

## RE-FOUNDING THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY!

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

### *Anxiety*

#### **In between the beautiful dream and the mediocre reality!**

The beautiful vocational dreams often smash against the prosaic reality of our community life. The religious communities where we live do not respond to the ideal of religious life which we bring within ourselves. With the passing of time, we are resigned and we become accustomed to a tolerable mediocrity which reminds us about the "neither cold nor hot" of the Book of Revelation (Rev 3: 15-16). Those who try to improve the communitarian lifestyle usually encounter a lot of difficulties and obstacles. The communities where the members are older, usually remain attached to the customs and traditions and have no desire of changing. The younger communities attempt perhaps to introduce changes which are interesting, but, as they lack profundity, often times become a failure.

#### **What is happening to us? What can we do?**

Things should not be this way. Among all the places in which we should feel at home, the first one should be our own community. The place of difficulty, martyrdom, and suffering for us missionaries of the reign of God, is the place where we carry out our mission. The sufferings that Jesus had to face were coming from his enemies, not from his friends. The community was for Jesus of Nazareth the place of encounter, of rest, of preparation in order to confront later on the hard reality of his mission.

I cannot resist to mention, already at the beginning of this reflection, the affirmation of Psalm 133:

*How good and delightful to see  
Brothers living together in unity!  
It is like precious oil poured  
Upon Aaron's head,  
Running down his beard  
Onto the collar of his robes.  
It is like the dew of Hermon  
Coming down the mountains 'of Zion,  
Where the Lord confers his blessing:  
Life everlasting.*

The union among the brothers and sisters, living together, is a beautiful sight. It is the Spirit pouring itself down, anointing, and consecrating. It is as the dew that fecundates and blesses everything so that life will sprout. When there is charity and love, the community is the house of God. The space in which all of us try to build "a community of one heart, one soul and everything in common" is really wonderful (Acts 4:32). Practically all our Constitutions exhort us to build day by day this joyful and blessed reality of the fraternity, sorority.

Is it possible that this dream will come true? Or do we have to resign and embrace the cross? Is radical change and re-foundation of our religious communities possible? Of course, it is possible! Now is the appropriate time. This reflection is an attempt to say "no" to the resignation and "yes" to the possibility of giving a new impulse to the communitarian re-foundation. It tries to be a "no" to the easy optimism and a "yes" to the patient hope. A "no" to our thinking that, if we obey, everything is resolved; and a "yes" to the processes which implicate everybody and that, by implicating everybody, we are able to dream impossible dreams in order to arrive to the unpredictable *J.M.R. Tillard* .

### **From communion to community- an excellent path!**

The community is the fruit of communion. It is obvious that we are not dealing here with community as a juridical institution. A juridical house-community is instituted once and for all and is regulated by laws and internal structures. In contrast, a community which is the fruit of communion is always in a process of growth. It is as a living organism which easily could pass from one state to another: from harmony to lack of balance, from health to sickness, from peace to war, from tranquility to madness. The community, then, is a fragile and vulnerable being that all the members have given birth to and which is threatened with death by the same founding members.

The bonds and relations of communion keep the community alive and maintain it in a constant process of growth. To keep bonds of relations and communion, however, is not easy. When we relate with others, we relativize our own reality. We relativize our opinions, feelings, our convictions, our well-being and our self-affirmation. To relativize ourselves is the path to enter into a communitarian network: it is to complicate and implicate our lives. The soloist in the choir is concerned with himself and his show. However, the one performing part of a choir or a group has to renounce his own exclusivity and individuality to become part of the whole.

To enter into communion is not an easy task, especially in a world as ours where there is so much emphasis on the right to be different, to have one's own culture, to choose one's own religion, and to vote for the political party of one's preference. The communion of the plurality is enormously rich, and yet, it is also something extremely difficult. It is true that in our society this is attempted among business enterprises and political groups, and in the concert of the nations. It has taken a long way and a lot of dialogue for different political ideologies to reach an agreement for a common Constitution or Magna Carta or in deliberating on a law that affects to everyone!

The marvel of the community does not emerge without relations of communion, without mutually relativizing ourselves. Jesus, not only recommended but he commanded us: "Now I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13: 34-35).

### ***Framework: Communitarian bio-diversity***

#### **Above all, we must affirm the diversity!**

The communion among us is difficult for the simple reason that we are different. The Holy Spirit is the cause of this holy and blessed diversity. Besides the common traits shared with humanity. there is in each one of us a mysterious individuality designed by the Abbá, through

his Word and his Spirit. The Spirit is the source of so much diversity "The Spirit reveals his presence in each one with a gift which is also a service for others (1 Cor. 12: 2ff).

Our God, a Trinity of different persons, wants us also to be united. There is the diversity of gifts, but the Spirit is the same. There is the diversity of ministries, but the Lord is the same. There is the diversity of works, but the same God works in all" (1 Cor. 12: 4-6). St. Paul uses the allegory of the body to speak about the Church. Though the corporal unity is very important, the distinction, individuality, and autonomy of each member is not less important: "The body has not just one member, but many" (1 Cor 12:14).

At times we strive too much to achieve unity. Because of this, we do not give enough time to discover and contemplate on this amazing diversity. We cannot draw a colored painting if we are unable to distinguish and appreciate the diversity of colors. We cannot form a polyphonic choir if we do not learn the different voices. The perfection of the individual is to the advantage of the whole. The search for unity is corrupted when unity is not the result of the co-relation among all the members, but rather the result of the imposition of a few. Chesterton used to say with a lot of sense of humour: "At the end, they become one, but I ask myself, which one of them?" Communion is not submission of everyone to the will of one person, but rather the unity of all the free wills of the members. "If all were the same part where would the body be? There are many members and one body" (1 Cor. 12:19).

We must give full respect in our religious communities to the diversity and the differences. We must give space so that every brother or sisters would be able to be himself/herself and would not be forced to renounce the uniqueness with which one was created. We may complain to the creator who made each brother or sister in that way, but never to the concrete person or to the community. Perhaps, we should lament our lack of understanding, our ignorance, and our intolerance of differences.

The first step towards the building community is to recognize and respect the diversity and differences of the others. Failure to do so would result in a community built upon sand:-a community with a face which is not its own. It remains internally unbalanced and disintegrated without true unity. Everything in this community is false and unauthentic.

### **The levels of bio-diversity and of communion**

Let us dwell for a while in contemplating on the diversity, or rather, bio-diversity that characterizes us. This would help us understand diversity better, respect the differences, not feel hurt due to differences of views, and learn to live together with those who are different from us.

Each one of us is a complex reality made not only of spirit, soul, mind, and animated body, but also of animal, vegetal, and mineral dimensions. We take minerals for nourishment. In our body there is a "vegetative" dimension that functions in the same way that the vegetal does. We are also characterized by an "animal" or zoological dimension: we, often feel and react like the way the animals would.

As a garden of stones: Not everything that happens among us is due to our good, bad or indifferent free will: there are reactions which take place in the sphere of the pre-conscious and the pre-voluntary. It is for this reason that often we speak of "good or bad chemicals" among us. There are persons who in the face of certain situations immediately "explode". In others, we discover involuntary processes of increasing depression, loss of vitality, or spirituality. Each one has his or her unique chemical complexity. Some people

need to eat one kind of food, others another type; some prefer air and ventilation, and others the enclosure.

**As a field with trees or as a garden:** We discover ourselves also as a forest planted with many kinds of trees, or as a garden with many kinds of flowers and plants. The trees are totally exposed to the elements and they obtain their energy from the earth, from the air, water and from the surrounding atmosphere. Our bodies too are also fields of energies nourished by everything that surrounds them. In our communities, like different trees, we share a vital space, the same earth but remain unique. The acceptance of vegetal diversity leads us not to demand too much and to become aware that "in variety there is pleasure".

**As a singular zoo:** There is also within us an animal bio-diversity. Each one lives his/her own animal dimension in different ways, within the common condition of human species. We are constituted by the zoological principle. Because of this, we say that some people are "like cats and dogs"; of others, the "boss of the herd", "rapacious", or "parasites". We call Jesus the "gentle lamb" of the "lion of Judah". Jesus called Herod, "a fox" and his disciples, "little lambs". In our society there are "loading animals", "ferocious lions", "doves" and "hawks". With a sense of humour, we could say that our community is like a zoo.

**The spiritual community- "under the gaze of the other":** The psychological, mental, spiritual bio-diversity is the one that characterizes us most. The world of the soul and spirit makes us more mysterious and unpredictable. In each one of us sparkles the flame of the spirit, a unique sensibility, a mysterious world of affection, love, dreams, fears and complexes. Each one of us is a free being, endowed with conscience and eternal life. We have access to our intimacy only through symbols and progressive relations of empathy.

We live in our own body, however, and we begin our existence under the gaze of the other.<sup>1</sup> Without existential communion, life in common extinguishes itself. All of us are born twice: in nature, we are born to life and in society, we are born to existence. It is true that we are animals, but not only that! We search not only for pleasure, but also and above all, we search for relationships that give security to our existence. We long for relationship - love, warmth, and recognition-, not for material benefits that the relationship could give us. The gaze of the other that recognizes us, is like oxygen of the soul and air we breath.

"No punishment could be conceived as diabolical as, if this could be physically possible, to be abandoned in the society and to go unnoticed by all the members of the society."<sup>2</sup> This is the situation of those who are marginalized and excluded. The poor ones are those no one take notice: "The poor one comes in and goes out without being noticed and, in the middle of a crowd, finds himself in the same shadow that he finds when he is in his hut."<sup>3</sup> Old age is not only a decrease of our vital forces, but of our existence also. Its main cause is the increase of solitude. Victor Hugo used to say, "I started dying due to solitude". Our existence could die even before our life is spent out.

Life in community is a way of living always and constantly under the gaze of the others. It is a permanent form of existential life. The communitarian problems emerge precisely when

---

<sup>1</sup> The child searches for the gaze of the mother not only so that she will take care of his nourishment or self-affirmation, but because the gaze of the mother contributes and is an indispensable complement: it confirms the child in its existence... As if they would know the importance of this moment, though generally this is not the case, the father, mother and child can look at each eyes for long time; this action would be completely exceptional in adulthood, when a mutual gaze for more than ten seconds could only mean two things: that both are going to fight or that both of them are in love'. T. Todorov, *Life together*, Taurus, Madrid.

<sup>2</sup> W. James, *Principles of Psychology*, I, New York 1904.

<sup>3</sup> A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral sentiments*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976.

this existential prerequisite is not present and when the relations operate only in an animal, vegetal and mineral level, when we are not living any longer under the gaze of the others. At that moment we feel ourselves marginalized and excluded.

**The nostalgia of the infinite and the experience of "being unfinished":** The existential communion satisfies all the demands of communion that we detect in our being. The experience of being incomplete and unfinished brings us to long and desire much more than, in reality, we human beings can give to each other. The mutual recognition, to live and grow under the gaze of the other is frequently insufficient. We need to be recognized by God himself, to feel ourselves justified by his grace, and to know that we are united with all because of him. The spiritual dimension is for us the most mysterious. It is expressed in the ideas, in the feelings, in the dreams and utopias, in the constant creativity. The communion in this sphere is inexhaustible, always longing for more. It is never totally satisfied. There is within us an infinite thirst that is never satisfied and that makes us feel always in need of more. This incompleteness places us in front of the nostalgia of the infinite. The nostalgia of the Spirit nourishes in us a constant search. This is precisely the reason for the existence of our religious community: to place us in the threshold of the infinite.

### *Con- Vocation*

Men and women religious, with all the Christians, but especially from the perspective of our own vocation, are called to live in communion, not only in the mineral, vegetal and psychological or spiritual dimension, but also in the mysterious and transcendent dimension.

#### **The "divine" which indwells in us**

Jesus prayed that we all "will be one" as He and Father are one, and that was the will of Jesus who called us for mission (Jn.17: 11b19). He came to "gather into one the children who were scattered" (Jn.11: 52).

We were created for love. But, unfortunately, something went wrong and love disappeared from human relations. The original sin and our personal sins diminished and blocked love and friendship. Every dream about love is affected by human limitations and by the contamination of the evil one.

Jesus came to redeem us from sin. He could say in all truth: "I am Love", "the one who has seen me has seen Love." The journey followed by Jesus is paradigmatic when we want to understand how to redeem and heal our sick fraternal love. Jesus' journey was a path of forgetting himself and total donation to others without conditions. Jesus showed us that the path towards communion and fraternal love passes through the cross, the self-abnegation as an individual in order to affirm the other as a person.

Jesus not only gave us an example, he also intercedes before the Father, even today, so that we will be preserved from the evil one and be able to live in love. He sends us his Holy Spirit. He pours out in us the gift of the divine Love. As we are integrated in his Body; the Love of this Body, the Spirit of His Body flows through us. In the Body of Jesus, in constant growth, we also grow in love. Our charisms are transformed into grace and service for all the others. Our charisms build the Church, develop the Body of Christ, enrich and make it beautiful. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. We partake in the same sap, in the same life, in the same love. Inserted in him, we produce abundant fruit.

Our religious community is the conscious expression of this mysterious and sublime reality. To be aware of it is a source of hope, of intimate joy. This is the ultimate reason for the existence of our religious community. For this reason, it is so beautiful to contemplate together before the Lord Jesus in the chapel, in the Liturgy of the Hours, and, above all, in the celebration of the Eucharist. How wonderful it is to contemplate together around the table, being grateful to the Abba for all the gifts with which he is nourishing us! How beautiful it is to contemplate with the community dispersed in mission, but united in heart and in the common missionary project!

### **To live the love of the Covenant- community of discipleship**

We live in community because we have been called by Jesus to follow him and to share in his mission together with the others. In this following, the Gospel is our supreme rule and it is the parameter of the community in every moment. Like the first Christian community of Jerusalem, we too will be living by the Gospel when we live in love, in the Covenant.

The commandment of love demands from us to love God, whom we cannot see, "with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength (with everything we are and have)". This principal commandment becomes true in us when we love our brothers or sisters we see, "with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength." The result of this is "to have only one heart and one should share everything in common" (Acts 4:32).

Jesus tells us, as he told the Twelve, "To you who listen to me. I say Love! (Lk. 6:27). This love has to reach out not only to our friends but also to our enemies to the unknown to the bad ones. It has to be also the love of the stranger- an inclusive love. The men and women disciples have to love in such a way that they control their wrath (Lk. 6:29). They are patient in the face of hurts and ill treatment (Lk. 6:27). They answer with gentleness to the calumnies (Lk 6: 29.31). They are respectful of the adversaries and manifest mercy and gentleness to them (Lk 6:28). They must even be ready to sacrifice of themselves. When the disciple of Jesus loves in that way. he becomes perfect as the Heavenly Father is. as Jesus is. The Abba is full of mercy and compassion. and so is Jesus (Lk 7: 13). The disciple has to be also compassionate and merciful, so that like the Samaritan he will be able to feel in his guts the shock of love.

### **If the Lord does not build the house**

The religious community is not the result of a good organization or direction, neither of our potentials and initiatives: it is the work of God. In our religious communities indwells a mystery that we can call: the force of the Gospel. the utopia of the reign of God! In any of our religious communities, even in the poorest in human resources, this mystery could be detected. Our community is not what we want the community to be, rather what God, who has called us together wants it to be. To allow God to be God in our religious communities is to discern and welcome the dream of community which he is offering us and. because of this, to renounce our own dreams of community.

The reunion of our separate brothers and sisters is not the result of our efforts of reconciliation: it is a gift for which we must always open our hands, waiting for it to come from God. The one who feels bad in the community, has to be open to the grace of God which could arrive at any moment and will make possible what humanly speaking appears impossible.

## ***The Difficult Communion***

A religious community in which everyone is too specialized in which there are no collective goals, gradually becomes an eccentric and unbalanced group, a collectivity of lonely persons, a grand reserve of personal interests. When the group has common goals. When there is a vision for a common project, "circles of understanding" emerge with care and concern for the other members of the group and the members become aware of the needs of each other to which everyone should attend.

### **Love is the first and the most necessary gift**

The only interior force we have at our disposal in order to enter into communion is love which may also be spoken of as "charity" or even "friendship". The charity (Mk 12:29-31) has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5) and it builds our communion. The one who loves, takes upon himself/herself the sufferings of his/her brothers or sisters (Mt 8:17), gives rest to those who are tired or burdened (Mt 11: 28-30), takes care to keep his heart always full of compassion and humility; feels himself/herself as a family with all those who follow the will of God (Mt 12: 50; Mk 3:35; Lk 8:21), becomes a friend to all, and loves and gives himself/ herself up to others (Gal 2:20).

Saint Paul mentions charity very often in the context of prayer.<sup>4</sup> It is obvious that he wants to teach us that we cannot buy charity- love ("If someone would offer all his possessions to buy love, he would be despised" (Song of Songs 8:7). and that we can only beg for it. "Charity comes from God the Father (Eph 6:23). "Love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit" (Gal 5:22). "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us" (Rom.5:5).

### **Reasons to love our brothers**

Our perception of the good side of things and people develops love in our hearts. When we are not able to perceive the positive and lovable side of people, our love is forced and unauthentic. Our inability to see the lovable side could be due to the fact that we lack the proper perspective to see it.

**Because the person who carries image of God is worthy of love:** We can love our brothers and sisters because there is an authentic lovable dimension in them, in spite of every thing: in each one of them the image of God is present! They are the image and reflection of God (2 Cor. 3:3.18).

The greatest wealth of each of our communities and of our Institutes, are the persons. Each one is valuable and unique. The doctrine of the Church affirms that the original sin was unable to destroy in each one of us the image of God, though the sin corrupted it.

The one who contemplates with sacramental eyes on his brothers or sisters will be able to see in them a lovable zone, and it will not become very difficult to love the goodness of the person. No one likes to be loved as an obligation and it is, even, impossible. Love emerges as a grace, as a surprising event. Saint Thomas Aquinas used to say that God loves us by "making us loving persons." And John of the Cross says, "And your grace gradually impressed your eyes in me." God loves the grace and kindness that he creates in us and discovers in us. This capacity of creating has also been given to us. "The one who believes you, creates you." A

---

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tess 1 :2-3; 2:12; 2Tess 1 :3; 2 Cor 13:11-13; Col 1: 3-4; Film 4-7; 14-19; Phil 1:9.

person could start being born again under our gentle and loving gaze, our trust, and our kindness. Love emerges, as a gift, from contemplation and leads to contemplation, because it allows us to see the persons with other eyes.<sup>5</sup> A gentle gaze is also creative. No one should be considered as a lost case. No one should be denied our word, our credibility and trust.

**Because the person is a member of the Body of Christ:** A second reason that should motivate us to love our brothers or sisters in the community is that we all form only one Body. Those who are bonded in Christ Jesus form one Body with him: "because we are members of his Body" (Eph 5:30), and no one has ever hated his own body. To understand and to experience this reality is a gift of the Spirit. Frequently our vocational experience, both Christian and charismatic, is fragmentary. We feel more the vocation than the "con-vocation"; we feel ourselves more as members than as a body. The individualism of our times accentuates this situation. To have the experience of the Body of Christ is a grace of the Spirit, and it is a grace of contemplation. It is to discover that we are the images of God, "images according to the Image, which is Christ Jesus," being Church. This is the gift that Paul received in his way to Damascus: Jesus was identified with his community!

We should never hate or exclude or give up all hope with regard to anyone of the members of our body. If we give space to and liberate him/her within the body, this will benefit the whole. Perhaps, they might need certain motivation to integrate within the organism; but if we manifest a special care, as what we do when we have a broken arm, we will be able to recuperate them.

**Because love overcomes everything:** The internal law of God is love. This is also the law of those called to be his living images. Without love we degrade ourselves, we lose our capacity of immortality and to live forever. One who does not love, remains dead. This internal law motivates us to love even in the most difficult and contradictory situations. One who develops a deep love-friendship with Jesus and feels himself/herself bonded with him, perceives within himself/herself, in his own consciousness, the law of the Spirit which seduces the entire being to love with all consequences, even when love appears impossible.

### **A love which implies all the virtues and builds the community**

Certain important attitudes contribute to the building up of the community: humility and charity in word, friendship, not judging, mutual forgiveness, and being conciliatory.

The word is a great mean of communion and communication. Humble words full of charity contribute "to warm fraternal relationship. Communication occurs when now words transmit not only ideas, but also feelings. Arrogant words become unbearable. And arrogant persons can never build communion. The arrogant and proud person neither opens his/her heart nor communicates his/her inner self and becomes isolated.

**Friendship** grows when there are warm and deep relationships among brothers and sisters. The one who told us, "I do not call you any more servants, but friends," demands that all of us would be able to affirm the same thing in relation to our brothers or sisters in the community. Friendship is a gift of God which is sown among us and which we should cultivate, never preventing its growth. It is diabolical to create enmity and discord in our communities.

---

<sup>5</sup> "Religious community is in itself a theological reality, an object of contemplation: as a family united in the name of the Lord is by its nature the place where the experience of God could be attained in fullness and be communicated to others" SCRIS, *Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life*, n. 15.

**Not judging:** To think badly about other people, implies a very low vision of the human person, because a person is not only what he is now, but also what he will become. No one has appointed us judges of our brothers or sisters: "Do not judge and you will not be judged" (Lk. 6:37). Christian hope leads us to hope everything, "because for God nothing is impossible," and because "love hopes for anything." The excommunication coming from the heart makes communion impossible and reveals a great deal of self-sufficiency, arrogance and anti-gospel pharisaic attitudes. We are not angels but human beings: we are spiritual, but also animal, vegetal and mineral. With many stones we can prepare a beautiful garden (as in Kyoto); with different kind of vegetal we can have a green garden; and with different animals we can have a new world where the lion and the lamb are together, and child plays with the viper without any harm.

**Mutual forgiveness:** we are a community of sinners called by Jesus. He knew that we would offend each other often, and for this reason he demanded from us to "forgive each other seventy times seven times" (Mt 18:22).

### *Let us Re-Pound the Community!*

#### **To welcome generational and cultural differences or "the what"**

It is necessary to help our communities to:

- Awaken the awareness of their inner culture and its influence on the community (cultural differences, geographical origins, and generation gap).
- Increase the awareness of the need to change attitudes when there are members in the community who come from other cultural backgrounds or when one is working among peoples of other culture.
- Recognize and appreciate the experience of each person (those coming to or have been in the community for many years), especially the feelings of confusion, uncertainty and fear.
- Discover and initiate a healing process of the wounds and failures of the past.

When we are aware of the cultural and generation differences, it is possible to start working on community building that is a serious pending task among the religious. This is a type of work that demands asceticism, to be in line with the Gospel, and faith and conversion and in this regard, our communities need a sort of therapy and re-education:

- To deal with attitudes and behaviors preventing effective intercultural communication (stereotyping, prejudices, racism).
- To orient the willingness of the community towards cultural change through processes and means that will help the community to become truly a multicultural community where members from different cultures can live and grow together following the spirit of the Gospel and the charism of the Institute.
- To develop a language that can be understood by all the members and that integrates all the cultural differences.

- To promote relationships equipped to address the demand for constant dialogue.
- To reduce anxiety and to learn how to deal with the confusion created by our lack of preparation to deal with cultural sensitivities. To enable the members who suffer different forms of discrimination and cultural alienation to deal with their situation and initiate a process of reconciliation.
- To help the members, especially the newcomers, to change their ethnocentric and cultural-relativistic attitudes and be more open to others.
- To make a serious revision of our documents on mission, programs of formation, structures of government, styles of leadership, and other aspects of the communitarian life from the perspective of the challenges coming from the inter-cultural reality.

### **To create circles of hospitality or "the how"**

Circles of hospitality are those corners where we feel listened to, welcomed and secure and where the members of the community can communicate with each other with security, trust and freedom. However, the atmosphere of lack of trust where no one feels secure and there is a lot of mistrust is a frequent observation!!

When we the intelligence, integrity and good will of a person, when we psychologize the points of view of the other, and complain of the other's lack of openness and being fixated in a particular manner of thinking, when we suspect that the person is hiding something important from us, we become gradually disassociated from this person.

To believe that all of us are sons or daughters of God, baptized in Jesus, consecrated by the Spirit and committed to the Gospel to serve our brothers and sisters, gives us a great sense of security.

Many times, we may find ourselves unable to understand why certain persons maintain certain attitudes. However, we have committed ourselves to listen to their stories and to understand in a better way their own perspectives. At the deepest level we give them our trust and put aside our doubts about their motivations: we see in them brothers or sisters who try to walk the path of truth. Without this level of trust, communication is practically impossible.

The circle of security has to be transformed into a circle of hospitality. We accept each other as brother and sister in Jesus. We recognize that all of us are sinners and full of imperfection, and at the same time that we are trying to be faithful disciples of the Lord. The root of the word "discipline" has to be understood as the art of being a disciple. We are in a great need of learning from one another.

A very important aspect of hospitality is that the gesture of welcome is truly effective when the one who is being welcomed experiences this gesture as a real welcome "for him". In other words, the welcome has to signify something for the one who is welcomed, not only for the one welcoming. To experience this welcome is similar to experience the grace of God. As believers, we try to create an atmosphere where the grace of God could be experienced.

Circles of security and hospitality are also listening-circles. In order to understand how these listening-circles work, it is necessary to remember the fundamental rules of communication. But we will not deal with this matter.

## **Steps towards the re-foundation of our communities**

Our small community, fruit of relations of communion, is something that cooperates towards the betterment of the great society, our Church, our Institute. Our communities need a new face, to be places of peace, joy and creativity. This is a new way of being a religious community. This is a call for community re-foundation.

The steps towards this profound renewal of our communities could be the following:

Let us inaugurate our community! Let us build it up as a community chosen by God. Let us project it to the utopia, to the mission. Let us prepare its nativity and celebrate it.

The community is inaugurated with a serious community project. In this project are the names of all the members. All the persons in the community are recognized as members of full right, chosen by God, followers of Christ, anointed by the Spirit.

Let us have extra care for the roots of the local community! Let us evoke its history, the persons who constituted it before us. Let us value its geographical establishment: the place where it is located and the streets surrounding it. This space is very important. It has to become a bio-topos, a place of new life.

Let us contemplate on our neighbors, the houses surrounding us, the human communities with whom we share our space, the city in which we are placed. All these aspects have to be integrated in our project.

Let us make everything possible to create a collective "I", and a "we" in which all our differences are assumed and integrated and no one remains outside. Let us struggle for the beauty and harmony of the whole with our most powerful weapon which is love. Let the fundamental rules will the participation of all, respect for all, and the search for mutual friendship. (Automatically, Jesus will appear in the midst of this community).

Let us take a measurement for the house with all its rooms. Let us fill it up with life and austere beauty. Let us make of it our dream "habitat", our home. Let us bless each room, each hall, each office and corridor. Let us place at the center the Indwelling of our God, the tabernacle, the Place of Encounter. The corner which is not "my house", which is prohibited or close to me, is deprived of the beauty of the common house.

Our house should not be an inaccessible fortress, but space for the hospitality and encounter, a house of welcome, a house with open doors. Let us create an atmosphere of playful celebration where we celebrate the gratuity and fill our time: feasts, rests, and celebrations with meaning. Our community must be able to express itself with a sign, a symbol, or an image.

## ***Conclusion***

Albert Camus raised one of the most painful and emotional questions of our times: "How can I feel at home?" Many people today are searching for a home in the community, or to have a community where they feel as their home.

Our beautiful dreams can become true. Let us convert and believe the good news.

This is possible, thanks to Jesus who came to live among us and went back to prepare a home. Thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ!

\*\*\*\*\*

FR. JOSE CRISTO REY GARCIA PAREDES, CMF is a Claretian Missionary, a renowned theologian, a Mariologist and an expert in Consecrated Life. He is presently the Director of the Theological Institute of Religious Life in Madrid, Spain.

He has authored a series of books on Religious Life as a Parable of the Kingdom, on Mary and the Reign of God, and on the Theology of Religious Life in a Post-Modern Era.

He is a celebrated speaker of Consecrated Life Week here in the Philippines. He is an acclaimed theologian in the Union of Superiors General.

Fr. Cristo Rey is a seasoned professor and an authority in his field. He inspires his students and gently guides them, as consecrated men and women, in the ways of the Lord.