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Community as a School of Charity **Dom Vianney YAMAGUCHI of Oita**

At the time of my entrance, I knew nothing about Cistercian Spirituality and its goals. However, I reflected this way: the monks in this community are living in accordance with the Rule of St. Benedict and they are wise men who transmit the traditions of St. Bernard. Therefore, even if I do not know anything about spirituality and the purpose of this Order and am not completely certain about my motivation or why I am called to the Cistercian life, the monks will teach these things to me and I will learn from them. In fact, what I have thought and longed for was actualized: they taught me and I learned from them. I practiced what I have learned and I became a functional member of the Order living under the Rule of St. Benedict.

More concretely, what they have taught and what I have learned from them is that the distinguishing characteristics of the Cistercian Spirituality is the community as a School of Charity and that we see Christ in the community itself in a unique way. Also have I learned that the goal of the Cistercian life is to fulfill our vows by following the Rule of St. Benedict. In order to reach this goal, we have practiced seeking a balanced life between mind and body as Christians through daily prayers and manual works.

On the other hand, in a society like Japan where the strong tradition of Buddhism is still persistent, even we Christians are not immune to be influenced by the mentality of its cultural surroundings and its heritage. When Buddhist monks enter the priesthood, their motivation and its purpose is very definite. Namely, they try to enter the priesthood hoping that the suffering in this life will be overcome and other sufferings will not arise. In other words, they believe that they are not only able to be released from the sufferings in this world through their own practices in such a way that they can control their own desires by their own will but also to be released from the sufferings in the world to come through their own practices of self denial so as to reach the level of spiritual enlightenment. To attain this goal of spiritual enlightenment, a Buddhist novice spends a lot of time, energy and effort as a pilgrim traveling on foot through the country seeking for a good master. In most cases, the training is initiated and continued on a one to one basis, the disciple and his master. It is in the hand of the master to judge if his disciple has reached the level of the spiritual enlightenment or not. On the other hand, if the disciple is not satisfied with his master, he is free to leave his place in order to look for another master who is even more experienced and deeply spiritually enlightened. No matter whom the disciple chooses as his master, the two of them, the master and his disciple have a community living during periods of spiritual training. In this sense, having community life is common in both the Buddhist and Christian traditions. However, the community life in the Buddhist tradition is different from our Cistercian tradition in the sense that the former is one of the means of spiritual training and the latter is the School of Charity.

In such a milieu influenced by the mentality of Buddhism, we must resist the temptation to look upon our religious life as the place of training or that of releasing ourselves from the sufferings in this world. We, the members of the monastery which was founded rather recently have to keep in mind this point in particular. There are not a few aspirants to enter our monastic life motivated by the desire of purifying themselves and of escaping from the reality of this world. They recognize that they are sinners and they decide to enter just because they want to devote their whole life to the monastic life in order to compensate for their sins. However, our monastic life is not simply a place to struggle with our sufferings. Neither is it a place to train to release ourselves from our sufferings. Monastic life is a community as a School of Charity where each one of us bears our own cross in union with the other members and aspires together to follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

If we do not have a clear idea of this concept, that is, the concept of the community as a School of Charity, we are liable to consider monastic life to be the place for personal training. The more our awareness of our sinfulness increases, the more we are apt to desire to overcome our own sufferings and be broken from the shackles of our sins by means of enduring our sufferings and our spiritual training without any support or assistance from others. Due to this inclination, therefore, personal training is regarded to be more important than anything else and as a result, there is always a danger to lose the balance between prayer and manual work. Such training rooted in a self-centered concept falls into the specific illusion that we do not need to associate with other members of the community. As a result, this yields to a risk to be alienated from the rest of community under a mistaken illusion that we cannot be understood and accepted by the other monks of the community. In such a circumstance, we are liable to shut ourselves within our own selves and, therefore, to become narrow or closed minded.

In order to avoid such a narrow-minded concept of the monastic life, there are some points which we should keep in mind. The most important point is that we should be very clearly aware of the fact that our monastic life abides in the community as a School of Charity. In the community as a School of Charity, each one of us comes to know ourselves as we are. To know oneself is to be accepted by others and by our own selves as we are. We should recognize ourselves as we are and we should accept ourselves as we are. We religious need to encounter our true self in order to be humble. We encounter ourselves not being released from sufferings but struggling with the sufferings. Here, God's grace reveals itself and works through this awareness. For those who recognize themselves as they are, our Rule teaches that our monastic life as a School of Charity has no end; "For as we advance in the religious life and in faith, our hearts expand and we run the way of God's commandments with unspeakable sweetness of love. Thus, never departing from His School, but persevering in the monastery according to His teaching until death, we may by patience share in the sufferings of Christ and deserve to have a share also in His kingdom." (Prol. 48-50)

For the young monk who has just started his monastic life, observances and fraternal correction may provide a good help to understand that the monastic life abides in the community as a School of Charity. In particular, to observe silence and to practice fasting and abstinence, both considered as typical characteristics of the Cistercian life, offers a good opportunity to follow an example of Christ who retired to the desert and struggled with the temptations by the evil spirit for forty days and nights before He initiated his public life. It is to confirm that we are members of the Church that we religious go to the desert following Him. It is to share in His mission that we try to repeat what He has done in our own lives. One of His missions is to obey His Father completely. This reminds us of constant obedience to our abbot in that whatever we do, we have to do in obedience to the abbot.

To see some objects as they really are is one of the most difficult and troublesome tasks human being can achieve. In order to see, we need a trained and awakened spirit. To see is to love. We can rephrase His words, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Mt. 19:19) as "See your neighbor as you see yourself." Seeing as it is means to see a person, thing and situation, not by the imagination, but to see as they really are. In so doing, we can respond to our brothers appropriately. After entering the monastery, I myself have learned, first of all, to accept myself as I am in the School of Charity. Now, I am making the effort to see and accept my brothers as they are, as I see and accept myself as I am.

THE UNITY OF THE COMMUNITY: The Family of God

Sr. Augustine of Butende

When I received the invitation to prepare this conference, I was perplexed! It was a challenge -- Oh! - with my limitations! However, Preparing it has been really a stimulant for my renewal, and I am sure that the Holy Spirit has been working overtime. The movement of God's Spirit in our Church today, is both challenging and exciting.

The phrase: "Church as family of God" appears 15 times in the final message of the recent African Synod. That was the theme of the Synod. Declared the Holy Father: "The Synod is over. The Synod has begun in the Church, in families, in Christian communities." And the Pope reminded us that "Synod" means "to walk together." How do we Cistercians "walk together" in our worldwide communities?

I am sure that the participants in last Year's RAFAM meeting at Latroun will agree with me: We experienced a real family spirit and memorable Cistercian hospitality!

No doubt we Africans do have a keen sense of "Belonging." I wonder how that gift of "Belonging" is actually lived in our communities. It may help our understanding if we look at what constitutes "signs" or "symptoms" of a true family:

...Everyone feels at home. No one is a stranger there.

...There is love and solidarity.

...There is cooperation (even though minor conflicts are ever present).

...There is sharing and dialogue. Everyone gets involved in working toward the development of the family's common good.

Permit me to comment on "tribalism," the dictionary definition of which is: "1. The organisation, culture, or beliefs of a tribe. 2. The sense of entity of a tribe." Tribalism is often accused of being a common hindrance of a community's unity. How accurate, in fact, is that idea? Ever since I entered our abbey, I have noticed one specific remark on every visitation card: "Your community should be grateful to the Lord always, because there is no trace of tribalism" -- in the pejorative meaning often attached to the term. If tribalism, in its negative sense of prejudice animosity or rivalry, should ever rear its ugly head in our community, we would feed it to the cobras!

MUTUAL CONFIDENCE

Self-confidence (together with confidence in God) is very essential. For instance, community members may react, behaving as if incapable of doing anything. Sometimes absolutely dependent (I do not mean the sick and the aging). Dependence is rather discouraging to the superiors. Nevertheless, superiors must take risks and appoint Sisters for various occupations. I think that a Sister who feels threatened or unable to take an assignment, should try it out and be prepared to make mistakes -- and continue on, with courage. Difficulty is not impossibility.

Thanks to her gift of fortitude, a brave Sister may Push ahead against obstacles in her desire to rescue a situation for her community. And what may (often) happen? She tastes a bit of "the cup" the Lord knew: 'Let her suffer; she asked for it!' Perhaps some members will view the Sister's efforts in that way because they do not themselves care to face reality.

WHAT FOSTERS/HINDERS MUTUAL CONFIDENCE?

Love, trust, listening, affirmation -- foster mutual confidence Trust is a risk, as we open ourselves to others we are, in fact, saying: "Here I am trusting You and defenceless before

you." St. Benedict asks us to reveal even the hidden temptations we experience to our spiritual mother/father. Is that easy? Genuine communication can take place only in a climate of mutual trust and confidence. At times, one hears it said: "Africans are generally closed." Is that true? Perhaps they are struggling with this need for confidence (and sometimes they are concerned about the matter of confidentiality). It can happen that as we were growing up, we were "conditioned" to avoid intimacy -- "wearing our heart on our sleeve." We may not have expressed our feelings openly. We kept a respectful distance toward our elders and those in authority.

Mutual confidence is hindered, on the contrary, by prejudice, fear, rumor -- even as it is nurtured by love, trust, listening, affirmation. One is naturally reluctant to share, at any real depth, if she feels that what she has shared in confidence may, alas! -be reported from the roof. (Woe to the one who betrays secrets... cf. Sirach, 27;16.) My tongue "is like a fire. It is a world of wrong no one has ever tamed the tongue" (cf. James, c. 3). Rumor often results in bitterness; a reputation may be ruined; work may become disorganized. Benedict reminds us that in a flood of words, there is no escape from sin.

TRUTH IN RELATIONSHIP -- TOLERANCE THAT IS LIFE-GIVING OR ELSE DESTRUCTIVE

Oh my people! How long will Your hearts be closed? How long will YOU love what is futile and seek what is false? (Cf. Ps. 4;3) We pray that daily, as we complete our monastic day. Truth in relationships asks for my selflessness, constancy, understanding, forgiveness, sincerity -- and the courage to begin anew each day. Above all that truth asks me to accept myself as I am. Truth in relationships is a very happy thing: it makes me laugh; it makes me sing; it makes me glad; it makes me sad. It also makes me seek the reason why certain things happen. It should be, therefore, life-giving.

What hinders truth in relationships, and so may make them destructive? Lack of humility; scapegoating; insensitivity; insecurity. Perhaps especially destructive is fear: of opening up; of being myself; of taking others seriously; that others may have something to teach me. And what about the fear that if I really "so in" for full and sincere dialogue, I may have to change, as a result, my own views and behaviour? Further, fear fosters gossip, rudeness, tattling, prejudice, suspicions. Am I able to expose myself in the nakedness of my limitations, weaknesses and Poverty, while letting others see me as I am, and not merely as I would like them to see me?

Scapegoating is a big enemy of truth in relationships. So long as blame is projected onto another Person or thing, then the need for self confrontation and conversion disappears or at least postponed. If only we would give time to talking directly with others, that we spend talking about others, wouldn't Community life move more smoothly and more fruitfully?

OF TOLERANCE AND APATHY

Who of us can survive in the monastery without due tolerance? Sometimes that tolerance is put to the test, due to insensitivity. We live so closely together! We meet in refectory, church, scriptorium, work assignments. Our uniqueness, temperament, background, Personal Preferences, and so on -- must be considered in our life together within community. If they tolerate me, must I not tolerate them? But there is a destructive tolerance engendered by a fearful or uneasy silence, when some sort of communication is called for; this is particularly a danger for those in authority. I might also fall victim to this sort of corrosive tolerance because of my hostility or apprehensions or human respect.

What of apathy or disinterestedness? Not helpful and not healthful. Suppose that those who have the right or obligation to "speak up" for harmony, good order and general well-being of a community, elect to stay snug and comfortable by claming up instead of expressing their sincere concern and -- if proper -- their correction. Is not this neglect - however it may be motivated -- an encouragement for any faulty status quo? I think that this kind of behavior is something quite other than a genuine love of peace and

wholesome tolerance. Thomas Merton remarked: "Lord, save me from two kinds of friends: those who always correct, and those who never correct."
Closed systems are ordinarily destructive.

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

We are in the school of divine mercy! When emotions are strong, communication is weak. Where there is no experience of death and resurrection, community life is unreal.

Someone said forgiveness is difficult, but to ask pardon is much more so. It is easier to go to the sacrament of reconciliation than to face each other for mutual pardon. "Forgive and You will be forgiven," says Jesus. Without a spirit of forgiveness, one can easily develop schizophrenia or hypochondria, or other physical/psychological disorders.

Forgiveness in its highest form, purposefully seeks for a mutual relationship, and for togetherness. It is willing to repeat itself 70 x 7 times, without being ashamed of being considered a fool, or posing as heroic. No matter the quantity or quality of faults, the one who forgives is convinced that her sister is better than she appears.

Forgiveness is the most humble gesture. It is discreet and gentle -- in such wise that the Person forgiven is not made to feel that it costs the one giving it, very much at all. From my own deepest experience, the -fact that I was accepted to remain in the monastery until death is the sure Proof that I live under the forgiving heart of my fellow-Sisters. Thus I believe that the preservation of unity among Sisters depends on a sincere and mutual effort toward reconciliation.

To eliminate thorns of scandal from the community, the Sisters are not to prolong the time of anger, but when there is a dispute, to make Peace as soon as possible. (Cf. C. 15) Honestly speaking, without a spirit of forgiveness, one easily falls into three capital sins, which the Abbot General commented on in the last MGM - 1993: activism, individualism, inconstancy. Victims of those failings tend to nurse grudges and then find themselves depressed and furious.

"Confess Your sins to one another and pray for one another, then you will be healed" (James, 5:16). If I find myself embarrassed if I have to confess the same sin now and again, then I should ask myself: "Does the sacrament of reconciliation give me the guarantee that I'll never sin again?" Why does St. Benedict ask the superior to recite the Our Father both morning and evening -- Lauds and Vespers? That's twice a day.

INTEGRATION OF DIFFERENCES AND HEALING OF WOUNDEDNESS

Indeed, as the Abbot General said in the MGM Conference, 1993: "Each of us pilgrims to the absolute, companions in joy and sorrow, witnesses of the Monastic church and to the Kingdom to come!" We enrich one another but at times we cause Pain to one another due to our differences, because being human, we are influenced by what is said and done to us. It is only by that love which covers a multitude of sins that we remain together.

Lack of openness, differences in opinions, insensitivity -- are a few of the reasons that can create agitation in us. Have You ever been in a meeting where some participants were hearers only -- and later claim that they had no influence on the decisions made?

I am convinced that one should speak her truth, listen attentively to others -- even the dull and ignorant, for they too have their rights and convictions. If we are Prone to contrast ourselves with others, it is easy to become vain and bitter; envious or jealous. There are always greater and lesser persons than ourselves. "Be yourself," is both wise and practical advice.

Genuine sensitivity is the heart of dialogue and the Perfection of charity. "Do unto others as You would have them do unto You," Jesus teaches us. In fact, a wound of insensitivity takes time to heal because it is rubbed now and again.

What about differences in opinion? One example: change. Life is not static, but a community may sometimes be so. Some of its members may refuse to change from their present life-style because change can subject people to tensions: "What is this change

going to do to us?" Why do some religious conclude that tension, per se, is harmful? Change does call for a blend of humility, courage and strength -- and if these elements are missing or weak, then rigidity of mind and spiritual rheumatism may easily set in and immobilize those thus afflicted. Unless one moves along with the community ("goes with the flow"), she may very well experience friction, irritability, defensiveness and suspicion. Every new idea will be a daunting challenge; every new proposal a threat. How often does it not happen that we argue vehemently, only to discover suddenly that there was no real Point of disagreement.

Are we willing to confront one another? Conflict is an extremely difficult issue for most people living together. Many never learn how to handle it, and often see it, therefore, as wrong. When a community has commenced to deal effectively with conflicts, it moves into cohesiveness (sticking together). And when a social-religious group is cohesive, it discovers a sense of trust in and joy with one another. The members then show a great deal of sharing and tolerance, becoming more effective at decision-making.

THE JOY OF LIVING TOGETHER

Indeed, the ability to rejoice with my Sisters, spontaneously and intimately at their successes -- or to empathise with them in their failures or sorrows -- is a sign of my being truly a sister-Sister. Love unites. With a mere "companion," her victories or defeats may leave me relatively unmoved, one way or the other. I might be jealous of her successes or smug at her falls.

Take the example of relatives or close friends. At times they may do things of which we disapprove or be shocked at, and Yet we remain firmly attached and devoted to them. Where there is genuine love, we instinctively recognize and accept the difference between the Person and the deed. We find it easy, normal to continue loving them, even if we repudiate what they have done.

For some people, a stress-free life is their ideal, their goal. Although high-level stress and tension are regarded as injurious to one's psychological and Physical well-being, may it not also be true that an untroubled life leads to boredom and meaninglessness?

St. Bernard writes of our daily difficulties as:

- ...burdened with sin
- ...weighed down by our mortal body
- ...emerged in earthly cares
- ...drugged by carnal cravings
- ...blind, bent, infirm
- ...entangled in a web of error
- ...defenceless before a thousand dangers
- ...frightened by a thousand fears
- ...perplexed by a thousand difficulties
- ...subject to a thousand misgivings and burdened by a thousands needs.

In all these trials, Bernard sees us as destitute of sufficient power in our own virtues; mute before the harsh importunity of human destiny, when unaided by divine mercy. This incites us to pray, or ought to, and that is what God is looking for..."Without Me YOU can do nothing."

UNITY IN THE SCHOOL OF CHARITY

Dom Amandus de Tegelen

I am flattered by the Father General's invitation to say a few words to you, this is already a sign that I am lacking in humility. It seems to me, however, that this invitation rightly implies it: without a notable lack of humility, no-one could accept a limit of 10 to 15 minutes for so vast a subject as unity, even if it is reduced to: forgiveness and reconciliation, integration of differences and healing of wounds. Fortunately, I still have a little good sense which tells me to curtail the subject relentlessly.

In the first place, I want to speak to you more specifically of the **readiness to forgive**. One can never sufficiently stress the importance and the place of this disposition in the spiritual structure.

And, in the second place, how and why it can come about that differences can be destructive of development and unity.

Only readiness to forgive can open the path of healing and of unity.

The Gospel, the preaching of Jesus, gives an outstanding place to forgiveness, but not so much to asking pardon, to confessing one's faults, to making satisfaction, as to granting pardon, to being ready to forgive.

Readiness to forgive is the theme of the dialogue between Peter and the Lord. How many times should we forgive? The response, despite the oriental style, is clear: times without limit. In the prayer "Our Father who art in heaven" the Lord speaks more in our style. After "Give us this day our daily bread" he adds immediately: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". Give us today, forgive us today - each day, always - as we too forgive, - each day, always.

On this theme of forgiveness, of readiness to forgive, Jesus spoke many parables:

There is the parable of the master who forgives and the servant who is pitiless, the parable of the prodigal son, which is rather that of the father who forgives, of the son who receives the superabundant forgiveness, and the son who does not wish to enter into this feast of forgiveness.

There is the story of the sinful woman who washed the feet of the Lord: she gave much, and because of this, much is forgiven her. It is a lesson for the host. And, finally, the story of the adulterous woman.

Is there any other subject that has been treated so fully?

This should not surprise us. Fundamentally, the Holy Bible, the history of salvation, is a history of forgiveness. From the very beginning, God has always been ready to forgive. Forgiveness marks the difference between the history of the angels and the history of mankind. Thus redemption by the Christ is therefore based on forgiveness. God loved us, said S. Paul, when we were still sinners. To love is to be ready to forgive and to want to forgive, to take the first step towards perfect and complete forgiveness on the one side and on the other. We should not be surprised that Jesus paid such attention to forgiveness, to the importance of the role of forgiveness in Salvation.

Jesus does not recount edifying stories, but the reality of his own life. One could even say: his own personal defence. He eats with sinners, and because of this he is criticised.

Jesus was familiar with interior resistance to contrition, confession, conversion; but he was also familiar with interior resistance to forgiveness.

Before speaking of this interior resistance, I would like to say something about **differences**.

The differences in nature, in God's creation, the diversity, the variety are perhaps the most remarkable element of God's work. This richness gives praise to the Creator.

On the level of mankind, there are also differences of all sorts: of gender, of temperament, of character, of culture, of intelligence quotient, of ability... etc., etc.

On the plane of religion and spirituality, a man can place more emphasis on experience than on revelation: be more impressed by the vertical or by the horizontal, more attached to dogma or more attracted to devotion; he can be powerfully influenced by canon law, liturgy, eschatology, history, the social context, by interest in visions, apparitions and prophecies, or by the phenomenology of sacramental signs. These differences can be riches for a community, deepening the unity of a community.

I do not wish to treat here of these differences from the point of view of the persons themselves, nor from the point of view of the manner in which their preferences manifest themselves, be it aggressive or anxious, emotional or rational, welcoming and engaging or provocative and disapproving, nor from the point of view of the strength, the motivation, the craftiness, the ill-timed zeal of these persons. Nor do I wish to speak of these diverse conceptions in themselves.

What I have in view, my only objective, is **the other** who clashes with these differences, who won't let himself be enriched by them, who won't accept differences, points of view other than his own. With him, we return to our theme: the importance of readiness to forgive.

The Lord spoke of unforgivable sins: referring to sins against the Holy Spirit.

There is at least one more unforgivable sin: the sin against justice of those who consider themselves to be just and - obviously - are not. We are speaking here of the sickness of the "just ones" who declare unpardonable every offence, every criticism, every threat to their alleged justice.

Who is immune from the germs of this disease?

There is in us a source that gives us a certitude of our own justice. Interiorly, we are certain that God sees things as we see them; we see creation, redemption, religion, sanctity, all the things of God with the eyes of God. We bitterly defend our theological territory. Whoever threatens, shakes our conviction, commits an unpardonable sin against us.

In the catalogue of differences there are plenty of possibilities to threaten and shake this false conviction of our spiritual equilibrium, our stability in virtue, our maturity and the perfection of our theological edifice, to say nothing of our orthodoxy!

The "sickness of the just" is a great danger to unity. This danger, in the subjective order, is graver than objective differences of any kind.

This sickness creates a situation which is bad for the community, but much worse for the person who cannot or will not forgive this sin against himself. On the one hand - it has to be said - each one needs certitude, self respect, but the sickness of the just draws this certitude from a hidden source, difficult to discover and to unmask; and on the other hand, every path, every possibility of change is blocked.

In this situation the only way out, the only direct remedy is forgiveness, that is, to forgive the unforgivable sin. Perhaps reluctantly at first, not knowing that this is the road of humility, the hesitant opening of the long road of humility.

Forgiveness is the opening, the key, in psychology as in theology; truly, forgiveness of the unforgivable sin is the key to salvation.

Appeasing one's hunger each day, always, with the bread that is available at the moment, one must at the same time forgive each day, always, the unforgivable sin against oneself.

This is beneficial for oneself, for one's healing, for the salvation of the community.

In forgiving like this, one follows in the footsteps of God.

The way of conversion: humility, self-knowledge and good zeal

M. Benedict THISSEN – Berkel

S. Benedict mentions as a symbol for the way of conversion, the ladder on which Jacob in a dream saw angels descending and ascending. This ladder is our life on earth; the sides of the ladder are our body and soul. (RB 7: 5,6,8,9).

In chapter two I am often struck by the fact that S. Benedict emphasizes the main task of the abbot, namely: directing souls and serving a variety of temperaments; i.e. so accommodating and adapting himself to each one's character and intelligence that he will not only keep the flock entrusted to his care from dwindling, but will rejoice in the increase of a good flock. While always fearful to submit a reckoning of their souls, he becomes also concerned about his own soul, when that one is added as well. In eight verses 'directing of souls' occurs six times.

S. Benedict draws our attention to the whole person.

When someone enters he brings along with him his own story: his genesis up till that moment, his character. He brings along his emotions and feelings, which are strongly influenced by the household he belonged to, by his family and social background. He brings along his desires, his ideals and woundedness, there where he is alienated from himself. He brings along with him everything of his innermost unconscious, good and evil, cherished and forgotten matters, traumas and the inability not having adequately reacted towards those traumas.

All this substance enters the monastery with the candidate, nothing remains at the gate. This substance qualifies his behaviour in the community, his relations in the community, his reactions to the community. This is the life on earth of this particular person, the ladder of S. Benedict, that keeps its shape by the body and the soul.

This is the material and the subject of the way of conversion.

The one who enters is unconsciously looking for the lost paradise, the ideal family and the place which was his in that dream family. Father and mother are projected on the community. One takes the defence of traumas out on the relations with the brothers and sisters.

How many are there in our communities who suffer from a negative self-image, who suppress or deny their feelings, who refuse to develop their gifts and talents and flee in a spirituality, which is purely intellectualistic and not in touch with their feelings and inner reality. Who cling to the observances, which don't bring them to the gates of their inner world, but precisely block those very gates.

How much anxiety exists in our communities, which is hidden in every possible way or let go against the others, because the others trigger that very anxiety?

This is all subject and material for conversion.

The way of conversion is not situated on the moral level, which is a correction of behavior from outside and has no relationship with our real feelings and emotions, no relationship with our soul.

The way of conversion is not merely situated on the psychological level, where problems are tried to be solved and behavior is approached intellectually.

The way of conversion is not situated on the socializing level, which demands an external adaptation, which fosters strongly individualism, because a well-functioning group matters and the inner life is not taken into account.

What then is the way of conversion? Conversion asks a turn-about, a turn to inner self, to all that is going on in there and that is stored in there, a very patient and attentive listening.

Conversion is a steady listening to how we experience life really, a becoming aware of our real feelings and desires, a descent to that extensive space, that palace of my memories, which leads me to Him, who created me, as S. Augustine says in his Confessions (8:12). It is the way of becoming really incarnated, to be and to become this unique person I am called to be and to become. It is to pull out of oblivion the moments and periods in my life, where I started to react out of my false self, where I started to repress my feelings and my opinion to survive and where I became alienated from myself. Where I lost my contact with my soul, with the image of God in me. This is a way of deep humility.

I can only go this way in the light of the faith, of the fragile confidence that God asks this from me and that there is no other way. The light of the intuition, that tells me it will lead me beyond despondency and uncertainty to the image of God in myself, to the love of God poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

It is only possible to go this way of conversion when there exists a strong affective relation with the spiritual guide. An affective relation which is a gift and can never be made. Since there proves to be overcome so much shame, so much hesitation, so much fear and distrust in oneself before someone dares to admit and surrender those painful memories, that negativity towards oneself, those madmaking obsessive thoughts and fantasies, but also the experiences of light and the invitations of the soul and of God. They are only in reality admitted to the eyes of the soul when confided to somebody else.

The language of the body is here very important. Many of the physical complaints and problems are expressions of the soul to be heard, signals from the inner world that want to give up something which is hidden away. Can we again understand the language of the body? Jesus understood the signs in the body, He healed the soul and the body was to be again. Or, He maintained the infirmity like the thorn in S. Paul's flesh, in order that in this way God's grace would be revealed. Can the prevalent somatizing in our communities not be an invitation to richer self-knowledge in stead of feeling condemned to stand it as inevitable or to consult the many physicians and treatments?

Can it be that the invitation of S. Benedict to support with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body and behavior, just be intended to let grow the wheat and the darnel in the field of the soul?

The growth in humility consists in gradually and increasingly dwelling with oneself, with everything that lives in the inner self and so to become reconciled with all this. In this way the transformation-process takes place on every level of personality, also of the unconscious. Then it will happen what Jesus said to Nicodemus, that a person has to be reborn. Self-knowledge goes even further. It recognizes the talents, the invitations to full human life and to glorify God in this way. It assumes responsibility to be actually that unique person.

The good zeal applies itself to restore the link with everything the inner self wants to reveal. It uses lectio as a reading of its own life, it admits to be touched in the lectio in body and soul, open for what God touches in the inner self and reveals about ourselves and about Himself. It applies itself to the relations in the community and all that is happening there, to hear as messages of the Lord, as invitations to self-knowledge. It will give elbow-room to the others in the community, it will mention limits and bring them up, appealing to the real inner experience.

The bad zeal abuses the life in community, the relations, the observances by repressing everything that is coming up and by being deaf for it. It remains at the outward and the order of it, in order not to be appealed by the inner emptiness and chaos, which want to be touched by the outward matters. It abuses the monastic life to resist the inner-self and to hold out the alienation from oneself. To prevent the conversion and the Breath of God to hover the chaos calling forth new life.

The way of conversion insists on an integration of everything living in our inner-self. Also on an integration of lectio, prayer, work, speaking and keeping silent, to foster that listening to the soul with the ear of the heart.

Couldn't we be occupied in liturgy, symbols and arts in a more sensual and physical way to understand the signs (Cf. S. John). Couldn't we give a real place in our lives to creativity in earthly things, colour, material and nature to escape our cerebral reflections about monastic life and escape our speculative constructions, which only alienate us from ourselves and prevent us to hear the will of God. Our first Cistercian Fathers may teach us a lot about this and we should rediscover their writings on this point. I finish with a word of William of S. Thierry: the schola caritatis gives its solutions not by reasoning, but by the intuitive knowledge, by the very truth of the matters and by experience itself. (Haec est specialis caritatis schola;...[hic] solutiones non ratiocinationibus tantum, quantum ratione et ipsa rerum veritate et experientia terminantur. {De natura et dignitate amoris, n.31}).

PEDAGOGY IN THE SCHOOL OF CHARITY
Adequate formation in relation to culture and our time
Mère Geneviève-Marie of Echourgnac

To do the work of pedagogy in the School of Charity is:

- * to interest oneself in a **person** capable of receiving teaching,
- * to seek suitable means to reach the desired goal,
- * to be able to prove, by very specific criteria, that these means are good,
- * to lead this person to the full exercise of his **liberty** by definitive commitment.

This programme can only be realised in a given time and culture. It comprises :

- a pedagogy of initiation
- a pedagogy of transformation

1 - A PEDAGOGY OF INITIATION

The one who comes to the monastery gives proof of an inner force pushing him to leave a family, a career..., to knock on the door of the monastery, and to ask to enter in order to change his life. The pedagogue is led first of all to consider this force of the "*noviter veniens*", before discerning the motivations of the decisive acts he has just performed. It must be said that there is, at the start of monastic life, a force, a thrust, which has to be taken into account. Saint Benedict even counsels that the intensity and duration of this thrust should be measured, by being pushed to the maximum. How? By refusal! ... And if this term seems a little strong, it is only echoing the negation that appears in the first verse of chapter 58 of the Rule: "*Do not grant newcomers to the monastic life an easy entry*", to have true life, eternal life (Prol.17).

This first refusal may seem today rather symbolical, but it is not rare that the newcomer is sent away to wait for a longer or shorter time, that his liberty of choice might grow.

The first truly pedagogical act, the first educative action, is thus written into this barrier that has to be overcome. It is the first experience of purification for the newcomer to enter by the door of humility, of endurance, of patience... since the door of a school of charity cannot be other than a narrow door. The quality and the accuracy of this first contact seem to me important. There is already here a decisive and clear manner of entry into a new life, a pedagogy of initiation, one might say. It is necessary from the very beginning to make proof by trial. The newcomer is led to deepen his own questioning, perhaps to lose his assurance, to increase his intimate desire to follow the One who is calling him. This first refusal is, as it were, the blow needed to make his heart ring and to measure the resonances of his soul.

1. A PEDAGOGY OF TAMING

*** The experience of refusal**

This pedagogy of initiation is a pedagogy of taming. It is uncomfortable for the disciple, and even more so for the master who has the responsibility of adapting it to the person. He must play his first act with love, for only love can "tame" the person for Jesus. He must also have a positive and disinterested regard for the one who comes and who carries in his heart the Mystery of the God who dwells within him and calls him by name. As for the newcomer, he should allow himself to be received not with a blind and hardly constructive effusion, but by a purifying act which begins to make of him a disciple of the Master who is meek and humble of heart. This goes against the mentality of today which gives a blind importance to the emotions. These emotions, an essential part of the human being, have to be educated.

The novice thus finds that he is led from the beginning of his monastic life to discover that the school of the Lord's service is a school of charity where he cannot feel at first

completely at home. For this school of Love draws him and escapes him because it is the work of God; it stands by its transcendental dimension on which human weakness leans; it speaks of the Mystery of the alliance between what is of the divine and what remains poor and sinful⁽¹⁾.

* **The experience of distance**

After the experience of refusal comes the experience of distance. Taming needs distance of space and time. *"He should...stay in the guest quarters for a few days. After that, he should live in the novitiate, where the novices study, eat and sleep."*⁽²⁾ This distance can arouse in the newcomer a disappointment, since contemporary society cultivates immediacy in consumerism, in pleasure, it reduces distances to the point of fusion, even confusion. It is in this place of separation, the novitiate quarters, and taking the necessary time, that the determination he showed on asking to enter will be carefully tested.

This distance regarding time and place is also accompanied by a distance with regard to activity, to responsibilities and to relationships. The newcomer will learn to go through a period of mourning and to live this separation in a conscious manner⁽³⁾.

The one who persisted in knocking in order to change his life, will have to persist in living (in the true sense, since he is being led in a house) in distance and in waiting, actively working to know himself, through the various degrees of truth, until his request is well matured and conformed to the school of charity.

* **The experience of the need of grace**

- *What do you ask?*

- *The Mercy of God and of the Order.*

To ask for mercy is an eloquent act on the part of the one who has persisted up to now. This implies the path down into himself which distance and time have permitted... with the help of the formator. This implies appeals hurled at the Saviour⁽⁴⁾. It implies also the discovery of compassion as the basis of fraternal relations.

* **A senior and the Rule**

To enable this descent into the depths, the initial pedagogy proposes as means <<a Senior>> and <<the Rule>>.

Saint Benedict describes the pedagogue of the school of charity as being *"skilled in winning souls"*. Perhaps today we could translate this expression as: "skilled in relationships", a person who gives and inspires confidence, a watcher and a stimulator at one and the same time?

Alongside the senior, and inseparable from him, there is the Rule. The senior *"skilled in winning souls"* must also be <<skilled in making the Rule loved>>. Repeated reading of the Rule will play a part in this pedagogy of taming and will make of it a mirror of confrontation, a means of transformation and of confirmation.

2. A PEDAGOGY OF OBSERVATION AND DISCERNMENT

The pedagogy of the Rule gives an important place to observation and discernment: *"Let him examine carefully whether the novice is truly seeking God."*

* **Ad quid venisti?**

The being put to the trial at the start, the work of mourning, enable the heart to be sounded: where is the desire of the newcomer rooted? In the desert he is crossing, he begins to pose the crucial question which will resound at every stage of his life: *"Ad quid venisti?"* This questioning must reach the depths of the person, even down to the source of his being, like a plumb-line which, descending, cuts through the masks, sifting the components of the person: memory, will, affections... The pedagogue follows this descent, and the novice, by opening his heart, tries to express to him this new and sorrowful

journey that is being accomplished in the depths of his being. Normally, in the best cases, both have access to this treasure: God murmurs a unique name and awaits the response of a freedom. It is only at the end of the descent that master and disciple are able to declare authentic the search for God. Then they know something of the peace that surpasses all things: the certitude that it is truly God who has pushed the disciple to come and persist in his demand.

* **Eagerness**

But the search for God in this School of Charity should also be marked by specific criteria: an eagerness for <<*the Work of God, for obedience and for humiliations*⁽⁶⁾>>

It is this eagerness (and Saint Benedict is not content to speak of simple dispositions or predispositions) which little by little will give form to the novice.

II - A PEDAGOGY OF TRANSFORMATION

To consent to allow oneself to be educated, is to consent to receive one's FORM, that is to say, one's own Cistercian countenance, one's image-likeness of God. Now, the Form is Christ, who, according to the Hymn to the Philippians, being found in the form of God, takes the form of a slave. It is to Him that one must conform oneself in order to be transformed, partaking of his glory after having shared in his humiliation⁽⁶⁾.

1. CHRIST : FORM, FORMATOR, PEDAGOGUE

Our Constitutions are well aware that all the means necessary to live and remain in the School of Charity *"are not human skills, and cannot be learned from human masters."* (C.45, 2) Why ? because they give primacy to the experience of Faith, founded on the Christ and the Gospel which surpass all cultures. This is not an obstacle to monasticism since it permeates it through and through, even if in itself it is a reality lived within a culture⁽⁷⁾.

This profound view can only be written and rooted in the Resurrection of Christ who transcends place, time, modes of life and cultures. It seems to me that there is something analogous with the saying of Pascal : *"Man surpasses man"*.⁽⁸⁾

This pedagogy of transformation, if it would be "adequate" in relation to our the culture and to our time, must put the accent on **kenosis**⁽⁹⁾. It was clear to me that for the novices of whom I had charge, to live this aspect of the Mystery of Christ required at the same time the most necessary and the most costly effort. But the novice can only engage in this effort if the Father Master and the Community accompany him on this path of renunciation.

2. THE KENOSIS OF THE DISCIPLE

Why the kenosis ? Because it is the path indicated by Saint Benedict : *" We shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom"* (RB, Prol 50). This is all we have to let the beginner see, but all of it, without hiding it.

Another reason ? Because it was the way taken by all our first Fathers. *"The first lesson in this School of Charity will be Jesus Crucified, a lesson which will last all through life."*⁽¹⁰⁾

The young person who enters the monastery is put in contact with a formative milieu which enables him little by little to understand that he must become as empty, as obedient as God became for him, and at the same time discover the things that encumber him: not only the passions which plunge their roots deep in his heart, but also everything that he has accumulated through the surrounding culture, because it is above all with this culture of post-modernity that he is impregnated, this culture from which he now distances himself in order to make a choice, by learning to think of it as at the same time a partner and an adversary.

*** Confronted with simplicity**

He is confronted with simplicity, with renunciation. To pass from the company of the idols of having: money, comfort, consumerism, to a sober, ordinary, basic life-style, could bring about shock. The kenosis will enable him to operate this shift from having to being.

*** Confronted with suffering**

He is confronted with what has a taste of suffering: obedience, patience, renunciation of one's own will in all its forms, which seem to him intolerable, because the present culture rejects the cross and all that is negative (accident, illness, discomfort, conflict...).

*** Confronted with oblation**

He is confronted with oblation. He learns to seek not what is helpful to him, but what is helpful to another. Now, our epoch proclaims the achievement of the individual in the search for pleasure, emotions, well-being. The only sin would be not to seek pleasure.

It is only in renouncing this faculty of enjoyment that he can offer himself every instant to God, to the other.

In this real combat, which is painful, should we not then encourage the disciple to let himself be stripped, to say simply to God : *"Lord, take my spirit and my will, and purify them"*, teach him to call on the sweet hand of Mary ?

3. THE KENOSIS OF THE MASTER

More than anyone in the community, the Father Master is led to empty himself of himself

*** to become more interior**

*** to listen and to speak a word**

*** to discern**

not only what he should say to each one, but also what he should ask him; to recognise the moment when he should be patient and when he should make demands.

It is by emptying himself of himself that he will come to broaden his faculties of understanding, of adaptation, of creation, for it is impossible to enlarge the soul of another if one does not enlarge one's own. To transmit Life, one must first of all experience it oneself.

4. THE KENOSIS OF THE COMMUNITY

The community can only be formative if it welcomes in order to transmit what it has received and also what does not come from itself but from elsewhere. For life to circulate freely from one member to the other, we must have hearts of the poor, forged over a long period by the hard labour of hearing of the Word, of mutual obedience and of forgiveness. The transmission which comprises this giving-receiving comes through kenosis.

The welcoming community is confronted :

*** with the strangeness of the other**

*** with the questioning of the other**

*** with its own fragility**

The young person comes from a world so different from its own ! The work of the kenosis will be to abandon the "a priori", to try to understand, to have confidence, to recognise the values and the limitations of the young people and their culture.

In the last analysis, this welcome, this transmission, will result in a fraternal charity which reaches its culminating point in the ceremony of profession where the young professed sings his <<suscipe>> three times, to which the community immediately responds. We can receive one another because we have first been received by God. This is what is proclaimed at each profession : *"Receive me...into the School of Charity"* one might say. And to signify that this School is not a vague collective, but a communion of persons, of pardoned sinners, united to God and to one another, the newly professed kneels before

each member of the community, asks him to pray for him and embraces him. The kenosis of the disciple, the kenosis of the community open on to Communion. The newly professed may then become brother to all men, without distinction of time or culture.

1. *We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. (2 Co 4,7)*
2. Rule of Saint Benedict (58, 5)
3. As Fr. Armand VEILLEUX emphasises: *To go through this mourning... is of the utmost importance for the rest of monastic life...It would be a grave error to fill up these first days... with numerous activities... to "occupy" the postulants.* (Reflections on monastic formation, AIM Bulletin, 1995, no 59, p. 25)
4. *The spiritual master should lead the disciple to cry for help to Christ the Saviour. The novice must of necessity discover from his own experience the need of Grace.* (Father Charles DUMONT, *Sagesse ardente*, p. 308)
5. <<Humiliations>>being understood as humility of heart in the face of upsetting circumstances.
6. <<Transformamur cum conformamur>>: this expression seems to me to be the key to the doctrine of S. Bernard on formation. (C. DUMONT, *Sagesse ardente*, p. 318)
7. Cf. Dom A. VEILLEUX, *Culture et monachisme* (Canadian MRM, August 1992, Annex 6)
8. M. Jean Marie said this very clearly last year, at the beginning of her conference at the Canadian Region: *I think that an adequate formation to the cenobitic life, in relation to our culture and our time, would not be so different from that of every time, since it is essentially a question of depth, which is an invariable constant.* (Canadian MRM, August 1995, Annex 5)
9. The word KENOSIS refers us to the incarnation of Jesus (Ph 2) who took on himself the whole of humanity to divinise it. It expresses the foundation of our monastic consecration.
10. Father Charles DUMONT, *Sagesse ardente*, p. 275

PEDAGOGY IN THE SCHOOL OF CHARITY COMMUNICATION IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Dom Isidoro of Huerta

The subject you have invited me to talk about, **communication at the present time in our monasteries**, can be considered, not without reason, within the pedagogical framework of the school of charity that constitutes our communities. But like every pedagogue, it can be either good or bad. Consequently, it will depend greatly on how we understand and live communication at the moment of evaluating whether it is good or bad pedagogy, conducive to charity.

DO WE COMMUNICATE ?

This question seems rather obvious but the truth is that not everyone thinks the same way. As a life of silence and prayer as well as a community life are both essential in our vocation, we should not find it strange that we always encounter a certain tension when it comes to facing the subject of communication. Speech and silence, relationship with God and with our brothers, these are the two rails along which we move forward in our monastic life of the following of Christ.

Obviously, we do communicate! It suffices to glance over the House Reports of Poyo '93 and see that in the far greater part of them there is an expressed "mea culpa" because of excessive verbal communication. But well do we know that the problem lies neither in speaking nor in keeping silence, but rather, in knowing how to express ourselves in speech as in silence. The Abbot General reminded the Spanish Region last year that there are very boisterous communities in which there is no communication and there exist very silent communities with an authentic communion. Balance is the point towards which we must direct ourselves.

We see the need, therefore, of reflecting on what communication is for us, on how we go about it, what we are communicating, if we communicate **ourselves** or just simply communicate, what difficulties we encounter, and what it is that helps us.

WHAT DO WE UNDERSTAND BY COMMUNICATION?

When we speak of communication it may be that we do not always coincide on what we are talking about. Immediately, dialogue comes to mind; a dialogue that since the Council has changed the physiognomy of our communities so as to bring them into tune with the times in which it falls to us to live. But well do we know that communication is much more than verbal expression. It is the body language (gestures, attitudes, postures, conduct that is seen by the other) that contains a message. It is, consequently, an interpersonal relationship.

Neither is our style of communication free from the influence of the media of social communication that quickly inform us about everything that is happening without allowing time for reflection, and encourage a form of superinformed but superficial society wherein there are people who feel they are islands in need of being personally heard and welcomed.

This results in that not a few young people may enter our houses with a sincere desire to share their interior world. Nevertheless, we must take into account that in an eminently sensory culture, this increase in the desire to communicate oneself has one peculiarity: it stems above all from feeling, affectivity or emotiveness. It is a necessity to express what one feels and at the same time to find in the help of another the support which heretofore could be found with greater ease within one's self, in values accepted and shouldered and which at the present time are in crisis. Perhaps it is because of this that today we are more cognizant of the need for dialoguing or just speaking, while silence is regarded by the

young as a not well understood imposition. They need time to discover communication as an expression of communion.

Dom Ambrose Southey used to say a few years ago, when speaking of today's youth in our monasteries, that there is a noticeable esteem for prayer, but also a need for a process of purification. It is frequently noted that what many young people are truly looking for, consciously or unconsciously, is experiences or sensible manifestations of God or of the supernatural. In other words, they are seeking themselves and not God.

Something similar could be said regarding the need for communication. This also needs to be purified so that it not remain a mere desire for escape and affective compensation in a hostile world, "feeling" the acceptance of others, their company and support, instead of a giving of one's self and an acceptance of the other for himself.

Communication is to give something of self and to receive something of the other in order to share it. But we cannot transmit anything if we have not first entered into our own interior and in our inner sanctuary have communicated with our selves and with the Spirit of the Lord who lives there. If in our communities one does not live in love and out of love, there can be no true communication. Frequently, we spend our energy seeking out forms of communication without going to the essential, without first being clear as to what we want to communicate. If this is lacking our methods and reflections will be nothing more than a lovely garment adorning an abominable being; it frightens off anyone who is coming close. And perhaps in our blindness we keep on asking how this can be possible when the wrapping was so beautiful.

When our communication springs from love, community is lived not only as a means for personal sanctification, a school wherein we exercise ourselves in charity itself, but as a true presence of the love of God who makes us one in Himself. It is then that a three-way communication is achieved with the third person who is not a stranger to us but dwells within us. When we seek nothing other than our own perfection, and even more so if we do not seek it at all, authentic communication with one's brother i.e. the setting aside of self and the welcome acceptance of the other disappears, and what appears is our disfigured relationship with God, which at best is patiently to tolerate the other, to try to emend him, to have our own opinion prevail etc.,but there will never be dialogue and authentic communication from a spirit of faith.

Our union with God is prior to communion with our brother, although in this communion the union is accomplished and grows. This itself allows us to communicate with others with the solidity and liberty of our communion with God, that is, without being dependent on the positive or negative reaction of the other, but rather by transcending it, thus being able to make possible what on occasion may turn out to be impossible. It is the fruit of what our Fathers speak so much, to love Christ in the brother despite the not very attractive manifestations; it is to live the sacramentality of the community as the body of the Lord, the total Christ. It is not possible to enter into true communion-communication with God, if we do not open ourselves to communion with the brethren, the sacrament of His presence and of our union with Him. For this reason living in community affords us the great advantage of verifying the truthfulness of our communion with God.

Thus, our communication with the brothers is an expression of our "communication" of love and friendship with Him who called us to live together His mystery of love. In this relationship there is something beyond us, something that makes pedagogues of us even without our intending it, the spirit of the Lord who causes us to discover His love even in the negative attitudes of the brothers, impelling us to put love where there is no love, instead of succumbing to the negative manifestation of the other, the result of a passing bad mood of his. Seen in this way, communication is no longer a one-to-one thing, but something that concerns three as I have already said: the one who transmits, the one who receives, and the spirit of the Lord who gives light to both the one and the other. It is then that we are capable of communicating indeed, beyond the coherence or exactitude of what we are saying.

In the measure that a community opens itself generously to this dynamic of faith and openly talks about it, without any false shame - in this measure does true communication grow beyond whatever apt or inept forms of self-expression we may use. We all have the right to err; when all is said and done it is our condition - but we do not have the right to succumb by refusing to see things in the spirit of faith, by refusing to cherish the Lord in the heart of the community.

Actually, communication goes beyond forms of communication. Since it is life, it is fitting that we distance ourselves from its outer wrappings knowing, however, that we cannot prescind from it. What am I trying to say? When we discover and accept that we are not our manias and feelings that surface in us and which we cannot easily overcome, then we can better objectify our interior lived experience. This will help us discover that the same thing is happening in our brother and will enable us to be better prepared to grasp what he really is, the life that is his and which he communicates to us. It will also prevent us from confusing what he really is with those unfortunate expressions that we all have and, which though they manifest something of what we are, do at one and the same time conceal the deepest part of ourselves.

WHAT ARE WE COMMUNICATING?

Today we are experiencing a great need for communication. But it is precisely this "need" to communicate that determines the quality of communication. The desire to communicate-share an experience that one has had and integrated is very different from the communication of oneself out of a need to be listened to, to be taken into account, a need that springs from fear of one's own experience in the solitude of the heart. In the first instance we are capable of offering something of ourselves gratuitously; in the second, what really interests us is the positive response of the other.

In order to communicate one's self one needs to give something of self and to love the other. The angry or cutting expression communicates only my tormented interior state but it avails nothing towards growth in love unless it be developed by the listener from the vantage point of meekness, thus giving rise to peace in him who before did not have it.

I have seen brothers who communicate themselves bitterly. It must be said that instead of communicating they are manifesting their own anemic state because they are not revealing what they truly have within, nor do others listen to them as properly as they ought. I have seen brothers who are impetuous and even hard of character but who have a big heart and an interior life. It is curious how the community knows how to receive the message from both the one and the other, and this because communication is much more than words or forms. When we communicate ourselves we communicate life.

It costs us nothing to communicate what can be seen, what appears to the eyes of others, or what is obvious. Such does not commit us (work, news, etc.). It is the type of communication we most use. Nevertheless, what enters into the sphere of our feelings or intimate experiences we no longer manifest so easily. What is needed is an atmosphere of trust and friendship wherein one knows that he is welcomed by the other without more ado. In any case, it is easier to manifest past feelings than that which is happening in the present, or those feelings relative to the brother who is in front of me all day long. Some, especially among the young, would like more of this type of communication, but in reality it can occur only if a climate of unity and friendship has been created, and then this type of communication of self does increase communion even more; contrariwise, one runs the risk of promoting incomprehension.

We all know very well that the quality of communication in our communities does not depend so much on meetings or the possibility of dialogue as upon an intense lived experience of love and fidelity within the community. When this is present the community communicates, and communicates itself, simply because it has something to communicate; it has life.

HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE OURSELVES? DIVERSE FORMS OF COMMUNICATION IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

The types of communication in our communities differ. There is a form of communication that is lived and that does not always achieve expression. It is communication, the fruit of authentic communion. I give myself to the other and I receive him beyond signs or words. I feel I am united to the community and this transmits life. When contact with a community is first established, one senses something positive or negative which is outwardly transmitted and which is the fruit of the degree of communion, distinct from comradeship.

There is another type of communication accomplished by a multitude of wordless gestures. This kind is irremediably present in our communities, be it positive or negative because we are not solitaries but cenobites. Hence, even the one who separates himself from the community or lives a tense silence is already giving a clear sign that he is excommunicating himself. By means of these gestures and attitudes we communicate our interior world which we ourselves do not always succeed in knowing.

There is another type which is the direct one; it is between two brothers or it is that of the entirety of the community. The first has great possibilities because a true friendship can be cultivated. Both the one and the other reveal our personal human and spiritual quality and the experience that we have of the love of God which impels us to grow in the school of charity. If this is so, I wonder why it is that when our communities talk about the economy, plans, liturgies, work or one's neighbor, we expatiate so easily and when we touch a subject of a more spiritual cast we respectfully withdraw? It is true that to speak of our feelings makes us more reticent, but at times it is also a sign that our interior life is not so firm. Perhaps, as we noted before, what is needed is an adequate climate of trust that does not always exist.

We are also in need of an apprenticeship in communication by bearing very much in mind how we function at a psychological level (self image, feelings that the other may cause, expectations) but I am not going into that because it was stipulated that we should not concentrate on this aspect.

In general, I believe we can say that communication in our communities is as diverse as are the components which go to make them up. It occurs at a superficial level, but also at a deep one. Much depends on one's own interior experience and the atmosphere of communion existing in the community. Without any doubt, for a community to enter into spiritual depth is not very frequent, and yet we should hold to it as to a possibly attainable challenge. It is something towards which we all should strive for the proper enrichment of the community.

SOME 'MEANS' AT THE SERVICE OF THE SCHOOL OF CHARITY . . .

D. Yvon Moreau: N.D. du Lac

The French philosopher Alain used to invite his students to "reflect nearer themselves"... It is in this spirit that I choose to reflect nearer myself, nearer my own experience, nearer the experience of my community ... Not to make this experience a model, but to share it with you and to offer it to your own discernment.

Dom Bernardo asked me to develop the "means" used in the school of charity. Because of my limited experience, I will dwell on the second series of means proposed: hearing, dialogue and community discernment. In the first place, I will present some of the concrete forms these various "means" have taken in our community... In the second place, I will share some more personal reflections...

* * *

Three concrete forms of our experience...

Community Discussions:

- At different times during the year, not determined in any rigid manner, we meet to discuss one aspect or another of our community life.
- Our community is then divided into 4 groups, representing every age group, and animated by one of the members of the abbot's Council. The brothers stay in the same groups, as far as possible, and each group has a secretary. - At first, the discussion takes place in groups. Some of the brethren who have more difficulty in speaking in front of the whole community thus feel more at ease expressing their point of view.
- The following week there is a plenary session: either each secretary presents a synthesis of what has been said in his group, or there is a synthesis of what has been said in all the groups. Each brother has the chance to fill in if he thinks that his point of view has not been accurately presented in the synthesis.
- As a result of either synthesis, discussion takes place among all the brethren; there may be one or two moments of discussion like this in the plenary group.
- If the brothers of the abbot's Council are the animators of these groups, it is to assure a better follow-up to the discernments that have been made. For there is nothing more frustrating for a community than discernments that are not followed up. It is important to bring about and put into practice what has been judged good by and for the community, as a way of life and of growth.

Joint meetings of the abbot's Council and the business Council:

- In view of the fact that certain questions would become heavy and burdensome if they had to be discussed by all the brethren (and the more so since several in our community have difficulty in hearing), we choose to deal with these questions in joint meetings of the two Councils, thus assuring attention to monastic values and attention to the financial implications of certain choices.
- And so, in bringing about the 4 phases of renovation in our monastery from 1992 to 1995, and simplifying our material structure (more than 12 buildings have been demolished between 1991 and 1996), we first made the necessary discernments in the Councils.
- The arrangements made by the Councils were then presented to the whole community, who could ask for explanations and propose different points of view. If necessary, modifications were made in the arrangements presented by the Councils, then the required votes were taken by the members of the Conventual Chapter.

"Internal Visitation"

- Each year, I devote some time to meeting each of the community in turn. This meeting often focuses on one theme or another of our community life (e.g. weak and strong points in our fraternal life, our lectio divina), but each brother is free to bring up any subject he wishes.

- One advantage of this visitation is that it assures - at least once a year - a more serious and engaging encounter between the abbot and each of the brethren. It is also an opportunity, by the close listening to each brother individually, to bring to light more specifically, one situation or another which is a concern of several of the brethren: thus, at the "visitation" of 1995, the whole question of the reorganization of work in our community appeared as a priority.

I believe that between these three concrete forms of hearing, dialogue and community discernment, a certain form of "fraternal correction" also slips in, at least in a broad and indirect way. But I have to acknowledge that among us more specific "fraternal correction" is still an object of dialogue and of discernment... Its use in practice is still very hesitant!

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Brief personal reflections...

- Far more than an intellectual activity, community discernment is an act of charity... It implies listening, respect and love in each brother... It demands of each one an openness, a disposition of being ready to throw open to question one's point of view... How can one listen without loving, without giving one's brother's interest precedence over one's own ?

- Community discernment also demands prayer... It is good to notice that our ideas can change when we take time to pray about them, when we take time before God to allow the inessential to be sifted out from the essential...

- The fraternal climate of discernment is always more important than all the techniques that we are able to learn from human sciences...

- Techniques can serve the spirit, but they cannot give it... This spirit we receive from the Gospel, from the Rule of Saint Benedict, from the monastic tradition and from the Spirit who gives life to the body which is our community ...

- The Spirit can even discover with us new paths of dialogue and discernment, but techniques can never discover the Spirit !

- Our training for discernment is our fraternal life lived in the perspective of chapter 72 of the Rule of Saint Benedict. It is in the fraternal life led from day to day that it is prepared and given, as it were, imperceptibly... It is a discernment at the heart of life, the expression of, and search for, an authentic fraternal life; the expression of and search for communion in God and with God...

- This discernment will be carried out in "the truth of charity" and in "the charity of truth", as our Fathers loved to recall... For truth without charity would run the risk of oppressing, and charity without truth would run the risk of going astray.

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By way of conclusion...

In his chapter on calling the brethren to Council - a privileged place and moment of listening, of dialogue and of discernment -, Saint Benedict declares: "After hearing the advice of the brethren, let the abbot ponder it (*"apud se"* according to the latin text) and follow what he judges the wiser course." Saint Benedict points a finger to the true climate of freedom that should predominate during this whole process: freedom of the abbot with regard to the advice of the brethren, and freedom of the abbot with regard to himself, inasmuch as he himself is one of the brothers of the community...

Here, my conclusion leads me to make a confession... Thanks to the remarks of my brethren, thanks to the light shed by our two Visitors, Dom Etienne and Dom Olivier, last February, I had the shock of discovering that, as abbot, I had one more brother in the community: brother Yvon... and that he wasn't necessarily the easiest to silence ! ... Of course brother Yvon has the right to be heard among all the other brethren, but he has no more right than they to impose his point of view on the abbot ! ...

Beyond the forms that listening, dialogue and discernment can take among us, abbot and brethren, we are guided by the Spirit who frees us from our chains... It is he who will make us capable of listening and receiving the word in truth and charity, if we know first, personally and as a group, how to place ourselves in the disposition of listening to him... It is he who speaks and works through each brother... It is he, the Spirit, who builds up and animates our community , by discernments faithful to Christ and to his Gospel !