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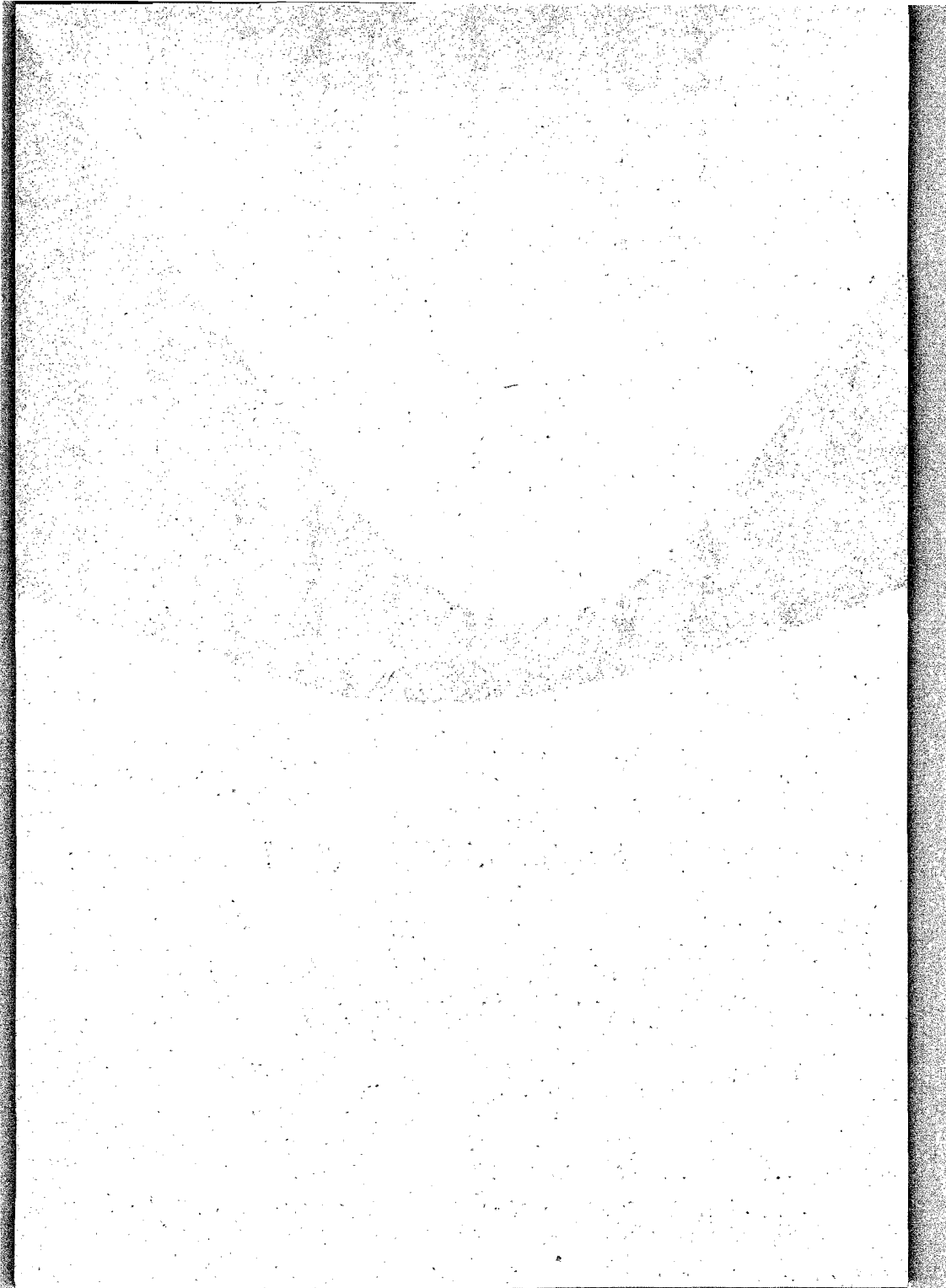
**PUBLICATION OF THE WORLD FEDERATION
OF CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITIES**

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**ON THE ROAD OF THE BEATITUDES
A Life Style for Today**

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"This way of life...requires of each member simplicity in all aspects of living in order to follow more closely Christ in his poverty and to preserve interior liberty in the midst of the world.

... it prods us to work for the reform of the structures of society, participating in efforts to liberate the victims of all forms of discrimination... Our life finds its inspiration in the Gospel of the poor and humble Christ so that we work in a spirit of service to establish justice and peace among all men."

- General Principles,

Christian Life Communities

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Gray streets, clogged with cars. Buildings that stretch up, threatening to blot out the sky, allowing nothing to appear but the somber, gray smog of the factories where men work. Faces and bodies that go and come, pushing along the gray sidewalks that are dirty with the city. Hurrying without hurrying, carried along, worn out ...

And in the shadow of the buildings and the shops and the show-windows and the cars and of all that shouts of the sham and mockery of "the kingdom of man", we find ... not a spacious boulevard with its wide avenues and commodious squares and comfortable inns, but a narrow road, a path, where what matters is not what one has but what one is: a person; a creature of God.

"The Hacienda of Tomorrow! Private property. No admittance". The fence with its rows of pickets that divide and separate like crosses in a graveyard, like endless Hail Marys on a rosary of many mysteries. And on the other side, green cane, sugar cane, cane that costs sacrifice and sweat. Sweet cane. My cane? No, the cane of the landlord.

Furrowed faces; faces reddened by the sun; the faces of sharecroppers. No shoes on their feet. Hard work and hunger, hunger and hard work ...

Huts of straw. A house of cardboard. Bedsheets made from newspapers. A meal of rice. Forlorn eyes, with but a slight glimmer in them to reveal what they look at, what they hope for ...

The daughters of the landlord get married. The daughter

ers of the day-workers simply start living with someone. Working when the sun comes up. Working when the moon comes out. Working, working, they find no escape from the cardboard hut, the rice, the sweat.

The master knows about letters, about figures. He knows, we do not. He has an auto, a big house, he has this, he has that. We have two hands, our strength, and that is all. Working we see the sun come up, working we see the moon come out...

Land. Our land? No, that of the master. The land is for those who know, those who have, those with power Here, on the other side, my grandfather, my father and me, we see the green cane, the green cane, the sugar cane, cane, cane, cane... There in the distance, on the hill, is the house of the master, with windows, with a television antenna. One auto, or two, in the driveway. The moon spills its milky light over the landlord's house, the lights of the house go on and...the men come back from the fields, furrowing with their feet the footpaths of the Hacienda of Tomorrow ... And in the shadow of those footpaths there appears, not an endless row of pickets succeeding one another as in a rosary, but a narrow road, a path, where what counts is not what one has or what one knows, but what one is: a person, a creature of God.

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I

THE KINGDOM OF HUMANITY AND
THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

The kingdom of humanity stretches across the whole length and breadth of the world. It affects us. We are part of it. We live in it. The two images that I just presented are but two of the many images we are accustomed to see, to hear and to live. Perhaps we are a suffering part, or perhaps only spectators, of these situations that exist in our world, the kingdom of humanity. These two images shout at us: they speak of two worlds, of many worlds, in the kingdom of men. A kingdom that imposes itself, that compels certain values which shape a life-style, a way of living, in the societies in which we live. This imposition does not necessarily suppose an act of violence, and yet it is a violence, subtle and "beautiful", which produces the television, the films in the theaters, and the radio. "Buy a home in the residential area Chic, where the BEAUTIFUL people live". "You will live longer, if you use our Ram-Pam pills..!" These are the values that are seeping into our society, producing in all of us a certain bitter-sweet enslavement.

In spite of all that, we Christians live in the world and we are the world. We are aware that the Son of Man became incarnate in order to become one of us. This Incarnation cuts across things, running counter to the values of having and doing of the kingdom of men. It is not just a Copernican revolution. The Incarnation of the Son of God represents that radical break that Paul speaks of - the new man. The Incarnation as such is an action, a sign. And if the Incarnation itself is a symbolic action, so is the manner, the "how" of it. We understand the Incarnation as the identification of the Son of God with humanity. Nevertheless, this needs to be "understood" as regards the "how", the manner, in which it took place.

The Son of God not only became a man like other men, but he took upon himself the being, the existence, of poor men, in a poor country dominated by a foreign power. Those are historical facts, facts that speak to us not now of the greatness of the divine action in the Incarnation, but that announce something more, that imply value judgments. They imply life, a new life that can begin only from the radical conversion of heart of humanity, of men and women.

The life of Jesus Christ was a life that participated in the world according to the logic of his birth. Jesus, his birth and his life are symbols of a change. We need only take up the Gospels to see how his life and the values that he preached are "the sign of a change" from the style of living and the values that held sway in the milieu of Israel of that time. And how the Incarnation was not an isolated event of his life but the beginning of a process - a life of identification, of becoming one with us, his brothers.

Over the centuries, the piety and love of God's people has embellished the reality of the Incarnation with popular traditions and even with myths. But if for a moment we strip away all the adornments we have added to the Incarnation event and the birth of the Son of God, then we will become aware that his birth is the root and basis of his life, and that his life was only a progressive deepening of the very act of Incarnation. And we will grasp better its manner, its "how". Within a specific historical, social and cultural framework. This living and being born of Jesus Christ has implications for all of us who are called and are Christians. They are implications which should and must challenge us all at every instant.

The life, the style of living, of a Christian, must reflect and maintain the dimensions of the Incarnation and life of Christ Jesus.

As baptized people, we have freely taken the path of a life in Christ which carries with it the living by determined values. Values that were marked in the life of him who is our Liberator, whose norms are none other than that of living, in as far as and as much as one can, the beatitudes.

Our position, then, within and in the midst of the societies in which we live, in our world, must be an attitude of continually reflecting and discerning about our life, our society, our world.

As Christians we do not live on an island apart, nor can we be dreaming about living in an ideal, utopian society. We live in a world made up of societies that are marked by a set of values, by a mode of living. We are born, we are nourished, we live, within this set of values. Ours is the nation, the earth, the flag, the laws, the landscape, the songs and the dances; in a word, ours is all that identifies us as citizens of this or that nation. We are French, Argentinian, Filipinos or Canadians. Our society finds its identity in us and we find our identity in it. To deny these values is to deny ourselves. To reject a world, to reject our world, would be, in the final analysis, an alienation. Something like being planted in the air instead of having put down roots. This would be contrary to the whole meaning of the Incarnation of the Son of God, an event which means and stands out as the having put down roots in humanity and in man's world.

Nonetheless the world, our world, the one in which we live and move and whose society we form part of, has another visage, a visage that oppresses, that tears away, that accumulates, that restricts, that allows injustice. It maintains the oppression of persons, oppressive systems, the class struggle, economic gulfs, internal and external monopolies. It maintains consumer societies as well as totalitarian societies of the right or of the left. Societies which bring it about that both man and woman cease to be projections of love, projections of God, and are changed into a number or a bolt or a screw by a society in which what counts is not that which is human in itself, but in so far as it can produce this or that, something quantitative.

Those values which, in these sinful situations, and by means of these anonymous systems of oppression and injustice, destroy and oppress - they are in contradiction with the values of the gospel, the values that we have inherited from Jesus in the Beatitudes (Matthew, chapter 5). The redemption-liberation of Jesus takes roots in freeing humanity from these evils.

. We live in the ambiguity, the tension, of our surroundings, of our culture, of our society. It is easy to be swept along by those values or to attempt to identify them with Christian values by means of fallacious connections, which is nothing more than to betray ourselves or, what is worse, to compromise our values in such a way that we cease to exist.

It is necessary, therefore, to keep ourselves in an attitude of continual discernment. To be discerning constantly the values that are operative in, and that move, our culture, our society, our surroundings. To discern between the good and the evil spirit. In Ignatian terms it is to maintain ourselves in the attitude of the meditation on the Two Standards, trying to make our choices always according to the path of the beatitudes. For this is, in itself, the road that brings us, eventually, to an incarnation in Christ and in the world.

To reject some or perhaps a great many of the values of our society is not to reject our fellow-countrymen or our people, but to reject those things or that which go against the dignity of the human person, justice and peace. It is a rejection of something in order instead to increase, add to and develop the dignity of the person, and has justice and peace as its motive. It is a rejection of those things or that which dehumanizes us and is contrary to our own true identity as a people, as a nation, as sons, which we are, of one same FATHER.

The Christian option that I was speaking of is not just an intellectual option stemming from prayer and ending in the same prayer. It is an option that requires and demands an action, a living, a witnessing of that which we are, which we feel, which we believe.

Being a Christian, today as yesterday, means living according to the exigencies of the gospel. Living according to and in the beatitudes requires living in a definite posture in any society in which we are. This means - let us face it - that being a Christian carries with it the being a sign of contradiction, not to the society in itself, but to the values in it that, of their nature, are opposed to Christian values. For example, to live as a

Christian, today, in a consumer society, implies and demands keeping oneself free from the slavery of consumerism. A consumerism that takes its rise from a fierce individualism, and is furthered by a certain educational system, a philosophy of having, a quantification of life. Whereas it is not having things that makes a person human but rather being - and being for others. Another example would be that of a society in which the great value is the state, and for this quasi-sacred value, men and women cease to count, and their dignity becomes non-existent. It is the denial of the person or persons in favor of the total collectivity: the state.

In the face of the values that restrict, oppress or corrode the dignity of the human person, the Christian must assume a posture at variance with them, a posture of rejection, since if we understand well the Incarnation we cannot separate the reality that we are sons of God from the reality that all men and women of our national and our global community are our brothers and sisters. If we are incapable of changing the world, the world will change our mentality and our values.

It means, then, accepting to live in the ambiguity and the tension of our world, living in continual discernment, being led to a constant choice of the road of the beatitudes.

If not, then our life as Christians becomes so permeated with the values accepted in society that being a Christian becomes something like belonging to some cultural association or other. Being a Christian in this fashion is to look on God as functional, simply functional to our surroundings: a God who expands or contracts in accordance with the cultural "moment" in which we are living. A God whom we make use of according to our own benefit or advantage. The proclamation of the Word and of the Eucharist then become empty signs. Or what is worse, signs so mysterious that they have nothing to do with our life, with our reality. They become "something" that we do on Sundays and feast-days. The sacraments are changed into "trampolines" on which we jump up and down to show how powerful we are, means to acquire a certain prestige in our milieu. To be a Christian becomes, then, something unreal, a non-being. Religion becomes a mere product of society.

II

TO BE A CHRISTIAN IS TO BE OPEN

The Christian must, by the fact of being baptized, be a person open to the other. But ... which other?

It is very easy to be open with those persons with whom we are in sympathy, with whom we have the same values and culture, with whom we move in the same circle, either physically or because of a common outlook. We could call this openness quasi-natural. Recently TIME Magazine had an advertisement about itself in which it said something that is very real and true:

The readers of Time the world over belong to the same culture, and are interested by the things that appear in the review. And so it does not matter whether they are Japanese, Mexican, Irish or Italian, they are united by something cultural that identifies them: TIME.

Now, being open to the other implies, and in fact consists in, being open to that or those persons who are other than I. Other in culture, in values, in tastes, in their style of living. It means being open even to and with that other whom we call the poor man. It is being open to that other who is incarnate in the "thou" of the poor man - someone different from me.

This demands a total acceptance of the dignity of the other (poor person), and of his or her world. Acceptance of him as a subject, as a projection of the person of Love. A refusal to look on him as an object or a thing.

Openness to that other demands, then, a change, a conversion of heart. It demands that we empty ourselves and at the same time become enrooted in Christ. This is not an escape but a transformation, which gives human hope a new

dimension.

It can be said that we are open to the poor man because:

- a) We give him bread.
- b) We look after him or teach him how to work.

In these two steps, which I do not doubt we do moved by that openness and desire of identification with the poor, it is we who from above are giving to the poor; the relationship is vertical. While we give to the other, it is we who keep hold of the power to give, it is we who hold on to the power in the society in which we live. To be open to the other must lead us to a third step:

c) Sharing.

The sharing, the eucharist, the communion of our power, of our possessions. The communion of ourselves with them and they with us. The brotherhood of the sons of God.

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III

OPTING FOR THE BEATITUDES

For centuries it was thought that the Beatitudes are evangelical counsels for those called to religious life. In a way the theology of religious life has appropriated these values as something exclusive to the life of giving oneself to a religious family.

And yet, as Vatican Council II itself has allowed us to see, we are all called to live this gospel life. When today the Christian, moved by a desire that is born of his very vocation as a Christian, questions himself about how he lives and his plan of life, then we become aware that the Beatitudes are a legacy, a style of life, a road, that Jesus has given us and that he asks us to take. A life style that he asks us all to live - religious, priests, laity.

This style of living demands of us, then, that we analyze our state of life and honestly, sincerely, without compromise, see how we can live the *MAGIS*, the *MORE*. That *magis* which is born of the desire to follow Christ from his incarnation all the way to his death and resurrection.

Otherwise, how can we explain Chapter 25 of Matthew when Jesus says: "I was hungry and you gave me to eat... I was thirsty and you gave me to drink...I was naked and you clothed me". We cannot put our shoulders to these words, nor even read attentively the Beatitudes, if we try to conceal the fact, the "how" and the setting of the Incarnation of the Son of God. That Jesus of Nazareth was the son of a carpenter, one of the poor of Yahweh. And in reading all this, we must be careful not to find all kinds of excuses and to make all sorts of distinctions - whether justified or not - which would obscure the true meaning of the gospel. Rather, to live following the path of the beatitudes, which is to live by going beyond the alienation of our age, to live as the *NEW* men and women of whom Paul speaks.

Of all the Beatitudes, the one that has presented the most difficulties is that which asks of us a life of evangelical poverty. I believe it would be helpful to clarify some aspects of this. Poverty as such is a non-being, it has no positive content. So it is right to judge that one cannot seek poverty as an absolute value, as it is a non-being.

The aim of becoming poor like the poor carries with it an emptying of self in order to be - more. Achieving a greater identification with the other and therefore with oneself. It is the renouncement of "having more" and the openness to "being more".

The call to "come and follow me" of Christ is a call for everyone, each according to his vocation, a call that demands a renunciation in order to live.

We cannot choose poverty in order to be "signs". The content of the choice is not in being a sign or a symbol, but in that, having been called, I will live fully as a new man or woman ... Whether or not I am a sign will result from the fact that my life is at one and the same time inserted and anchored both in God and in the men and women who are my brothers.

We will not discover Jesus, who was poor and a prophet of the poor, through a long and laborious intellectual search, but only by ourselves becoming poor and little. Nor will we come to know the transcendental God until we receive him humbly in our hearts, recognizing the limits of our intelligence and our existence, and our powerlessness to enclose him in a concept or deduce him from a syllogism.

Time and again we need to cast our gaze on the event of the incarnation, turn our hearts to it, and in silence discover in it the mystery of humility, of "disponibility" (availability; openness to God), of total identification with God in his entering into our world and becoming one of us.

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IV

ON THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

Jesus of Nazareth could have done all that he did and said without belonging to a community. Nevertheless, he did not do that. He formed part of, and lived in, a community, the community of his disciples. With them he lived, taking part in the life and customs and culture of his people. It is logical to suppose that he entered into and even enjoyed singing about friendship and brotherhood and what it means to belong to a nation and a people. We know that he had acquaintances and friends, that he enjoyed the company of people at meals. A Jesus who knew how to laugh and to cry with his people. The community of the disciples of Jesus is also a legacy that he has left us, and out of which was born the Church.

Our vocation as Christians is a communitarian vocation. When we are baptized the community of Christians is asked to accept our entrance into it. We cannot be sons of God the Father if we are not brothers of Christ and of all the men and women that he came to redeem.

The Christian community is a kind of Eucharist; it requires a horizontal relationship between all, and demands especially that we become "broken" and "divided", that is, shared like the Eucharist, in order to be ultimately one with him.

Being broken and shared carries with it the idea that we should be, at every moment, vulnerable and accessible to the other, whoever that other be. It is an openness that leads to a liberation, not only my liberation, but that of all.

The Eucharist is the responsible and concrete act of faith that is present with us and through history. Community - Eucharist - means the continual living of a life of

faith, one that is rooted in God and in humanity and its world.

The People of God is a community of active persons, not a community of theoretical believers. The actions of this community must reach out to all facets of life, penetrating to the most mundane structures of human society.

The People of God must build a world that is faithful to the Word that has become Flesh. For "not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father".

Within the bosom of the Christian community there must throb this openness to the will of the Father and this continual questioning of ourselves as to whether we are collaborating in building the Kingdom of God or whether we are a hindrance to the Kingdom. How often must we ask this? Continually. It means maintaining ourselves in an attitude of community discernment and brotherly love in which we can, in a union of hearts, take responsibility for being co-creators in constructing and advancing that kingdom of Liberty, Love, Justice and Peace after which we all sigh. It means being always engaged in the struggle for freedom from every enslavement and every oppression for all men and women, our brothers.

"The Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation. Christians should rather rejoice that they can follow the example of Christ, who worked as an artisan. In the exercise of all their earthly activities, they can thereby gather their humane, domestic, professional, social and technical enterprises into one vital synthesis with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are harmonized unto God's glory." (The Church in the World Today, 43)

The community is called to free the world from discouragement, from boredom, from decadence, from retrogression, from inertia, from all those forces that inhibit the upward thrust of life, that destroy the advances already made, that prevent a more human life - in a word, from sin, which is the real impediment in our world.

And we must be aware that:

"The positive struggle for a better future cannot achieve success without clashing with those human forces that are guilty of opposing the authentic progress of humanity. The liberation of humanity, therefore, cannot be furthered except by those men and women and those communities who are capable of accepting, to a greater or lesser degree, the sacrifice of their own interests and even their own prestige." (Lines for a Liberating Pastoral Action, 5)

The Christian community can assist the birth of the Kingdom of freedom only by a Eucharistic posture in which, challenging old forms, they make efforts to create new structures that are more in accord with the gospel. The reluctance to break new ground, to experiment, to search earnestly in prayer and sacrifice, to continually evaluate - this reluctance, this fear, must be overcome. We could go so far as to say that a failure to assume the attitude and stance of a pilgrim is in a way a lack of faith in the future.

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LIFE STYLES

In all the foregoing pages, I have tried to sketch the basis or foundation of our life, a life that leads us to live in a determined, specific and concrete manner.

From the beginning of the Church's life, there have been groups of Christians who have felt themselves called to live out, in a specific and concrete form, the message of Christ. It is a call that each of us has received, simply by being baptized. A very important point is that the Faith is a gift, given by God, and to which we respond by participating in his Church.

The men and women of faith are those who go out of their cocoon, leave behind their secure structures, break the molds: the truth takes priority in their hearts, and the continual search to do good, to advance justice and to lead an authentic life, form for them, let us say, the foundation-stones of the exigencies of the gospel. That is why, as I said before, through the centuries Christians have formed groups, communities, called "religious families", in order to live together in a specific way, the Faith.

Now, in our day, community life is not limited simply to the life of religious. In fact, living-in-community can be viewed as something specific to our vocation as Christians. This does not have to mean living in the same house or under the same roof. Community as such is a much broader thing than it used to be considered. We cannot deny that the fraternity involved in common life is of great importance, and that where our milieu makes it possible, it would be something extraordinary. It is here that creativity, stemming from the need to live the message fully, should lead us to seek the will of the Father. Life lived together is not exclusively for those who have chosen the

religious life or those who as single persons have decided to lead a committed life in the Lord. On the contrary, community living is an option that is open to all Christians, whatever their state of life.

Common life, therefore, can take many different forms: a total physical community (all the members live in the same physical place); a mixed physical community (not all the members live in the same place); a cell community (only a few members live together); for others, living together is limited just to the times of meetings and gatherings, these being the expression of real and profound community life.

Now these different styles or ways of proceeding depend on various factors. One is the makeup of the group - the states of life of the members. Another that is very important is the reality of the world in which the members live and of which they are part. This depends on the culture and the abilities of the persons involved, whatever their state of life.

One point that I believe is very important and fundamental is the place: having a place where the community is centered. This does not need to be of any special kind, but simply a place where the members go, where community is forged: a physical place.

These communities of faith are not communities that are weighed down with money or property, but communities that announce the resurrection: capable of perceiving and feeling in the ambiguity of life and in the search for the kingdom of humanity a foretaste of the resurrection.

An extremely important point in all that has up to now been said is that these communities have, as their basis, a concrete and specific "incarnation", one that begins, not in the gospel itself, but in the existential geographic dimension. The fullness of life comes, as we have said so often, from Christ incarnate, and the Incarnation is a presence that gathers up in it all created reality and all history. A faith-community cannot grow if it is separated from the existential geographic reality that surrounds it (country, nation, continent), since this would be to separate itself from the existential reality

of Christ, the center of all reality.

I would say that a basic mark of any community of faith in any geographical area - whether nation, country or continent - is that it should take its rise from what I would call four fundamental pillars of our faith. These are: FAITH, HOPE, LOVE, INCARNATION.

I think it might be helpful to spend a few minutes on these, not to speak of the theology involved, but simply so as to be concrete in what we understand by them.

The dimension of faith is very important. We might presume that we all share the same faith and that therefore this is taken for granted. Nothing can be taken for granted. It must be seen, felt and discerned whether the living of that faith which we share and to which we belong is alive and pulsing, and whether it is lived in the same way. Here it is that we must determine what spirituality will inspire and move this specific community of faith.

In the concrete case of the Christian Life Communities, their formation will need to be founded on and permeated by Ignatian spirituality, which is a particular way of looking at life, of living it, of being. This is a point of capital importance and we cannot and must not underestimate its importance.

Hope. This is based on what was mentioned in the earlier paragraphs about living in the ambiguity of the present, but always with a glimmer of the resurrection in the distance. This second basic element is intimately linked with that of faith.

Love, understood as identification, as a gift of self, on the horizontal plane, of one person to another. Not only toward those outside the community; rather, the love must go out from the very heart of the community of faith. It means being a disciple. A life in which I see Christ in the other, and allow the Christ who lives in me to be seen by others. From the fullness of living in discipleship will burst forth an identification with all men and women, recognizing Christ in them. It is important to grasp here that we are to love men and women simply because they are that: a man, a woman. Then, starting from

this love, we recognize Christ, who communicates himself in and through them.

Incarnation. As we said before, this requires that we do not adopt models that are foreign to our concrete and real life. We must start from our own historical, national and political roots. It would be a mistake and a negation to try to prescind from the realities that have shaped us and to adopt a manner of living that, if it does not prescind, at least is foreign to our manner of life. Being in carnated in our existential geographic situation is essential.

The crucial point for a community of faith, which is also a community of life, is not to enclose oneself just in fidelity to a program of specific prayers and practices, but to penetrate into the world, and really to accept the law of our growth, which is forged through the growth and development of the reality in which we are immersed and for which we are responsible.

Holding fast, then, to these fundamental lines as the basis and the preamble for attempting a style of living, we can then, starting from them, mark out the road of the beatitudes, which is the path of liberation in all its dimensions: personal, communitarian, social and political.

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VI

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN ANY LIFE-STYLE

So far we have been seeing, first the two images of our world, the event of the Incarnation of Christ Jesus, the call by baptism to live as new men and women in the path of being-more, within the context of the beatitudes and in Eucharistic communities. We spoke of the fundamental or basic lines for initiating any type of community life-style. Above all we have mentioned a point which, on the personal and communitarian level, is essential: keeping ourselves in a continuing discernment of the will of the Father and a critical attitude in the face of the values of our society, being rooted in the world and in Jesus Christ.

The essential elements - or fundamental attitudes - needed for implementing any life-style are prayer and continual discernment.

In fact, discernment begins with a life of prayer: personal and communitarian. A prayer that is a sincere search for an encounter with Christ and with humanity, in solitude and in the desert: a dialogue with God. A dialogue with God, who is not "elevated above the clouds", but who is the narrow and painful road along which we travel, as we detach ourselves from our fine clothes, our ideas, our judgments, our styles of life until, stripped, we meet him in the simplicity born of the identity and authenticity of ourselves and of the community of faith to which we belong.

It is an encounter, not with a metaphysical God far above and beyond us, but a meeting with a God who is and who lives in men and women, our brothers.

Prayer is then the discovering of that which is essen

tial in love. It is not something that I do or something that I produce through a mental effort, but it is life. It is living in that openness which demands and which promotes a sensitivity to God and to men and women, our brothers and sisters.

We speak then of prayer which starts from the sincerity of our own incarnation. Prayer which is and which has two dimensions: personal and community. Prayer which on the personal level leads us to an intimate friendship with God, the God, our God "Emmanuel", and which reaches out to the community level, producing that union of hearts which is friendship. "Friends in the Lord". For this friendship to exist, we need to be honest and sincere, not masking our true selves nor letting ourselves adopt attitudes that do not allow us to be ourselves and to be faithful to the unique vocation that we have received from God. This is where the community level of prayer demands that we meet on a basis of faith and that our lives be marked by this faith, hope and love. We must accept, as a community, to take on our shoulders and to participate in with our lives the totality of the paschal mystery. We already know that we cannot advance toward freedom by ourselves alone. Liberation can be achieved only in and through dialogue.

It might be good to stress a bit more the friendship that I have been talking of by referring to the friendship of Christ for men. This friendship of Jesus with the men he chose as his collaborators, the members of his community, begins with dialogue in which he outlines the common ideal or goal, the kingdom that they are to build together. As they progressively discover the common ideal, there grows at the same time a love and a friendship which each day goes on deepening. And at a certain point this friendship will be strengthened, deepened and given stability by the special intervention of the Holy Spirit. The friendship is then forged in an encounter with a common vision. A dialogue springs up around this common vision, which, in order to be realized, must help the friends to grow and to become more truly persons. It is by walking towards the Lord, and in the effort to serve him, that mutual knowledge and love increase and flower.

Only by understanding this friendship between Jesus

and his disciples can we grasp what it means to be friends in the Lord. Above all, only in this way can we become aware of the atmosphere of this friendship together: an atmosphere of freedom, of seeking the will of God, of confidence in my brothers, of indifference - which, in the Ignatian outlook, means disinterested openness. These then are the qualities needed for community discernment. Without these attitudes, without this climate and atmosphere, there can be no community discernment.

Discernment, as I have said before and at length, is to maintain oneself in a listening attitude toward the will of the Father, constantly opting for the Kingdom and in identification with the poor of Yahweh. It means doing this with the Christ of Nazareth, who today walks the gray side walks of the city, who today works from sunrise till moonrise at the Hacienda of Tomorrow, who lives as a family in houses of thrown-away cardboard. It means to live, guarding this faith at every instant from all the temptations to depersonalization, and above all from the temptations to cowardice and to superficiality.

It means a discernment that is rooted in our being as Christians, as disciples of the gospel, and that implies being faithful even to blood, even to death.

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VII

IN THE CONCRETE

I do not think it would be helpful to enter here into concrete details as to how to implement this life-style to which we are all called, each according to his own vocation.

I have thought it preferable rather - starting from my own view of the realities of community living - to present those vital and universal elements that are necessary to press forward on the road of the beatitudes toward a new world and liberation from every form of oppression.

We cannot here speak of a specific "how", of a specific life-style. To do so would be to deny the geographic reality, to fail to take account of those diverse worlds in which we live and in which we all have the obligation to insert ourselves, to become "incarnate",

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How happy are the poor in spirit :
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy the gentle:
they shall have the earth for their heritage

Happy those who mourn:
they shall be comforted.

Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right:
they shall be satisfied.

Happy the merciful:
they shall have mercy shown them.

Happy the pure in heart:
they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers:
they shall be called sons of God.

Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right:
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy are you
when people abuse you and persecute you,
and speak all kinds of calumny against you
on my account.
Rejoice and be glad,
for your reward will be great in heaven.

- Matthew 5: 1-12

