

COMMUNITY BUILDING

D. S. AMALORPAVADASS

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Establishing

Inter-Personal Relationship and

Learning

How to Love

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FOREWORD

This booklet contains notes of some talks given by me to various groups that come to our Centre for a Renewal Programme, especially to members of Intensive Training Institutes. The text is the transcript of recorded tapes, hence all the defects and qualities of a spoken text are evident. The author did not have the time to re-write the whole thing in a more coherent way, in a more precise language. Since this leaflet is primarily meant for those who know the author personally; it is presumed that these defects will be overlooked. Ultimately if it helps anyone to become more a person, to help others to become so, and to build up a genuine community, I shall indeed be happy.

One of the main goals of this ITI is to give you the opportunity of creating and experiencing a genuine christian Community life and sharing this experience in your diocese/congregation/place/family. From the experiences of community building here you should grow into leaders of Community, Community builders. Hence this is a crucial, and all-important course.

Moreover, this is something that can be practised and verified here. It is a practical programme for the coming 4 months.

I. INTRODUCTION : The Problem

1. Our Society, the modern world: Let us look at the human society in which we live, whatever be the level: world, country, state, town, village, neighbourhood. Social life has many aspects, and is beset with various problems. The problem no. 1 in my opinion is loneliness—and none can contradict it. Many institutions, organisations and means are at our disposal to enable us to be very close to one another: (a) **With mass media** we can have immediate and swift communication; with quick transport – we are in the jet age, we are a jet set—we can be anywhere, with anybody. We can meet the people we want at any time. Yet we are apart, we do not have any encounter with them. At times the very means of communication become instruments of isolation and division, mis-communication and misunderstanding causing and accentuating loneliness. The very means that are meant to bring people together divide them, *e.g.*, TV divides the family, a group. (b) **We go to parties or invite others to parties:** They are called ‘social gatherings’, ‘get-togethers’. They aim at relating people, bringing them together, and forming them into a group. We have mostly physical proximity and peaceful co-existence; we exchange courtesies, signs of etiquette. They do not necessarily establish relationship, and bring about communion. (c) **Journey** by train, etc. We are often, packed like sardines; Physical proximity and pressure is maximum. Yet we are irritated with one another. Each one is eagerly awaiting to get rid of the others and to have more space for oneself. This we express politely or in a masked way: ‘Where are you going to?’ ‘What is your destination’? So reluctantly we take leave the others at the next station. (d) **Institutions, structures and big communities:** The bigger the institutions, the larger the group the better it was. But today we react against regimentation, authoritarianism, crowds, anonymity and impersonalisation.

2. The family is supposed to be the ideal community, the basic cell of human society. Closeness and communion presupposes total belonging of one to another. There can be no better belonging to each other than that of husband and wife. The husband belongs fully to the wife and the wife fully to the husband. This mutual belonging and communion is expressed by a common home, by sharing the same roof, table and bed. Yet the husband

and wife can be far away from each other, even during their physical intercourse. They can be of two hearts when they are supposed to be one flesh: one flesh is not necessarily the sign and expression of one heart and one mind.

3. The Church: Our common experience is that our life is often a contradiction and a multiple one between the ideal and the real, between what we say and do, between what we profess and what we are. Let us now reflect upon one of these, the experience of being and belonging to a community. Let us take now a few examples.

4. In Liturgy: We claim to be and we would like to be communities of faith and love, witness and service. We sing in the church that there is one Lord one faith, one baptism, one Body and one God, Father of all and call ourselves a community of worship. In reality we go to the church as individuals, we remain in the church as individuals and leave the church as individuals—that is to say as strangers to one another, as unrelated people.

5. Religious houses and Presbyteries: Religious life is supposed to be a sign of the ecclesial community, of the Church in her state of perfection, in her final fulfilment and consummation, in her plentitude and maturity—a universal communion of one another and of all men with God and with the whole world—a gathering of the nations from the four winds of the world into the community of a single people. The kingdom of God which is within us and among us is not yet come fully; it will be so on the last day. The religious are supposed to be the sign of this ultimate and final reality. Thus the religious are the sign not only of the reality of the Church on earth but a sign par excellence of the Church in heaven—eschatological sign—a sign of this state when she would have broken down all walls of separation, removed all barriers, reconciled everybody and everything; liberated herself from all forms of slavery and alienation, and related people to one another in total communion. This is the ideal; but the ideal does not mean that it is something that cannot be realised now. We have to realise it. The eschatological nature of the Church and religious life means that they must give us a foretaste and substantial anticipation of the final reality.

I have a lot of personal experience with those who live in these institutions; numerous are my contacts with them, though limited. I know many congregations, have met hundreds of Fathers, Brothers and Sisters and seen so many of **them happy** and so many **others unhappy**. Looking back and reflecting on this experience I discover that their **problem no. 1** is again **Community**. General chapters and renewal chapters, ordinary chapters and special chapters are held by Religious Orders. Consequently we have initiated and are implementing an overall renewal; we have now new constitutions, new directives, new forms of authority and government, new structures and set-ups, etc. Have we solved all our problems? **Our main concern and the core of the renewal of religious life too is the community**, whether at the congregational level or the local and individual levels. If we solve this problem, every other problem will be solved.

What do we see, when we go to a convent, monastery or presbytery? One can make out immediately whether there is a community or not, whether the people there are happy or not. From my experience—from what I have heard and seen—some of our communities have literally become a hell. One can notice a complete division and rivalry among the members. Have we not heard that they feel awfully lonesome? Even during recreation and meals when they sit in a circle close to one another, they can feel lonely.

Let us formulate the problem as follows. In our congregations and religious houses we have the set-up, structure, framework and life-style of community which are supposed to be the means of promoting communication and building up community and thereof be signs of Community, *e.g.*, schedule of the day, spiritual exercise: (Mass, divine office, other prayers), meals, recreation, work, rules and regulations and everything else. There is a whole gamut of means and instruments to realise the Community and to show the members that they are one.

Yet people feel lonely, having no sense of belonging to anybody or anything, nay, non-existent, constituting a countersign: lonely, isolated, separated, nay opposed, in tension and conflict therefore in suffering and in agony. For in reality we are still individuals, unrelated entities, islands and monads; we do not

have communities. Thereby we practically do not exist: if at all we ever existed, we have ceased to exist, though we are biologically alive.

The Problem in focus:

Human life without relationship is not worth being called life. So we can state boldly:

(1) We do not have genuine community in most of our Congregations, presbyteries, parishes and families. Why is this? Because man is essentially shy; even the most extrovert person among us is shy. Everyone has a strong urge for self-preservation, to prevent violation of his privacy. Since we are always closing on ourselves, we are constantly in need of being opened up and related to others.

(2) If we do not have a community, it is because we do not have persons, *vice versa*.

(3) If there are neither persons nor Community, what is the reality of a convent or monastery, parish or family? What is exactly happening there. If so, what is it that will constitute us into a community, taking us as we are now? How are we going to build up a Community?

The main lines of solution to this problem will be the answers we shall give to the following questions:

(1) Do we know the difference between a 'person' and a 'thing'? What is a person? Are we persons? Do we permit persons to exist? Can they grow and develop, mature and become persons in our milieu and environment?

(2) If there are persons, if people want to become and be persons, how can they be related? What type of relationship will build them up into a Community?

(3) If this relationship is one of trust and love, do we know how to love? If not, can we still learn to love?

Before exploring how we can build up a Community, we must first of all know how we are existing in our so called 'communities'.

II. THE PRESENT RELATIONSHIP IN OUR GROUPS AND IN OUR FAMILIES :

1. Reification of people or depersonalisation or juxtaposition and use of persons as things:

This consists in reducing people to things ! It cannot be called relationship (Relationship in the strict sense refers to persons and not to things). It is rather a juxtaposition of objects, just as chairs—4 here and 3 there, are arranged in rows, straight, in squares, rectangles, or semi-circles or circles. Persons constitute a structure according to their temperament and character, functions and status, needs and aspirations: mental structures, physical structures, group structures. In such a situation one may be juxtaposed either peacefully or turbulently according to one's attitudes and desires.

(a) One can say to oneself: "I have to live in this house with this group of people; I have to move, act and live in this group of people; I have to move, act and live in this structure of persons and groups; so I must somehow manage to get along with them well, somehow I must succeed and be happy. What shall I do ? I go about doing things, move in the structure, causing the least trouble or disturbance-- in fact, I must not have any trouble at all. I will live peacefully." In other words, I am accepting a structure of persons purely to assure my survival and to have the least trouble. Again I say to myself: "I have to become a religious, or a priest; or I am a priest or a religious I live in this group of people and in this convent or presbyters. So, what does the rest matter, as long as I can live peacefully with my bishop/superior, with my parishioners or companions." So also in the family: "we are married, we are husband and wife; nothing can be done about it. We shall bear it." We classify people into categories. Those who fit me and those who do not fit me; the first I accept, the other I reject; not positively, but by avoiding those with whom I could have a clash ! Thus new framework of my life is made by classifying people and making of them a structure within which I can exist peacefully.

(b) The second attitude is a violent one. One's temperament and character are such that for one's survival one must break the existing structures of persons and make new structures by making others adjust to self. The person says to himself: "Why should I enter into this structure as it is? I shall build my own structure by adjusting everyone to suit me."

Now in both cases, what does one do? He is manipulating people, handling them as he would do things: exploiting and using them as he would use or discard a chair, according to his individual needs, purely from a pragmatic standpoint. People have value as long as they are useful to us, as long as they serve our purpose, as long as they fit into our framework. When we do not need them any more, that is when they become useless we throw them away, destroy them. Thus when we consider ourselves and chiefly others as things, there can be no relationship: and when there is no relationship, obviously there can be no community.

2. Co-existence:

The second form of existence is co-existence. This is connected with the previous one, the only difference is this: In co-existence one still considers the other person as a person and not as a thing. Co-existence is only euphemism. Instead of saying that there is cold war, we say that we co-exist. Co-existence is a relationship that is just proper—'proper' meaning indifference, coldness, lack of conflict and hot-war—negative aspect expressed in positive term.

3. Masked existence: Seeming and Being, Playing comedy: Double Existence, a bluff, hypocrisy, dishonesty:

The third form of existence is masked existence. One is living in two worlds. On the one hand, one has a little world of one's own, which one creates and admires, which one covers up and protects, which one cherishes and enjoys, which one defends against all interference, aggression and penetration, and into which one takes refuge or withdraws whenever one can, and where one remains as long as possible. But one cannot be alone with oneself too long in this world. One has to move in society. Whenever one has to do so, one puts on a mask as one puts on a habit or cassock—it is for public view. So one lives in two

worlds, has a double existence, has two sets of values, and outlooks on life, and has two behaviour patterns. One is a reality and the other is a drama; people are related only to the dramatic persons and not to the real persons, *e.g.*, my superior: I know what she likes and what she does not like; I also know that every superior wants conformity. I behave like this or that; by doing so I shall get whatever I want, I shall be comfortable; I shall get along well. Thus we have one mask or different masks for different occasions. If the other person is also of the same type the so-called relationship is between two masks, two covers, two labels, two dramatic personages, it is politics between two diplomats. One cannot penetrate beyond the mask, it separates rather than links persons. In a word, one is playing on the stage all the time. There is anything but relationship or authenticity.

4. Paternalism/maternalism and childishness/minorism:

Some people are made to behave as minors and children and are kept in that state even when they have physically crossed into adulthood. The childish behaviour or minor's existence is imposed on them by paternalism, maternalism and sometimes fraternalism of some people. One takes the attitude of superior, mother or father, big sister or big brother. It means a total dependence on them—the dependent person will never be himself or herself or will never blossom and grow into a person. If you want a copy of so and so then look at so and so. In other words we want copies which will be duplicates or triplicates of ourselves. Such persons can never have a blossoming of their personality nor become mature. In some convents, sisters have to approach the superior for everything !

Now, all these four forms of existence that we have described are no relationships; for there are no persons, hence no relationships, hence no communities. To build up a community there should be persons and there should be relationships; until and unless we have these two, we cannot have a community. Persons should exist; and they should be related. In short inter-personal relationship is Community.

One of the reasons why we fail to build up a community is that we take for granted the community; we take for granted persons and their relationship. We are not yet persons, we have

to grow into persons. Likewise we are not yet a community, we have still to create and recreate a community. Because we sing community songs, live in a framework of a community, we cannot presume it. So, if we want to build a community, we must say to ourselves every day 'there is no community', we must start the day saying: 'There is no community here': at the beginning of the Mass 'There is no community here. We need to become one'. Just as we must say, "God is not here, not there, I have not discovered him". Then we will go in quest of him. If we think we have found God, we are going to settle down. In the past we had too much taken for granted God, Jesus Christ, convent and community. There is complacency hence no further improvement. Even when we have reached a certain depth of communion among some persons we must doubt it, question it, because man by himself is not related spontaneously; he can be monad, a self-closed entity, an island. He can be in a shell. This is our reality.

III GENUINE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

(to be established and deepened as the basis and source of community)

Introduction: Dialectics between Person and Community

First we posed the problem of community and brought it under focus. Then we analysed our life under four forms of existence. These life-patterns are not relationships in the strict sense; it is because of this that we do not have the community we envisage. Now, to build up a community: (a) we need to be persons; and (b) we must relate ourselves as persons. When we have both we have a community. Community therefore is essentially an interpersonal relationship. Relationship here and throughout my lectures is used in a very strict sense.

Person calls for community; and community calls for persons. Persons and community are not to be opposed, but co-related; and that dynamically and dialectically. If we crush one we crush the other: suppression of persons is suppression of community, and *vice versa*. In the past we thought that we must crush, mortify, crucify and kill persons in order to build the community; it was a wrong supposition. Indeed the truth is just the opposite: unless there are persons there cannot be community. At the same time a person cannot exist without a community; it is only within a community, only in one's relatedness to others that one can be a person, that one can become a person. Otherwise with whom can one relate oneself?

Fortunately we have realised today more than ever:

- (a) the person implies essentially a relationship, a multiple relationship, and indeed a full gamut of relationship;
- (b) that a community is found when persons are related; that interpersonal relationship builds up a community.

With all this in mind let us therefore see: (a) what a person is and what relationship means; and (b) how interpersonal relationship is established and how this relationship forms a community.

PERSONS : (We need persons to build up Community)

1. Do we have Persons ? Are we Persons ?

We have become Priests, Sisters, Brothers. For what ? To have a total liberation from all the passing realities that can tie us down and stifle us to realise a full blossoming of our personality, and grow into full maturity and development. But what happened when one entered the seminary or convent ? One was made to realise that the first condition to become a priest or sister or brother was the suppression of one's personality. The more one crushed one's personality the better seminarian or better religious one was supposed to become. For example if one expressed one's likes and dislikes, if one spoke of one's aspirations and needs, if one wanted to be oneself, etc., one was considered self-conscious, ambitious, pronounced, arrogant and having a spirit of independence. Superiors and companions had the opinion that if one was like this already in the novitiate or seminary what would he/she be later on as a professed brother, sister or priest ? Though one had gone to the convent or seminary to be fully liberated from all shackles and constrictions and to blossom into a totally developed person as a priest or religious, what did one find on entering there ? Mainly structures and moulds, rules and regulations, inhibitions and prohibitions, restrictions of all sorts which tended to stifle people, to depersonalise them, to dehumanise them and to reify them. To be spiritual and holy one had to be non-human or dehumanised. Yet we made a profession of faith in the Incarnation !

2. What are Persons ?

What are the requirements to be a person ?

The obvious conclusion and basic demand is that one must be recognised as a person, and one must recognise others as persons. Persons are endowed with sensitivity and feelings, dignity and destiny, enjoying rights and duties, having equality, freedom and responsibility. One's feelings and rights must be recognised and respected. One's freedom and responsibility can only be granted when trust is given to him as well. If all this is so, one must have autonomy to be oneself and to become oneself; one must be a person and must become a person. Moreover a person is a mystery, an inexhaustible reality, calling for a long

process to be penetrated, understood, appreciated and communed with. A person cannot be thought of in his isolation; a person is essentially one who is related. Only at the moment of being related to the Other and to the others can one become and be a person. Life is not a single relationship but a multiple one; so a whole gamut of relationships must be established and fostered. These relationships build up, strengthen, foster and promote community. They realise brotherhood and communion (fellowship), make our life purposeful and meaningful, happy and peaceful, secure and full, and thus blissful.

3. How can a Person be helped to blossom ?

The community (society, government, association, convents, presbyteries, and family, etc.) must encourage the members to become aware of one another and to relate themselves meaningfully to one another. For this to happen it is necessary:

1. to create an atmosphere conducive to community;
2. to help and encourage people to be themselves;
3. to offer opportunities and occasions to be aware of one another and to relate oneself to others; to encourage their meetings and sharings; to devise ways and means to enable them to have, foster and multiply these relationships;
4. to provide privacy; openness to others requires a certain protection and one must respect their privacy;
5. to form within the larger community small groups since genuine and meaningful relationship is possible only in small groups;
6. to enable the small groups to open and relate themselves to one another, and to the larger community, without becoming closed-in entities or ghettos, without diminishing the intimacy of relations.
7. to develop among the members of the group attitudes that will make them consider as normal the interpersonal relationship of persons in the community. We must surround this relationship with expressions and reactions of normality; to surround them with sympathy and understanding, trust and love;

8. to recognise the innate dynamism of each member for personality development, and give him all possible help one can to realise himself/herself:

- by recognising their dynamism for personality development by helping that dynamism to be effective;
- by helping towards the solution of one's problems, the attainment of values that appeal to the person, the interpretation of his life-situations and the fulfilment of his aspirations;
- by the facing of challenges;
- by the taking of risks;
- by the solving of conflicts and tensions;
- by fostering a person's talents and charisms, assuring his education, culture and expression.

All this is what a person has right to expect from his community. And a Community worth the name should give all that

IV. CONDITIONS FOR ESTABLISHING INTER- PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP THAT BUILDS UP COMMUNITY

To build up a community one must be (1) sensitive, (2) open, (3) sharing (receiving and giving), (4) one must call others into existence, and (5) love, (6) in an atmosphere of freedom, confidence and understanding.

1. Sensitivity:

First of all one must be **sensitive**. Sensitivity is an awareness of others and other realities beyond oneself. Many a time—if we notice our own behaviour and that of others—we think and speak, and react as though others did not exist and were not by our side, though in fact we are surrounded by others. The fact that a person is sitting beside another, often does not impress him at all, has no impact on him, much less ring a bell in his heart. One can sit side by side with another person for an hour or more without saying a word. This is what we mean when we say a person is insensitive.

Sensitivity means not only that we be aware of the existence of others, but also that we take into account the **feelings** of others. In the past we encouraged the opposite under the pretext of “good intentions”. Provided we had the “good intention” nothing else mattered. But ‘good’ intentions have often been ‘bad’ in their effect. We often hear it said: “I meant well”, “I had only this intention”, “I had no other desire but to do good”. Though with these good intentions one could justify one’s action throughout, much harm has been done and is still being done in the name of so-called good intentions.

In practice, good intentions have frequently resulted in the exact opposite of sensitivity. In relationship what matters is not so much what one **means** as what the other person **feels** about it. The feeling of the other is different from the thought, ideas, intentions and convictions of the person acting. He has the right to say: “I feel thus: I feel cold, I feel hot, I feel offended, I feel

humiliated; don't ask me why and how. Whether I am right or wrong, whether my reaction is well founded or not, this is the way I feel". The whole question is: Are you aware of or do you take into consideration the feelings of other people? For many years we have been brought up with good intentions. That means we started with ourselves and our intentions: based our action on principle and objective reality, and did not care much whether other persons liked or did not like a thing. Now we must start from the other persons. And here all of us need to undergo a radical change.

Formerly one could be a **holy man** and still be **insensitive**, and we accepted this. To-day in the personalist context and in our present concern for interpersonal relationship as the basis of human action we would question the value and authenticity of such holiness. In former times, we could understand how two 'saints' could live in the same place house without having any communication between them, without any sensitivity or sympathy for one another. To-day we cannot understand it nor are we prepared to accept it. We can no longer appreciate as saints two persons who cannot understand one another and who hurt the feelings of one another. Before God our motives have some value and are, at times, sufficient, and He may justify and save us. God sees the heart. But if our sanctity before God is to be sanctity before men, if our holiness is to have a sign value of witness, if our sanctity is to embody normal humanity, if we want to appeal to normal persons of to-day, then we must be **sensitive**. One of the reasons why so many holy people do not exert the spiritual influence that they could and should is that the elementary condition of interpersonal relationship—the quality of sensitivity to the feelings of others—is ignored by them. Hence the importance of sympathy and empathy. Apathy and indifference are more cruel than hatred and violence, for the latter at least shows sensitivity and relationship of persons, though indeed in a regrettable form.

In short sensitivity means to be aware of the other person's presence and feelings, of his uniqueness and otherness, of his personality and his mystery. There are many techniques to develop and grow in this sensitivity. Most of us need 'sensitivity training' with a programme of exercises to that end.

2. Openness:

Sensitivity calls for and results in initiative and openness. A closed mind, insensitivity and unconcern go together. A normal man who is sensitive to others will feel the need for others, will open himself out to others. On the other hand a closed man will be insensitive to others; his insensitivity will not make him feel the need of others or urge him to open himself to others. Yet we know that for interpersonal relationship to be made, deepened and perfected, demands openness as an indispensable condition.

Openness includes emptiness or to feel the need to receive; freedom from prejudices, pre-conceived ideas and rash judgments; an absence of built-in resistance, hidden agenda, already-taken-decisions; an open heart or heart of flesh, a new heart.

In our sinfulness and pretended self-sufficiency we are cut off from others, shut up in ourselves. We become closed-in entities, monads, islands. The co-existence, juxtaposition of islands/monads will not relate us to one another or make us a community. We have to recognise our innate sinful tendency to be locked up within ourselves in isolation and loneliness, individualism and selfishness, in our self-sufficiency and independence. In this state others appear to be 'hell', whereas in the state of openness to others, it is selfishness and loneliness that become the 'hell'.

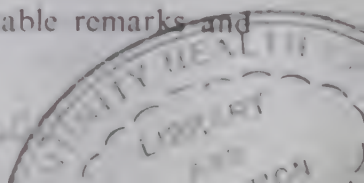
When several people live together in a human group or society there are different possibilities in their relationships to one another:

1. Two people are closed; they remain insensitive to one another and so remain closed;
2. One opens, being aware of the other; the other does not react, does not respond and does not open;
3. both open a little at first; after sometime both close;
4. both open a little at first; one closes, the other remains open for some time or always;
5. both open; remain open, but after some time refuse to open further;

6. both open to each other, grow slowly or fast in their mutual otherness till they know each other fully and till they give themselves to each other fully;
7. both are open fully; opened to each other, but closed to others or to a third party;
8. both are open fully: not only to each other, but both of them to several other, and all men in their mutual openness, thus spreading this attitude of openness and accelerating the process of interpersonal relationship.

To sum up, the possibilities are: (a) not opening at all; (b) closing after some time; (c) remaining partly closed; (d) being closed against a third party. There are different reasons for these attitudes or states of relationship;

1. One feels that he is self-sufficient and does not feel the need for the other. One feels falsely autonomous and has no innate sensitivity or dynamism for the other.
2. One does not get a call to sensitivity or dynamism from outside due to a lack of initiative and openness of others. There is a lack of 'provocation'.
3. There is excessive concern for self-defence; others are seen as a threat, as a danger, as hell. There is a fear of exposing oneself to insecurity due to lack of privacy.
4. A person is not prepared for the implications and consequences of an openness to share, to change. One feels it is better to be in 'blissful' ignorance. It comes back to resistance or unpreparedness for change.
5. One thinks that one has nothing to learn, nothing to share, nothing to give or receive. This comes back to self-depreciation and depreciation of others.
6. The person suffers because he is subject to inhibitions, complexes and obsessions.
7. A person comes across gossip, uncharitable remarks and indifferent or hostile attitudes.



8. One does not find people trustworthy, capable of appreciating one's frankness and openness, plain speaking and pronounced ideas.
9. One has had sad experiences in the past springing from his attempts to be open. He feels that he has been betrayed, tried and isolated and that confidence has not been kept.
10. One does not much care for an atmosphere of leisure, familiarity, informality, freedom and confidence, understanding and sympathy.

3. Mutual self-gift/sharing:

(a) Sensitivity and openness to others implies a felt need to give oneself to others who want us and to receive others who are offering themselves to us. Openness is necessary in view of accepting the total gift of the other person. And this acceptance is not one of words but of reciprocal action, namely accepting others by giving oneself. Thus trust or relationship is nothing but receiving the total of the other by a reciprocal self-gift to others.

(b) This acceptance implies:

- an awareness that we have something to give;
- a sacrifice, so that we lose ourselves for the sake of giving ourselves to others; we cannot give something, if we keep it for ourselves. On the contrary it is by giving away we can keep something.
- a preparedness for change, for conversion, to meet the challenge springing from this humble giving and receiving; which is dynamic, which has an impact and challenge, which calls for a change and which transforms.
- a readiness to accept the others as they are, where they are, in their total otherness and uniqueness;
- a faith in the value of the human person, and a conviction that existence is an existence for others;

(c) Some of the obstacles to this giving and accepting (sharing) are:

- (1) We want and demand conformity from others, expect them to fit into a structure, a pattern, a mould; we consider ourselves a model and expect others to be projection, a replica, a reflection, a copy, a duplicate of ourselves. This implies excessive self-love, self-appreciation, imposition of ourselves rather than acceptance of others; we do not want others to be themselves.
We refuse to accept others in their personality and originality, their mystery and complexity; and thus we deform, nay, destroy both ourselves and others.
- (2) We are willing to receive, but not to give; or inversely we want to give but not to receive. Reciprocity, mutuality and equality are basic conditions in relationship, friendship, love.
- (3) We calculate and hesitate; we are for partial giving and partial receiving; we are prepared to go only so far and no further. But in the case of persons there is either total acceptance and total giving or there is nothing at all. Persons cannot be divided; spiritual realities cannot be partial.
- (4) We do not want to expose ourselves and allow others to see us as we are but want to remain in our privacy; we do not want to be ourselves.

4. To call others into existence and allow ourselves to be called into existence:

As long as we are closed within ourselves, insensitive to others and do not give ourselves to others by receiving their self-gift we really do not exist. We begin to exist only when others begin to exist for us; for it is others who call us into existence. As long as we are locked up in self and do not let others see us we do not know ourselves. It is others who can reveal us to ourselves:

- by recognising us;
- by discovering us;

- by entering into us and having insights into the mystery of our person;
- by drawing out our gifts, talents and charisms;
- by enumerating our aspirations, goals, values, problems, struggles and tensions;
- by appreciating and encouraging us; by expressing, formulating and articulating our qualities and aspects;
- by relating themselves to us;
- by liberating us from our loneliness and isolation, from individualism and selfishness, from self-centred monotony and closed-blindness, from everything that constricts, restricts and obstructs our growth.
- by trusting us or putting themselves into our hands;
- by loving us and making us worthy of being loved.

Thus it is others who slowly paint our picture, shape and form us, and call us into existence. We in turn call others into existence by similar attitudes and gestures. Thus existence is given to us by others within a process of relationship. An existence is also pro-existence in view of bringing others into existence. That is why when two people say to each other 'I love you' and mean it, both begin to exist, created by each other out of love. Love or relationship vivifies. Love, and love alone can create both in the case of God and in the case of man. That is why we say that God loved us and created us, God created everything out of love.

5. In an atmosphere of Freedom and Trust:

The mutual openness and revelation, the mutual unfolding and donation of self is such an intimate reality that it calls for an atmosphere of trust and confidence, of privacy and security, of protection and assurance. Hence all the obstacles that could prevent this openness, this unfolding, this self-giving and this being oneself with others must be removed. They are:

- (1) compulsion, force, bulldozing, steam-rolling;
- (2) excessive show of authority;
- (3) regimentation, compartmentalisation, rigid structures, over formalities;
- (4) restrictions, constrictions, limitations, too many rules and regulations;

- (5) mistrust, suspicion;
- (6) envy, jealousy, sadness;
- (7) gossip, nagging, loose talk, rash judgments;
- (8) constant harping on defects and faults, public criticism and frequent correction;
- (9) refusal to admit defects and the existence of defects in persons and groups;
- (10) refusals to forget and forgive, especially on the part of those in authority, but also on the part of companions;
- (11) lack of opportunity, leisure and privacy for personal contact, for frequent meetings and exchange of views, for long conversations to be oneself with others;
- (12) formation of closed and rival groups;

In short, a lack of trust, understanding and sympathy necessary for an atmosphere of freedom.

6. Love:

The core and basis of interpersonal relationship is obviously love. But are we capable of loving? Do we know how to love? Have we been trained to love? Can we be educated to love? We make an effort to answer these questions now.

V. LEARNING TO LOVE

In the past, due to our wrong understanding of chastity, we did not always behave humanly; we tried to be angelic. But as the proverb goes, if man tries to be an angel, he ends by finding himself an animal. So we were afraid of loving people, afraid of loving them naturally, normally, humanly. And again we thought that the love of others was to be controlled and suppressed for the love of God. In our excessive concern for theocentric and vertical love, we neglected anthropocentric and horizontal love.

No community can be built up without this essential love. If, so far we have not succeeded in building up a community in our home, convent, presbytery, etc., it is because we have not yet learned to love. If so, how do we learn to love? What are the different aspects of this love that builds up community?

A

In the first place we must be **human** in our love from every point of view. Some of the characteristics of this human love are the following:

1 When we love, we love **the whole person** and **with our whole person**, body and soul—not this or that aspect only with our whole being. Two or more persons are related in their wholeness

2 Human love is an **emotional love**. Emotion is part and parcel of our constitution. Emotion includes attraction, dynamism, tension, warmth and affection. It is not mere sentimentalism

3. Every human love is **sexual love**. Sex too is a constitutive element of our nature; sex is not something added to it from outside. A man is not a general human being plus male organs; a woman is not a general human being plus female organs. Though we know that this is not so, most of us think and act to the contrary. Again sex is not limited to the genital organs; sexuality permeates our whole being, and transforms our whole

self; hence every act, every word is affected by sex. When I speak, for example, I speak like a man; my walk, my postures, my gestures, my figure are all manly; when I love I feel the aspects, consequences and implications of my sex. We cannot make an abstraction of sex in love. We do experience it in our loving, so we must not be disturbed by it.

4. Human love is **incarnate love**. We must love people as human persons with human love. We are not to live like spirits, God and angels. Human love requires external signs, visible, audible, tangible expressions. Love supposes sharing, giving and accepting—by means of visible, audible and tangible signs. This means that love must be seen and heard, perceived and experienced. No one could have understood God's love fully unless he had become incarnate in Jesus Christ, unless his love had taken a visible form in flesh and blood. "God so loved the world that He gave his only Son", "He loved me and delivered himself for me". "There is no greater love than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends". This is the meaning of incarnate love.

5. Love is a **dynamic reality**, an on-going process. It must be constantly growing. If it does not grow it ceases to exist. It has to be fostered and nourished. One cannot love 'too much'. If it is too much, it is not love at all.

6. **Human love has to become Christic**: We must love others as Jesus Christ loves us. When Jesus Christ said: "Love one another as I have loved you", he was asking something that is possible, something that he was doing himself. We can love like Jesus Christ because He has become man and shown us how a man can love another man. As God he has given us the capacity to love, has poured into our hearts His own love; he has given us His own spirit of love.

Christian love is His own love. Christ loved God and us not only with divine love but with human love. This Christic love is kenotic, it expresses itself by self-emptying.

7. Any love must be **chaste love**. Some of the conditions of a genuine chaste love are the following:

B

(a) It is a **universal** love, a capacity to love all, a love open to all, not an exclusive love. By saying that we must love everyone, we can also mean that we love no one, *e.g.*, when I say that I love all men in India with whom I have no interpersonal relationship, I know that this is not possible. And yet there is much truth in my desire and duty to love all people in different ways. From this we must not infer that love is arithmetically equal. If we say that we love all people equally we shall be hypocritical. It is not possible to love everyone equally, for persons are unique having quite different socio-cultural backgrounds, different formation, different emotional and psychological needs. Our love, therefore, cannot be equal with regard to time, manner, attention, expression, frequency, signs and emotions. But our basic attitude to people can be and should be equal. When I love one, he or she is the only person who matters for me; but when I meet another he deserves all my love and attention; likewise for all those whom I love.

(b) The persons who love must **always remain persons**, and that throughout the exchange of love, during the entire relationship, whatever be the expressions of love. So when we love a person we must not reduce him/her to a thing. Whenever we use people, or whenever we reduce others and ourselves to things, we are not really loving. When I love a priest, I must see and respect his priestly personality as well as my personality. When I love sister, I must maintain their religious personality and my priestly personality. Likewise when I love laymen and laywomen I must maintain their personality. Throughout their relationship those who love should be themselves, *i.e.*, maintaining their personality.

(c) **Oblative love**: Love means total offer and surrender of oneself: giving oneself to another person and the other person accepting the offering fully by the surrender of himself. If this is love one cannot be 'possessed' by the other. One should give oneself to another in such a way that one can take it and give it in its entirety to every other person. So in loving and in being loved **we have not to be possessed or lost**.... This is the in-built asceticism of love; this is real detachment which is ultimately attachment to all.

Suppose for example I have a priest in my office. When he is in my room he is the only person who matters for me, whom I love, to whom I give myself, my time and attention. He goes out, and a Brother, or Sister or a lay person comes in; now he/she is the only person who matters for me and I give him/her all my love; and so on and so forth. This is the meaning of loving everyone, and loving everyone equally and uniquely, loving everyone genuinely and sincerely. In this process, I gather and possess myself in such a way and I have such a mastery over myself, that I can give myself to every person, one after another and at the same time. Spiritual realities can be given in their entirety to every person and they can remain integral and undiminished. This is the true freedom of the Spirit: the ability and possibility to respond to everyone, to give oneself to everyone. In this freedom, attachment and detachment, immanence and transcendence are the normal dialectical processes.

(d) **Love supposes sharing**, not gathering and accumulating. Love is giving away, and not keeping. In the measure in which we share—and sharing is mutual—we can be sure that we are loving, that we are free.

(e) Love is not confined to two or more, but it is **an openness of those who love towards the rest**. It is not a love of mutual contemplation, but a love that expresses itself as a unified dedication to a cause or to the service of others. So we love one another in working for a cause, in working for something which is more than ourselves. For example, I am working for the National Centre, for the Church in India, for the cause of Church renewal. Now, many people come to share my concern, and work for the same cause. In this process my collaborators love me and I love them all. Or, inversely, a group of friends, precisely because of their mutual love, dedicate themselves to a common task and offer their collaboration. Or take another example: we go to work in the slums or refugee camps; we are working there day and night. There the work has brought some people together. We not only work for others, but in that process, we also grow in our love for one another. In this way while not getting locked up in ourselves, we open ourselves towards something bigger and tend towards it. It is in one's openness to others that one can love another person. If one closed up with one person—that is not real love, one ceases to love in fact.

(f) **Expressions of love:** This love to be real and fostered needs signs of expression and means of communication. What signs can one use to express one's love? Any sign of love is legitimate that is the normal expression of love in a place. This depends to a large extent on the life-status of persons, on the background, socio-cultural milieu and the local conventions of the persons who love one another.

(g) Now in the chaste and human love that I have described there is lot of **asceticism**. A genuine love always carries with it this in-built asceticism. It is the capacity for a distance and separation for the sake of a higher cause, due to our love for all men and a desire to be at their service. This is genuine liberation.

CONCLUSION

1. The role of leaders and superiors in building up a community:

Reflecting on this theme and looking back on our past experience we realise that, the community building process and the establishment of interpersonal relationship among its members rests very much on **the Superior**, though his/her efforts can be neutralized or negated by the members or groups at any time. But to a larger extent, the initiative can easily be taken by the Superior. He/she has many opportunities and means to build up constantly. He/she can create and maintain the atmosphere of a place, and can change the climate of the group to be conducive to community building, e.g., the atmosphere of freedom and confidence is conditioned by the attitude and convictions of the Superior.

2. The Trinity is the model:

The best example of community is **the Trinity**. It is an ideal that can be realised by us. God has, in fact, made it possible to be realised. That is the whole purpose of Revelation culminating in Jesus Christ.

Now, God the Father is open and in his openness gives himself to the Son. This Son is so sensitive to the Father and he gives himself fully back to the Father. This mutual openness and self-gift becomes the bond of permanent communion—the

Holy Spirit. The Trinity, the community of three Persons, is not a closed communion among themselves. This community becomes open, and the Persons give themselves to men in their self-gift. Being sensitive to this initiative of God, aware of this openness and in gratitude for this self-gift, we men surrender ourselves to God, committing ourselves entirely to Him in order to belong to Him fully and to live for Him in fidelity. This process must continue until all men are related among themselves and to God in this openness, self-gift and love.

3. The Challenge to all:

This is the community of salvation, this is the community of faith, worship, service and witness. The Church and every Christian community is a sign and instrument to bring about such a fellowship, by building up the community of men in their milieu till the universal community of mankind emerges as the kingdom of God in heaven.

The eschatological community, the community of heaven will be so much one that the words of Christ will have significance: "I in you, you in me, and they in us". After all, community or interpersonal relationship is:

- to be fully oneself always and everywhere.
- to be for others totally and for ever.
- and thus to be for God and in God in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

WORKSHOP ON COMMUNITY LIFE

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. (a) What are the types of relationship that exist in our Communities? How do we evaluate them?
(b) What are the obstacles and defects that impede the building up of our Communities?
2. (a) What are the aspirations and needs of our members which must be fulfilled in order to realise their integral personality?
(b) What are the ways in which
—we can create and recognise others as persons?
3. Underline some basic requisites to establish and foster inter-personal relationship and build up genuine communities?
4. From our experience of Community life what aspects and exigencies of love are crucial and are still to be lived?

