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LEGACIES

The Council earnestly requests members to consider the possibility of making a bequest to the Centre when making or revising their Wills.

For those who wish to help in this way the following approved form of bequest is suggested:

"I BEQUEATH to the Teilhard Centre at 23 Kensington Square, London W8, the sum of pounds sterling, to be applied for its general charitable purpose, and I further direct that the receipt of the Hon. Treasurer of the said Association for the time being shall be a full and sufficient discharge."

*COMMUNION OR COLLECTIVITY? TOWARDS A SPIRITUAL
REORGANISATION OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS.*

Michael von Bruck

(This is the text of a talk given at the Teilhard Centre in December 1983. The Author is an East German Lutheran Pastor.

Human relationships today are increasingly determined by two characteristics: egocentredness and isolation. The old human problem of egocentredness is stimulated by economic competition. Since we seem to "economize" life, egoistic competition is unavoidable, or as Marx said "capitalism has left as the only relationship between human beings the bare naked payment." Even if this sounds like an exaggeration, it might well be a prophetic vision. However it be, the lack of love, solidarity and compassion among human beings in the 20th century may blow up our earth in the foreseeable future, and already now we have built nuclear, bacteriological and chemical weapons which can make life on our globe impossible, maybe forever. To fight against each other we exploit our mother earth in such a way, that we may not have air to breathe, water to drink, vegetables to eat, resources to get energy from. We behave without responsibility, and in all this we produce so many children whom we don't know how to feed, how to give education and jobs, etc.

But in all this we are not very happy. One of the main problems is, that human beings become isolated. The joint family system had given us some shelter in the past, but it disappears whenever economical competition finds its way: and this is all over the world. I think that this process is unavoidable for all civilizations and countries. We should not look into a glorious past (which was often not as glorious as we think), but we shall look into the future to read signs how to overcome this dangerous stage of development of human society. We are not happy, because many of us feel isolated. Everybody is on his own, and not many care for one another.

What is the reason for all these problems? One who should know, the President of the Club of Rome which has essentially contributed to the conscientization of our human situation these years, Aurelio Peccei, writes in the German journal "Der Spiegel" (18th of May 1981): "Human society has to undertake a basic change of direction. Our generation has lost the feeling for wholeness." And he mentions three things which we will have to gain if we do not want to die collectively: totality, universal harmony and responsibility of human beings.

I

There are certainly many reasons and causes for the present or coming crisis. I would like to mention three points which seem to be essential. First, it is the overemphasis on the

economical principle that causes problems. Second, it is the old human thirst for power which destroys harmony, and third, it is the lack of awareness for wholeness which hides the unity of life.

1. The overemphasis on the economical principle is not just an ideological pattern, but it is a life-style which seems to conquer the world regardless of different religious or cultural traditions. It is the conviction, that you are what you earn; in other words: What I have matters, not what or who I am. I get my identity or dignity from my belongings. This includes positions, prestigious jobs, money; even friends are often regarded as prestigious belongings, not as a gift of free relationship. We count, administrate, try to be sure and safe — but we are not spontaneous, vulnerable and full of humour. Things and other persons are not a value in themselves, just because they are, but they are used. We seem to accept values only which we can utilize. This materialistic (and capitalistic) attitude towards our surroundings (nature, animals, natural resources, fellow human beings) has its influence on ourselves. We become finally a means for economical welfare, but we are not an end. This destroys all free relationship, all beauty, all leisure. No doubt — we achieve a lot in science and technology, but in the process the subject, the person, the being which all the goods science presents to us are made for, is offered and suffers. We think more in terms of economical profit than of human relationship. And this is dangerous, indeed.

2. We want power to be safe, to make sure that an ever higher consumption in the economical field can go on as long as possible. But we also enjoy having power for its own sake. Why? Because it seems to make us being superior over others. Even “spiritual power” is often misused in this way. It gives us satisfaction to be “more” than others, to make people dependent on us. Finally I think that behind all this is the metaphysical thirst for being: being “more” than others reassures us of our being, and we need this assurance again and again. Power is the strongest food for egocentredness. And power easily corrupts. The temptation to misuse it is always there. Power is aggressive in many cases. That is why it does not allow plurality and relationship but calls for uniformity and control. It is not for dialogue and fertile exchange but for dogmatism and hierarchical submission. Those in power want to dictate their own laws, which is always to sustain the social and hierarchical order. Those who misuse power are afraid of change, freedom and the renewing flow of the spirit. This holds often true for governments, parties, economical interests as well as religious organizations such as churches. The thirst for power destroys harmony. Power is necessary to sustain law and order, no doubt. But only when power tries to serve the whole, tries to build up a pluralistic harmony, peace is secured. We misuse our positions, capabilities and possibilities if we do not use power in such a way that it serves to build up harmony and helps to integrate the individual and the society without offering one of them.

3. There is a lack of awareness of the whole. We are split up into communities, denominations, groups, parties etc. One fights more or less openly the other. To gain our identity we try to destroy the other one’s identity. Thus, our identity is established only on the negative background against other identities: this is a weak position held by so many individuals and groups, parties, political systems, churches... But not only this: our personality in its daily life gets more and more disintegrated. We *are* not any more, but we *have* certain functions, and we identify ourselves with these different faces. Thus, we are different in families, different in business, different again in our political commitments and different in our religious life. But, as the Bible correctly observes, you cannot serve two Lords. This saying has to be applied also for our life in industrial societies. We do not see the whole but rush after the need of the day. We do not find final meaning in all our undertakings, because we have lost the sense for final values.

II

If we would try to summarize the three points of my remarks, we can say: The present crisis is to a large extent due to our uncontrolled egocentredness and individualism on all levels of personal and social life.

According to my understanding there are two options we have in order to overcome this problem: either communion or collectivity.

1. By *communion* I understand a free relationship of human beings who form a certain wholeness without losing the particular shape of the individual, because the centre is beyond the communion itself, thus it can integrate different poles. This connection will be explained later.

2. By *collectivity* I understand an organization of individuals who seek their identity not beyond but in the collectivity. Thus, the individual shape is supposed to develop in such a way, that it becomes more and more adjusted to the shape of other individuals in this collective union. Uniformity is the ideal, and that is why there cannot be a place for pluriformity and plurality.

I would like to add one remark: I do not suppose that one or the other of our political, social or ecclesiastical institutions is purely communion or purely collectivity. What we actually live in is always a mixture. But certain structures are definitely oriented towards the one or the other form to cope with individualistic egocentricity.

There is no need to point out, that collectivity in this sense is not desirable. It does not allow creativity, multidimensional pluralism and the joy of the difference. It calls for discipline, dogmatism and claims to have the truth. But actually, do we not often follow consciously or unconsciously this pattern? Let us not blame politicians or ideological structures, but let us look into our own religious organisations, customs and patterns of behaviour, even patterns of thinking.

I suppose that if we fail to realize integral communion at all different levels of human life, either destruction of the personality as well as the human conditions of living or a total collectivity which enslaves the individuals would be unavoidable. When you look only into the Indian situation and try to think possible solutions, this alternative becomes quite clear. Collectivity can well tackle the problem of injustice and exploitation — regarding nature as well as fellow human beings — but at the cost of the individuals's free development only, by force, not by insight. And this creates an unlimited chain of force. The individual would have to be put completely under tutelage. And this happens, not only in dictatorships but in many hierarchical institutions, religious one's as well.

Let us look into the other alternative: communion. Communion is based on freedom, pluralism and interrelationship leading towards integration. It is not easy to describe since we seldom have been able to establish communion without soon falling into dogmatism, intolerance and uniformity, i.e. collectivity. Look only into the history of religions and ideologies and you know what my point is.

Communion is based on personal maturity or the fully integrated person. In our Christian tradition we have a deep symbol for communion: the Trinity. Father, Son and Spirit are an integrated wholeness without the danger that the individuals lose their characteristic features. They are in an ongoing process of their integration, in the dance of becoming One, using the Greek word: in *perichoresis*. This is a symbol. It says, that God, the basis of reality, is integrated communion. God is both, source and end of reality. Hence, source and end of reality is communion. The communion is expression of interrelationship in love, based on personal integrity. This can be called the Kingdom of God. We are to realize this reality already now, here in the midst of our life with all its deadly problems.

The symbol of the Trinitarian *perichoresis*, which I have interpreted in this sense elsewhere, could lead us into the realization of genuine communion, which is not only expression of truly Christian life, but which we shall establish in order to overcome the problems of isolation, exploitation and the threat of destruction of our earth.

We said, communion has its centre beyond itself. This means, that the unity and identity of a communion does not come from itself, not from its own endeavour nor from its strength. It comes rather from the communion's participation in the wholeness. The communion of this kind is spiritually aware that it participates in the divine dance, in the self-realization of God. It shares and carries out this movement: the trinitarian process of God.

In this way communion is the process of divine integration and our sharing in it. Communion gets life from the vision of wholeness. It never *has* wholeness but participates in it. Since it never has it but is marching towards it and living out of it at the same time, it can be free to integrate plurality. This is the difference from collectivity. Communion is more spiritual longing, collectivity is more ideological endeavour.

III

How can we apply the symbol of the Trinitarian *perichoresis*, the interrelationship of persons in Oneness, for our task of communion-building?

Let me formulate two principles:

1. What communion is and how it can be established, we will know only in the process of practicing this communion. What revolution and the means for its progress are, we will learn only in the revolutionary practice, Marx said. This holds true for our question of a revolution, a *metanoia*, into communion-building, too. There is no doctrine, ideology or program which could be formulated and afterwards put into practice. Theory and practice are in a dialectical relationship. One stimulates the other. Otherwise we again will offer the individual and the particular on the altar of collective uniformity.
2. The integration of the personality and integration of personalities into communion is one integral process. It is a polarity in which both the poles create the field of tension which is the cause of movement, of energy and change — to use a simile from physics. Nevertheless, we have to discriminate: integration of the person and integration of a community are not the same, even if they are inseparable.

Integration of the person means, that everything we think, feel and do is thought, felt and done in the awareness of oneness and wholeness. Often we do not get things as well as ourselves together, time runs out, we haste from one problem or one performance to the other, but we loose calmness and centredness which is necessary for our mastering of things. We are not grounded in the centre, which is God, but we act as we would be the centre. Therefore, our personality collapses. This egocentredness, this hypocrisy is called sin in the Bible: we put ourselves in the place of God, in the centre, instead of being centred around the One, around God. I suppose that Vedantic spirituality expresses existentially the same but in different ideas: we confuse the real with the non-real, we are in delusion thinking, that the *Jiva* is the centre. And this is where all misery comes from. There is no need to explain this further. Everybody knows, because we recognize ourselves in this mirror of sin. But what can be done?

Theologically it is right to say: pray, have faith, live out of faith alone. But how? Again we are in danger of "using" faith, "having" faith instead of *being in* faith, *in* God who alone is active and doing! This is the very core of the Lutheran tradition and Luther's insistence is as important today as it was centuries ago. What he and so many spiritually experienced persons in many traditions mean is: The ego has to disappear, so that the integrated person may resurrect, living alone from the oneness which is God. How far away are we and our churches

from this deep spiritual insight!

What can be done? Without going much into details I want to give you a deep conviction of mine: we have to learn to meditate. We have to meditate to see the One, to integrate our daily life around the one Wholeness, to become calm etc. I cannot go into this here, but I am convinced that some mystical spiritual traditions of our own religion as well as very effective practices taught in Hinduism and Buddhism will help us to integrate our personality. This is a long way. It is not easy. But it is the presupposition for anything else. We have to go this way, if we want to *be* in faith and prayer and not just *have* it. Spiritual practice which centres us and thus helps to overcome our egocentredness, is a way to the integrated person. It is the way of participation in the Spirit. It is what we are called for: to be one with Christ as he is one with the Father (John 17).

I invoke meditation and spiritual practice here being aware, that I might be misunderstood, yet I hope it would be a creative misunderstanding. I do not plead for any withdrawal from political and social action, but I say: a real revolution has to be rooted in spiritual conversion, *metanoia*. The revolutionary has to be an integrated person. Maybe it would be wrong to say: first meditate, then act. It is *one* process, and achievements in one aspect stimulate the other one. So much to the integration of the person.

Integration of personalities into communion means, that all individual features, potentialities as well as actualities are regarded and realized as expressions of the One. The communion is an *advaitic* structure, being *in* the Trinitarian *perichoresis*, being One *in* the pluralistic movement.

Without going more into theological considerations at this point, which could well outline the basis for a dialogical theology, I would like to come out with five practical suggestions which might be helpful for communion-building in our dangerous situation:

1. Ability for communion-building has to be developed in early childhood already. Hence, we have to start with our children. Most of our education is oriented towards competition with others, towards egocentric efficiency. This is already the root for a wrong one-sidedness. In *education* we have to stress much more the *aesthetical values*, but in such a way, that the usage of arts for an aggressive attitude is made impossible. Aesthetical education should lead into an understanding of plurality, because in arts you never pretend to achieve unequivocality. Further, art should teach us values which are not expressible in financial calculations. Hence, that we commercialize art has to be stopped from the very beginning of education in arts. Finally, we have to recognize the deep connection between religious values and arts. Thus, religion should be taught much more by the means of arts and *in* arts than just by the means of intellectual instruction. The beauty of songs, psalms, pictures, dance etc. teach us existentially the complete surrender of the ego of the artist. And this is a step in overcoming our basic egocentredness and isolation and goes much deeper than intellectual commandments.

2. Communion is a *communion of seekers*. Nobody *has* truth or spiritual depth, but truth and spiritual insight have him/her. We all are on the way, nobody has finally reached the further shore. This is what Luther expresses in his formula: *simul iustus et peccator* — at the same time we are still caught in egocentredness but rejoice already in the spirit of freedom. The seed is planted in our hearts, and our life is the process of growth. In dialogue we should reconsider the ideal of *jivanmukta* as well as the *bodhisattva*: even if somebody has realized his very nature, he does not dispose of the ultimate, but he is grasped by the ultimate. Thus, the human person is on the way, the communion is a communion of seekers. Who seeks does not claim to have found it (Phil 3,13f.), but is open for a plurality which forms as such communion.

Hence, I plead for small groups and communities all over the world which feel themselves united in the search for the One. They live from the Whole and search for its ever deeper realization, but they know that they are not the Whole. They are a “network of the heart”, different in style and approaches and tolerant towards each other. They are small groups, engaged in the practice of *metanoia*, trying to live really a changed life.

This concept of the communion of seekers is realistic. It signifies hope, because it believes, that human beings are able to learn, to change. A basic change in our attitudes and life-styles is very difficult. It is even more difficult, because it is a personal matter yet of collective urgency. It is everybody’s own decision. But it is a way which we can learn to go together. There is not only one way, but a multiplicity of approaches and decision-making, which can be learnt best in small groups and communions. This is what I call communion of seekers. It is a re-evaluation of the monastic ideal. Yet, what we need are not communities apart from the daily life in our industrial societies and civilizations, but small cells creating spiritual awareness, living in *metanoia within* our daily structures and obligations, to transform them from within.

3. Communion is built upon and established in *mutual trust*. This is what political and economical relations are lacking the most. Mutual trust is based on the belief in human dignity, in the assumption, that fellow human beings are precisely in their otherness an end, not only a means for my own interests. This again is connected with the virtues of tolerance and plurality. Mutual trust grows out of experience. We should create consciously as many situations as possible which mutual trust can be experienced in. Again, I think that small communities will be helpful in this regard, whenever it is possible to establish them (in families, in business life, in our congregations, inter-religious groups, inter-ideological groups etc.). They all could be called spiritual groups insofar as they are aware of a wholeness which they want to realize in pluriformity. Mutual trust can be built up especially by means of dialogue on all levels such as living together, common reflection, meditation, political engagement etc.

4. For achieving balanced structures in all parts of our societies we should strive for *decentralization*. Centralism nourishes often only an uncontrollable bureaucracy and favours the build-up of hierarchies which are usually extremely repressive. It is difficult to say how decentralization can be achieved in areas such as military, economics, politics etc. This is a very complex process, and I am certainly not an expert in those fields. But we should encourage any attempt which could lead into more decentralization. Communion-building on the basis of small groups — first churches, religions or spiritual institutions — is as such based on the principle of decentralization. It is not only important to avoid misuse of power, but equally to encourage each other to contribute our best to the tremendous tasks human beings are faced with today. All lay-movements, non-professional or extra-parliamentary initiatives etc. have to be seen as most important events for solving problems. At the same time they are a build up of communion.

5. This leads us to the last point. Communion is built upon everybody’s *responsibility*. There should be less “delegation” of power and decision-making. Theologically speaking we can say, that man is integrated into the self-realization of God. Man participates in the Trinitarian dance. And dance creates reality. We have the world in our hands, and we are completely responsible for it, everybody, me and you. This means, that if we fail the self-realization of God cannot come to its fulfilment. God has given himself into our hands. This is the seriousness of the situation. This is the meaning of the cross of Christ. The world itself has become now the cross, where all our ambitions, egocentredness and power-struggles are nailed. If we do not allow ourselves to become transformed into the new life, into the new

spiritual community, I do not see much hope for human beings by the end of this century.

I have tried to give some guidelines for communion-building. Much more would have to be said. All is based on the vision or the awareness of the Whole. The Whole is always there. It is *in* the pluriformity. If I destroy the pluriformity, I destroy the Whole. If I am aware of the Whole, I become sensitive for any particular feature in the plurality. I let it be and appreciate it as an expression of the Whole, knowing that the Whole grasps everything, but everything is not the Whole. Theoretically this is not very difficult to understand. But to put it into practice is most difficult, because it is a process of transformation. It needs energy and willingness to become changed. It needs courage.
