**Redemptorist Religious Life(2)**

**Fraternal Life in Community. From life in common to communion of life**

*Starting point*

* Jesus inaugurates a type of family based on listening to the Word and in the bonds of faith (cf. Acts 2, 42ss). This family is called to transform the bonds of flesh and blood (cf. Mk 10, 22, Mt 19, 29).
* Fraternal life in community is the second indispensable element of religious life. (Cons. 21)
* The ways of living it change according to the charism, the sociological models of religious community, the forms of organization, and community rhythms.
* The essentials, however, remain, such as fraternal life in community shows the world what Christian love is; and a fraternal life in community that becomes a true "family united in Christ," where each one makes his own needs known to the other and where all members can reach human, Christian, and religious maturity fully. (Cons. 22)
* What we said earlier regarding the experience of God, we can now say in rapport with fraternal life in community, namely, that religious life is called to be re-founded or re-established and, of course, revitalized, starting from a meaningful fraternal life in community – evangelically speaking.
* Fraternal life in community is, in fact, one of the strongest signs of the love of the Eternal One, but also the *place* where renewal of religious life becomes more credible.
* Fraternal life in community is also a strategic and decisive reality, from the spiritual and psychological standpoint as well as from the theological and sociological point of view, an aspect of religious life, which, perhaps, is more credible today.
* In a culture that coined "egotism," the primacy of self, and, consequently, the most outrageous individualism; in a culture like ours that has weakened the primary groups, such as the couple, family, the village, and even friendship, fraternal life in community has now a great and valuable witness to our contemporaries.
* It shows the most essential aspect of Christian life, namely, brotherly love, and because of that, is, in itself, a proclamation of the Gospel. For many, it is the first form of evangelization.

*Being formed in order to form in fraternal life in community that is meaningful*

* Fraternal life in community is not only an essential element in religious life, but also one of the most attractive for many young people who draw close to it. In fraternal life in community, they look for a space where faith and the Word of God are shared and celebrated in common;
* a space that places the person at the center, thus multiplying spaces of meeting rather than structures;
* a vital space where there is a community of goods and services as well as shared mission;
* a space where reconciliation and fraternal correction is lived out and where each brother accompanies the path of fidelity of the other brothers;
* and a space characterized by a simple way of life and openness to share with the people, especially the poorest among them. (Cons. 34-38)
* According to these searches and demands by many of the young people who come to us – which to me seem quite reasonable – a *fraternal life* in community that is signified and nourished by the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and charity, *entails* sharing in both the material and spiritual, in the search for God and Jesus, in prayer in common, and fraternal exchanges;
* it also entails a continued communal discernment that makes it possible to preserve its own charismatic identity, and guards its members from a routine and mediocre way of life.
* Within this context, we can say that a fraternity or community that wishes to be defined as formative must believe themselves called to respond to the requirements listed above; they must also constantly strive to find appropriate means to recreate communion, intercommunication, warmth, and truth in the members' relationships with each other.
* A fraternity or community that wishes to be formative should be a prophetic community and a signal fraternity that knows how to read the signs of the times and is able to incarnate the Gospel in a concrete and understandable way for today’s culture.
* A fraternity called to form, ought to know and believe itself in formation;
* seeking together what pleases the Lord; accepting each other, limiting its own personal freedom for the sake of others’ freedom;
* and submitting to the demands of community life and the essential structures of the fraternity.
* A formative fraternity must be definitively the sacrament of transcendence and, at the same time, both deeply human and humanizing.
* For this purpose, values ​​have to be cultivated, such as mutual friendship, courtesy, a cheerful spirit, in such a way that it may be a permanent stimulus of peace and joy, while always putting Christ at the center.

*Formative Mediations for Fraternal Life in Community*

* In order to be formed and to form in fraternal life in community, it is important to pay attention to some mediations that are derived from what we have been indicating thus far.

1.- One of the first mediations is ordinary life as a school of formation. It is the everyday, normal existence that holds the true secret of formation and makes it ongoing. To run away from this would be a childish pretense, thus becoming for the religious an ongoing frustration, perhaps in search of permanent alibi.

2.- Another important mediation is that of *conflict*. Apparently, it may seem a contradiction, but conflict faced with maturity, insight, and authenticity can be an important formative element. In the face of conflict, formation should help both the youth and adults not to react by flight, accommodation, or competition, but by collaboration instead. This last one is the one that does not shy away from conflict, but faces it, and, at the same time, thanks to its mainly supportive attitude, is respectful of opposing views to its own, able to dialogue and collaborate, honestly seeking a solution to the conflict, while calling into question its own reasons.

* For such a reaction, one must have an attitude of dialogue as a lighted path: one illuminates the other, exchanging small sparks of truth. On the other hand, in order that dialogue may be possible two attitudes are necessary, i.e., *interior intelligence* and *relational capacity*. By *interior intelligence*, we understand it to mean awareness that every relationship is a challenge as much to one’s own maturity as to one’s immaturity. This intelligence is what leads us to discover what each one carries in his heart. By *relational capacity*, we mean the ability to learn to listen to others in humility, so as to be in tune with what the other is going through

3.- Very important also is *interpersonal communication*. This is the first step to advance in building an authentic fraternal life in community.

* In order for communication to be a tool for building fraternal life in community, it must take into account three levels:
* what we do, what we think, and what we feel.
* Communication is more than a simple exchange of ideas or news. A deep qualitative communication is one that has to do with a situation in which people meet. Communication is to enter directly in relation with the "other" whom I can definitely call "you." It is by encountering a "you" that makes "me" all the more.
* One aspect that I do think is important. A formation house should reflect as far as possible a family environment where there are elders, adults, youth, and children. It is necessary to know how to live and grow with the "other" and the "different" from the beginning of consecrated life. In this sense international and multicultural communities are very important, where one is forced to deal daily with the international, intercultural and missionary.
* In this context, I would like to point out, even if only in passing, the importance of inter-congregational experiences in initial formation, provided they do not replace but integrate the formation offered by the Institute itself. These experiences will enable collaboration to go beyond one’s own Order or the Institute itself. The situation religious life is going through is forcing us – it’s pity that we do so out of obligation! – to share, increasingly, experiences, formative paths, projects, energies, and institutions.
* Special care must be taken of communication in formation. I draw your attention here to a temptation to be avoided. Despite the many means of communication available to religious, I have the impression that interpersonal communication today has weakened much. Every time we meet, we are more interconnected, but less communicative; there is more community, but, at the same time, more alone. This can lead to tragic consequences with regards to vocation.
* Within this context it seems important to point out the need to work in formation for fraternal life in community in the dimension of affective maturity, so as to be able to relate to others. A healthy affective maturity depends largely on the formative environment of a fraternity or community.

4.- When forming for fraternal life in community, it is also necessary to create *interdependence,* that is, the ability to collaborate on a common project and walk together towards the same goal; to walk together because I feel that my own realization and happiness depend on it.

* Thanks to interdependence and collaboration, the group disappears to become a family, consisting, as we have already said, of heterogeneous people and the wealth of roles. We become a family where common standards of conduct develop and a satisfactory form of leadership is established.

5.- Finally, I want to say a word about a mediation that I consider very important both in ongoing and initial formation, that is, the project of fraternal life and mission.

* In this project, there should be no concern of operational efficiency driving its development, but, rather, the need to integrate harmoniously the whole of our life and establish criteria in it to guide life and mission.
* Among the priorities of the charism and evangelizing mission, there must be during initial formation a dynamic feedback within which to register both personal and communal projects.

*Sources:*

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