment in the hands of the community: charisma, mission, animation
- i. Prepare a concrete plan:
 - a timetable as an instrument of growth
 - time for prayer together with meditation and revision
 - time for conviviality, recreation, and fraternal encounter
 - community council; when and how to do it in order to make of it a time for sharing and discernment
 - agree on a weekly time for rest: a day off dedicated to prayer, rest, study and community life (RL 39.4)
 - organize monthly retreats, community day, spiritual exercise
 - plan for services to the community in the house, cleaning, domestic works
 - define the role and the service proper to the authority so that everybody can be helped in this journey

The community project (or *community charter*) must be looked at and updated each and every year when the revision for the past year and the planning for the year to come are done. Many community do not experience many changes from one year to the next, whereas others do; therefore it is appropriate that at the beginning of every social or apostolic year the community revise such a document which will help so much to clarify and identify each member around the common project in one sole fidelity to the charisma and one sole will of God.

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