DISTRUST, TRUST, AND THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

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Some time ago I was asked to address the assembly of a large province of women religious. It would be gathering to formulate a vision statement to help carry it into the year 2010. To prepare for the assembly, the province leader asked members to consider external issues that might affect the statement, such as racism, violence, sexism, and simple living. At the same time, she shared her concern about something she thought might affect the external issue. She asked why so many members seemed unable to talk with one another about issues facing them. "How can we mold a common vision," she queried, "if we cannot discuss the major issues that divide us?"

Around the same time she wrote her letter to the congregation I was asked to address a pre-chapter meeting of another group of women religious. Like the province noted above, this group has been recognized for its progressive stances related to social concerns. However, this time, "external" issues were not the primary concern of the planning committee. The underlying issue the committee members asked me to discuss was one they saw critical for the future of their institute itself: trust. Recalling the concern of the other provincial leader and aware of dynamics occurring in my own and other religious groups, the planning committee's letter elicited in me an "aha" experience. "They're on to something," I thought.

Subsequent reflections on the issue have led me to believe now that the future of religious life will remain very tentative at best, despite all the mission statements and provincial plans, all the visioning and pastoral programs, until we grapple with the fundamental issue of trust and distrust as it impinges on our notion of community.

In this article I will discuss the dynamics of trust and distrust and how these impact on self and others. Then I will suggest that a way to move from distrust to trust occurs when we *en*trust ourselves to our real selves and others (including God). This involves self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-disclosure, and self-donation. I will try to show how such a form of "entrustment" can constitute an essential ingredient for authentic community. I will promote such kinds of communities as those that will generate the kind of commitment necessary to give life to the community's members.

To achieve a better grasp of ideas contained in <u>trust</u> and <u>distrust</u>, the steering committee for the Chapter mounted two large charts in the assembly hall. Each chart featured a large circle. One said: "*trust*;" the other, "*distrust*." The sisters were asked to write within each circles others words and images to describe their look and feel. By day's end the circles were filled with powerful images:

DISTRUST	TRUST
Angry + Frustrated + Devastated	Affirmed + Self-possessed + Whole
Passive Aggressive + Rebellious	Empowered + Belonging + Respected
Half-hearted + Anxious + Hurt	Integrated + Warm + Giving Birth
Incapable + Outsider + Isolated	Responsible + Accepted + Generous
Powerless + Decimated + Pained	Powerful + Energized + Illumined
Humiliated + Defensive + Shamed	Loved + Oneness + Radiance + Safe
Disintegrated + Not Understood	Plenty good seeds + Free + Eager
A pit of powerlessness + Alone	Groovy + Solid-grounded + Loving
Withdrawn + Fearful + Inhibited	Explosive of creative expression
Misunderstood + Sad + Diminished	Understood + Happy + Expansive

Trust as well as distrust are learned; they evolve from human interchange. In fact, if Erickson is correct, they represent the first task of human beings. Trust and distrust are determined by historical factors in relationships and encounters. People learn to trust based on their relationships; they learn to distrust from their experiences. The interplay between them determines ones development. Our maturation process finds us withholding trust until the quality of our personal relationships merits our confidence in others. Betrayal makes us less willing to trust. All these factors help define the dynamics of (dis)trust.

Based on past personal relationships and experiences, we can't say we really trust all people. Yet neither can we say we distrust everyone. Either statement would be too strong to describe most of our ordinary relationships. For most people, certain dynamics must take place before we really trust or distrust. Furthermore, while trust and distrust have many manifestations, their interplay is not as simple as their polarities might indicate. A continuum with *trust* and *distrust* as its two poles contains various expressions of these variables of (dis)trust: "don't trust," "can't trust," "won't trust," or "mistrust." Most of us would place ourselves at different places with different people somewhere within these two poles, depending on the qualities of our relationships with them.

Dis/Trust and Self

Unless we can trust our *selves*, genuine trust in others and God will be tentative at best. Yet, precisely because distrust of ourselves has arisen from past (or existing) relationships with *others* that may have been violated, coming to trust of self is never that simple. Others help mold the self. The molding that begins in the womb and continues throughout life shapes our (dis)trust of our selves and others (including *the* Other). Because of the questionable way others have interpreted us to ourselves, our trust in ourselves can be very shaky.

God created all of us, male and female, "good enough." Yet, too soon, our experience is of other "gods" that tell us we are not good enough. Too soon we hear the challenge: "What's wrong with you?" This rebuke of ourselves articulates one of the most primitive experiences that results in distrust of the self. We learn at an early stage that at least some others think something is wrong with us. The resulting sense of biblical nakedness, which leaves us with the sense of not being "good enough" in our own eyes and the eyes of others, is shame. Shame grounds our distrust of self. The resulting inabilty to trust our self finds us covering up our nakedness; we create defenses for our self as a way to avoid further invasions from others. We fear to trust.

To buttress these defensive forms of protection which alienate us from these "others," we create a self we hope will be acceptable to them. Thus our identity, our self, becomes to be overly-identified by others' assumptions and expectations, their rules and regulations. The process by which this happens

is imperceptible; yet its effects can have lasting consequences. The result of being other-defined is lack of self-awareness and self-acceptance, the two basic ingredients for trust of self.

When shame-sourced images dominate our thoughts, feelings, and behavior, trust in our self is transferred to others. Without a personal sense of trust in ourselves, we rely on outside affirmation and acceptance. We become preoccupied with meeting standards imposed from outside. The "others" setting these standards can be persons or institutional representatives. When those cultures and institutions are discriminatory the sense of self-rejection and lack of trust in self can be compounded for those who become their victims. Thus in our culture a black child learns he can't trust himself *because* he is black. In our church a woman learns she can't trust herself *because* she is one of those "she's" not good enough for the institution.

A residual problem facing religious who entered community before Vatican Council II is that we entered into systems and structures that defined our lives in such ways that many of us still find it hard to trust ourselves.[i] We were trained to trust others instead of ourselves. It was considered virtuous, as a way of "dying to ourself," to rely on others -- our superiors, priests, bishops, popes, rules and regulations, canon law, or whatever -- to identify who we were and to give us our sense of meaning. Furthermore, our functions often defined our identity. Those determining our functions had the power to define our reality. For many of us, we have little or no identity outside of these others' definitions of us. To be aware of one's self, much less to accept one's self or share one's self, becomes impossible when that self is inseparably meshed with definitions coming from outside. When asked, "What do you think," the person not trustful of self necessarily finds identity and meaning in outside referents.

Without self-awareness or self-acceptance, there will be little self-definition. Without self-definition classic codependency often results. With it comes forms of superachievement or underachievement, the underminers of trusting relationships. Lack of self-awareness and self-acceptance that result in the lack of self-trust has significant emotional and behavioral consequences as well. More and more major superiors point to a kind of low-level depression among many of their members. This low-level depression can be closely linked with a person's happiness or sense of self-acceptance and self-worth. With low-level depression, trust in self and others (including God) too easily gets compromised.

Thus far I've tried to say that the process of achieving one's self-identity and coming to trust of self flows from genuine self-awareness and self-acceptance. Such self-awareness enables us to understand ourselves as autonomous persons with unique dignity. Self-acceptance, while affected by our relationships with others, never can be defined by these; it comes from inside. Without these two forms of self-identity, one will never be able to trust one's self, much less others.

I became very conscious of this fact as I finished my work with the first group I described at the beginning of this article. I had been one of three keynote speakers at its all-province assembly. Close to 500 members and associates attended. At the end of the three-day gathering, the group accepted a statement about itself that had been forged during the members' time together. It said something like: "We are self-defined and self-directed." The words had power for these women; they served as a kind of testimony of their trust in themselves as a group vis-a-vis any outside effort to define them. They spoke volummes about their rejection of efforts to any others to define their group.

Paradoxically, as I left for the airport I mentioned to one of the other keynoters that I was going from there to give a retreat to another group of women religious. Its identity still was very much linked with the local bishop and the existing ecclesiastical system. Having had the powerful experience of the weekend, I found myself saying, "Given what this group of women religious did at its assembly these days, I don't think the group I'm about to visit would even understand what it means to be 'self-defined' and 'self-directed.'" Groups are like persons in the way they are self-aware and self-accepting as well as

self-defined and self-directed. It depends on the degree of trust, faith, and meaning one experiences in the group.

Increasingly, I grow aware of the connections among trust, faith, and meaning. Elsewhere I spoken about implications connected to the crisis of meaning facing us religious.[ii] Every crisis of meaning involves some crisis of faith. At the same time, every faith crisis (in each other, our leaders, our communities, or our church leaders) ultimately involves a crisis of trust. *Trust*, the dictionary reminds us, means "implicit faith." Thus any crisis of meaning and faith will affect our capacity for trust.

Every crisis of trust invites us to examine our faith. Building on Fowler's notions of faith,[iii] I believe faith of any kind (personal, interpersonal, religious, or secular) involves personal relationships of trust and loyalty (to someone, some values, or some institution) that leads to commitment. Thus faith = personal + relationships + trust/loyalty + commitment. Each of the four notions builds on the former; without the former, the successive notion cannot take place.

A few paragraphs above I noted that self-awareness represents the core of one's personhood. In a similar way self-acceptance defines the possibility of ones authentic relationships with others. Without personal relationships wherein one is self-aware and self-assured, the possibility of trust with self, much less others is negated. However, since faith involves personal relationships of trust and loyalty that lead to commitment, there are implications for self at the level of each of these notions of trust and loyalty as well as commitment.

Trust and loyalty imply some kind of self-disclosure while commitment is impossible without some kind of self-donation. Putting these stages of faith together in a way that reveals the critical role of trust of self and others, we can create a chart:

Personal   Self-Awareness
Relationships   Self-Acceptance
Trust/Loyalty   Self-Disclosure
Commitment   Self-Donation

Without self-aware persons (step 1) there can be no personal relationships that reflect mutual self-acceptance. Without an authentic "I" there is no "thou;" without a self-aware and self-accepting person the other cannot be honored with integrity. Being a person grounds the possibility of relationships (step 2). However, personal relationships define the character and quality of trust and distrust. Without a certain kind of personal relationship wherein there will be some kind of mutual self-disclosure there will be no trust. Without appropriate self-disclosure forms of distrust or lack of trust (step 3) will define personal relationships. Finally, only if there is mutual self-disclosure will persons move their relations to the possibility of reciprocal self-donation. Without such a willingness to be self-giving there can be no commitments (step 4). Thus, for healthy people, only persons in relationships of mutual trust and loyalty will be able to make commitments. Persons (step 1) in relationships (step 2) don't make commitments (step 4) to those who aren't trusted (step 3). Unless they are controlled by fear or are unhealthy.

We can't trust persons or institutions that have abused us or our relationships. Margaret Farley notes, "If our trust has been abused or we have lost our own selves in our commitment to another or to a cause or institution, then we can be afraid to put ourselves at risk again [through trusting relationships]."[iv] As there can be no relationship (step 2) that is not personal (step 1), trust exists only with personal relationships of integrity, where people are trustworthy.

While the progression described above moves from personal relationships to trust and loyalty to commitment, commitments also nourish trust and loyalty and support personal relationships. Farley explains: "Commitment is destructive if it aims to provide the only remedy for distrust in a loving

relationship. But it can be a ground for *trust* if its aim is honesty about intention, communication of how great are the stakes if intention fails."[v] Commitment nourishes trusting relationships among persons who can count on each other's loyalty. When we examine any crisis of trust among us, we'll find a crisis in our personal relationships also. This leads me to examine the level of (dis)trust among us in many religious communities.

Dis/Trust and Others

If dynamics often occurring at gatherings of many religious I know are representative, we face a problem that can exascerbate any problems we may have in trusting ourselves. This involves the lessening of trust, loyalty, and any resulting commitment among ourselves. For instance, it often happens that, when we arrive at each other's communities, or meet each other at meetings, we give great hugs. But what happens then? What do we do, what do we say, how do we relate *after* the hug? This makes me wonder what, except for our past, do many of us truly share in common? What constitutes the character and quality of our personal relationships? Are they significant enough to engender trust? I began to ask this question after a recent experience I had in my Province.

One of our living groups celebrated the birthday of one of our brothers. Because so many of us have defined ourselves by our work and have such full schedules, the planners decided the only way to insure any kind of a crowd would be to have the celebration on a Saturday morning at 7:30. And they were right!

A good number came for the morning prayer and Mass (together concluded in a half-hour). Then we gathered for breakfast. Greetings were made and hugs were given. People asked, "How are you?" but this seemed to more a social convention than a real question of interest. No one expected a real response. Consequently, the culturally-accepted reply was returned: "I'm just fine." The food was ready to eat before our small talk would become stiff.

This was not a group that should have *needed* to make small talk. Like the two groups of women religious noted above, almost all of us were involved in work among the poor or in social justice. We shared a common vision. Our inability to communicate well could not be attributed to any lack of shared-vision. After all, together we had worked diligently on a mission statement. Then why didn't more of us feel at home with each other? This line of questioning led me to look beyond any external vision or ideal. It led me to examine something within us: the *context* for the vision which seemed to be stymying us.

It's nothing new to say, but I believe individualism overly-dominated our gathering that morning. We had a great opportunity to celebrate one another's efforts, to share each other's problems, and to support our common vision of being in solidarity with the poor. But few of us did. We didn't talk about our vision or how we strive to implement it. Instead we engaged in small talk. Why? This makes me wonder if issues related to a possible lack of genuine trust keeps us from being genuinely truthful and honest with each other.

Two other obstacles impinging on the possibility of mutual trust also may have been jealousy or competitiveness. I have heard many men in my province say we don't know how to work as real teams (among ourselves or with others) in our ministries. We find better examples of team in many diocesan parishes. A reason might be found beyond our individualism in the ways we compete with each other and are envious of each others' successes. Thus, what Lillian Rubin has found related to competition and jealousy among some women also might have applied to some of us men around that breakfast table: The fact that we were not very truthful with one another "create[s] a breach even if only a small one." It raises "fears of envy, questions of trust. But even when such behaviors are not at issue, women's inability to deal directly with competitive feelings is a source of difficulty in their relations with each other."[vi]

We finished breakfast and dishes in 40 minutes. Everyone went his way. I left pondering the quality of our personal relationships. But my questioning went further to ask about the level of our trust and loyalty. I even found myself raising questions related to my very commitment to these men.

Why should I remain part of this group of men that gave me so little meaning? For me that morning, the link between faith, trust, and meaning became quite real.

While my crisis of meaning may have been a mini-one, it held within it one more little erosion of faith in the institution wherein I have made a commitment. Why? As I've examined by thoughts and feelings subsequent to that breakfasdt, it had something to do with my awarness that we lacked much trust among us.

Why do we get surprised when people ask why they might not *want* to remain committed to our groups when similar cases confront them on a regular basis? If commitments are questioned -- at any level (be it marriage or religious life), I believe, it's generally attributable to a failure at one of the first three levels. In my experience, a good part of the problem of faith in our groups usually lies between levels 2 and 3, between our personal relationships and the levels of trust/distrust involved in those relationships.

Linking that breakfast incident with similar incidents have led me to wonder whether the present institutionalized form of religious life can generate enough trust among its members to ensure lasting commitments. So, before blaming our members or potential members for their "lack of commitment," I think we would do well to examine whether the quality of our personal relationships are strong enough to generate trust and loyalty among us.

While we may have crises related to trust among us, I don't think it can be said that religious -- except for some unfortunate situations -- actually *distrust* one another. Our dissolution has not yet reached that stage. Rather than such extreme experiences of distrust, most of us find ourselves elsewhere on the continuum: we don't trust, won't trust, can't trust or mistrust. Further analysis shows that much of this, in turn, results because our trust has been undermined, betrayed, manipulated, or otherwise violated.

Our communities will never generate trust, much less loyalty, to say nothing about commitment, unless we can *en*trust ourselves to specific others in personal relationships of integrity. Yet how can we share ourselves -- our shame as well as our dreams, our fears and our phobias, our questions and our commitments -- if we don't know if we can trust one another?

For instance, what if one of our members said publicly that he or she no longer participates in liturgies presided over by male clerics in a church that denies women the possibility of doing the same? What would the reaction be? While some might be supportive of that person how sure can we be that others might not immediately question his\her commitment to the community or loyalty to the pope? Still others might say they could no longer have confidence (or "faith") in the person because they disagree with the person's behavior. No matter, at the wider institional level the trust level probably would be seriously compormised.

For fear our own confreres may consider us disloyal, many of us don't say what we think, what we feel, or what we do in rituals we've developed. We don't feel safe describing our participation in worship-patterns with which we feel more at home. In effect, we have come to fear sharing our *selves*, afraid to trust the very persons to whom, by vow, we've entrusted ourselves. Don't such dynamics indicate a betrayal of basic trust? Can't a consequence of such behavior be a lessening of our vowed commitment to one another?

When relationships among persons in a community reveal a lack of the trust need for members to voice their opinions and differences, silence and passive-aggressive behavior often result. "Don't talk, don't feel, don't trust" dynamics often take over. The result will be relationships that characterize a dysfunctional system.[vii] Unless checked, these dynamics can often result in hostility and systems breakdown. The way this disintegration occurs might be charted as follows: lack of personal

relationships   poor intercommunication   unwillingness to cooperate   increasing distrust   hostility breakdown of commitment.

Recently I witnessed this process take over a group as it developed a vision statement (a mission statement), a provincial plan, and finally a pastoral plan. The first step of passing a vision statement went smoothly and enthusiastically. The final part of the mission statement even celebrated the group's willingness to "take risks." The subsequent provincial plan, linking its communal goals and ministerial goals, easily sailed through the group's chapter.

Things changed, however, when work began on the pastoral plan. It soon became clear that the proposed process would allow every individual to continue doing what he had already been doing. There were no structured processes that invited real openness to any wider environment. There was no examination of needs outside the group that might invite any real change.

As for intercommunication, interest groups (teachers, poverty ministries, individualized ministries, white parishes, preachers, etc) did share with each other. But most seemed dominated by one preoccupation: not to lose any existing ministries or jeopardize their individual ministries. Self-disclosure seemed determined to keep self-donation from happening. Despite talk about "reading the signs of the times," self-interest and self-preservation defined the process. As I read the reports from each group, I couldn't help but think of people on a sinking ship changing their deck chairs. The consequence of this lack of openness to the needs of a wider church and environment, this lack of genuine intercommunication, this lack of cooperation, reveals basic dynamics related to forms of distrust at the worst and lack of trust at the best.

This was evident when the provincial leaders called an assembly of the province to describe in detail the signs that indicated a crisis faced the province. The leaders clearly outlined the breakdown in the three critical areas of spirituality around which religious life has functioned, namely prayer, community, and ministry. Sharing their analysis of problems facing the province, the leaders asked members to respond, to offer challenges, to give alternatives.

However, rather than hearing rebuttals or other opinions (much less support for their analysis), silence virtually reigned. A few did question the conclusions and process, but they were not publicly supported by the rest of the members. However, once outside the session, plenty of very animated conversations ensued. Some men gathered in informal groups and complained about being "manipulated" and "railroaded" while others used less-flattering images to indicate their distrust of the leadership.

For their part, having overcome their fears by self-disclosure, the leaders were surprised at the members' reaction. They thought they had indicated forthrightly a declaration of the crisis facing the province. Instead of discussing the dilemma, denial dominated. In reaction to the members' mistrust of the leaders, the leaders' trust in the group eroded as well.

A consequence of current forms of distrust among many of us religious becomes more critical when we consider (dis)trust from developmental theory. If Erik Erikson is correct, people will not develop to another stage unless they complete the tasks assigned to the previous stage. Furthermore, he notes, the most primitive stage is that of survival. At this stage we must address the basic conflict between trust and distrust. Unless we find ways of resolving the tension between dis/trust there will be no healthy life synthesis. Erikson shows that, at this survival stage, the synthesis of the trust-distrust tensions results in *hope*.

If we can project Erikson's notions about the individual development of that body called "person" to the corporate body called "community," two main conclusions can be drawn. First, if we now experience critical problems related to the basic issue of trust/ distrust, this may indicate that, at its organizational level, religious life has reversed to the survival stage, the most primitive stage of life

for an organism. Second, because we lack ways to personally relate to each other in ways that will find us entrusting ourselves (including our opinions) to each other, scant hope remains for us at the level of our organizations. Without this hope our present, institutional, organizational form of religious life will move ever more rapidly into diminishment, dysfunctionality, and dissolution. Death cannot be far beyond.

I believe we religious of the mainline congregations will have little or no hope in our future until we find ways of sharing with one another in personal relationships, until we can really entrust ourselves confidently to one another, and until our commitments will flow from a transformation at the first levels. If Erikson's theory is correct, and if we, analogously can apply it to our organizations, we cannot avoid this issue if will ever move our organizations beyond survival into hope.

Moving through the Trust/Distrust Conflict

If so much distrust exists at the three levels of self, others, and the Divine, where can we find hope? I personally become very hopeful when I find members within the organization choosing life. They do so, not by trying to breathe life into the organization, but by opting to be part of a new kind of organism, a living body, a dynamic community. This *community* need not be envisioned as the kind of community most of us have experienced until now, because so much of this has been organizationally defined rather than organically driven.

For years church ministers working in Third World countries have said their hope for the church lies in basic Christian communities. More recently small faith communities within parishes and/or centered around retreat houses have brought hope to many in North America as well. However, given what I've said here about the issue of trust/ distrust in religious life, as well as the serious obstacles to its transformation I've discussed elsewhere,[viii] I have concluded that any viable future of religious life will be found in small, intentional communities of like-minded celibates and their partners who can share seriously with one another on basic issues and do this in the context of a more contemplative approach to prayer and life.

Our vocation directors increasingly tell us that young people coming to us for the sake of mission want a context for their ministry. Traditionally this "context" has been called community. However, as our numbers grow older and more diminished, as our individualism and our *anomie* get reinforced in our workaholism, as our low-level depression and our addictions sabotage the possibility of healing, many candidates find among us too many "grouches" to make them willing to stay. More remain because of a need to be in another dysfunctional group comparable to the one they left. Still others are confused because they find so little enthusiasm and hope related to the charism except at the periodic congregational gathering. The lived experience belies the theory.

Given the futility of trying to affect what may be beyond transformation, the only hope for a viable religious life will not be found in institutional change but in the power that occurs when people come together to share their faith. In Twelve-Step language we call this necessary context for recovery the Group. The psychologist Robert Kegan, and his feminist corrective Mary Baird Carlsen, call this sine qua non "the holding environment."

At Harvard, pioneers like Kegan and Carlsen, James Fowler and Sharon Parks have articulated new approaches to therapeutic processes and adult faith development. Originally therapists realized the truth of the biblical adage that people -- whether individuals or groups -- perish for want of vision. So *vision* was seen to be essential for life. But then, given the work of people like Victor Frankl and Rollo May, many in the therapeutic community came to recognize *meaning* as another essential for quality life -- individual or communal life. Now, therapists have concluded that neither strong vision nor deep meaning can be sustained without some kind of support system. Traditionally, this support system has been called *community*.

When I speak for community I am not talking about the old sense of living together lockstep, or even in the new sense of voluntary associations with a life-expectancy of a generation, much less the kinds of personal relationships that makes the community merely equal to the sum of its parts. Rather, I envision new kinds of "holding environments" or synergistic gatherings of people. Here people's shared meanings and visions will empower them into communities wherein the community, the whole, will be greater than the sum of its individual parts. Here the quality of their personal relationships will lead them to trust and loyalty that will generate commitments. I call evidence of such a gathering a "community of entrustment."

All of us -- whether recovering addicts and/or liberation seekers -- need such "communities of entrustment." Building on a certain kind of personal relationship that will lead to trust, these communities of trust will manifest three key functions: affirmation, correction, and commitment. In speaking of the qualities a client can expect of a therapist, Mary Baird Carlsen outlines the dynamics of such a "holding environment" quite clearly. Carlsen describes the characteristics:

> (1) *confirmation*--a supportive (not restrictive) "holding on" of the person as the individual is given acknowledgement and recognition. For, as Kegan says, we each need to be able to excite someone--"to turn the lights on in their eyes." (2) *Contradiction*--a "letting go" as the individual is encouraged within the framework of the holding environment to reach out beyond the current embeddedness to new steps in personal differentiation. And with the knowledge that the holding environment remains as a supportive backdrop for new experience the person is enabled to grow and change. (3) *Continuity*--a kind of "sticking around" as the individual keeps a sense of ongoing support and personal consistency within new forays into life.[ix]

If these characteristics should be expected of the therapeutic encounter, is it wrong to expect that they might identify communities of faith?

Community in the form of holding environments has become essential to the future of religious life. Unless religious develop an approach linking meaning, vision, and support system, I believe we will end up teetering, as anyone does who sits on a tripod with only one of the three legs missing. Even if we have found personal meaning and have agreed upon a communal vision, without the support system of some kind of viable holding environment, we will have no stability.

At this point my argument may generate strong exceptions, especially those who think of community in older monastic forms of "living together." I believe, however, that until we move from our various forms of denial (which we use to reinforce our one-legged individualism) and move to a new emphasis on community, religious life as we have known it will only continue to decline. Until our members are willing to make at least a modicum of self-donation, sacrificing some self-interest for a vision bigger than ourselves, we will continue our present form of corporate self-destruction. Even a biologically oriented approach to organizations tells us that unless the members exhibit some form of self-sacrifice, those organizations will quickly move into decay and decomposition, dissolution and death.

Robert Bellah and company show in *Habits of the Heart*[x] and *The Good Society*[xi] that our culture teaches us the language of individualism. This cultural pattern undermines bonds of community that once contributed to a sense of meaning, supported our personal relationships, and nourished our vision and commitments. But when, because of our individualism, meaning becomes vacuous, and visions remain on paper rather than taking form, it is hard to fathom how we will fashion community in the traditional forms it has taken. However, even though the culture's individualism may be overly-defining religious life in North America, we religious *are*

finding community. However, very often this is experienced outside those to whom we initially bonded (in my case, outside OFMCap).

What primary communities have many of us religious found since we entered? A possible answer may be found by examining how we spend our free time. For some of us the primary community is our family or friends. For others, it is our coworkers or peers. For still others, it is an exclusive group or our "significant others," male or female, depending on our sexual orientation. This leads me ask if the personal relationships and the trust and loyalty that have traditionally supported our past forms of community <u>with one another</u> are presently strong enough to sustain these other options to the commitments we have made.

Today our candidates come seeking meaning and vision in prayer and ministry; yet they also want a third pillar, a support system. The three legs of meaning, vision, and support system constitute the triad. Although our behaviors have made this third leg quite shaky, few of us acknowledge the institutional weakness. Even less among us seem willing to forego some of our individualism to create non-suffocating and liberating relationships of trust which might rebuild it. So we keep facing issues related to meaning and fail to enact truly life-giving vision statements. Deep down, like any corporate culture, we know both meaning and vision need a support system to give life to both. And we don't know if we're up to the task, the hard work, and conversion this will demand.

Discovering the Dynamics for "Entrustment"

How might we work to develop the dynamics to create such communities? First of all, we need to create safe environments wherein our personal relationships can be cultivated. We need to support people in their effort to be self-aware and self-actualized. We need communities supportive of self-disclosure wherein we can share our *selves*, including our shame and fears, our dreams and hopes in mutual ways. If faith involves personal relationships of trust and loyalty that generate commitment, we need to find ways to share our faith. We need to create faith-sharing styles to help us reveal our unique I AM with each other. Let me share an example of how this happened in a community of faith where I live.

In 1991 I joined four Capuchins in creating a new community, inserted among the poor. We really had no operating norms to guide our future. The only promise we made was to be faithful to an hour of daily faith-sharing. As the months went on, our personal relationships developed primarily through our time at prayer. Through our daily personal sharing of fears and concerns we began moving on the continuum of trust/distrust to deeper trust. Faith-sharing enabled the beginning of tentative "entrustment."

One day, one of the brothers felt safe enough to risk disclosing <u>himself</u> to the others. The sharing occurred in the context of the day's scriptures, Romans 13:8-9: "Owe no debt to anyone except the debt that binds us to love another. Those who love their neighbor have fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,' and any other commandment there may be are all summed up in this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" In the dialogue, it became clear that any problems we faced in loving our neighbor connect with problems in loving ourselves. Lack of trust of others has grounding in lack of trust in self. This realization led us to share problems we experienced related to self-love, especially the dynamics of shame. One of the friars went to his room and returned to read a passage from Bradshaw's *Healing the Shame that Binds You*:

> When shame has been completely internalized, nothing about you is okay. You feel flawed and inferior; you have the sense of being a failure. There is no way you can share your inner self because you are an object of contempt to yourself. When you are

contemptible to yourself, you are no longer in you. To feel shame is to feel seen in an exposed and diminished way.[xii]

The brother then shared his efforts at recovery from the paralysis of shame that had bound him.

Having moved from initial questions of trust to such intimate self-disclosure took months. However, gradually the environment for an entrustment community had evolved. Now he felt safe to entrust to the members of his community this deep part of himself. His self-disclosure invited further disclosure on the part of others. His self-revelation became an invitation to the others to share more of themselves, to entrust their fears and doubts as well as their dreams and visions with each other.

The next morning at prayer, we read from Paul's letter to the Romans (14:7-8): "None of us lives as our own master and none of us dies as our own master." What happened then, I truly believe, occurewd only because of dynamics that had been set in motion beforehand. Given the basic trust that had been developed from the awareness we were affirmed by each other, we now could be open to be challenged.

One of the brothers said, "You know, I think I have been living too much as my own master. I haven't really been too responsible to you. And I don't want to continue living so individualistically. I'd like you to challenge me when you see me unaccountable to you for what I do and how I do it." His openness to be challenged came because of being in an environment where he felt affirmed. Such a statement would be quite difficult to make without trust and a sense of loyalty to a group of people whose care he had felt. He had experienced personal relationships of trust and loyalty free of control. Now he could make a commitment. The pattern prevailed: personal relationships of affirmation and correction had led to a sense of mutual trust and loyalty among the members of the group. Building on these dynamics, promises could be made and commitments could be honored and sustained.

In conclusion, I am becoming convinced that commitments in (and to) community rarely will last unless they can be grounded in the kind of "entrustment" I've tried to describe in this article. Within such personal relationships of trust, I believe:

1. All can be themselves without being judged defective. They will feel they are affirmed and desire to affirm the others.

2. All can show their true opinions and feelings, which will be honored, even if not always agreed with.

3. Strong relationships among the persons involved exist among each other; they are firm and lasting.

4. The parties wish each other well; no one consciously hurts others. When challenge is needed it builds on felt-affirmation.

5. The parties have a personal investment in sustaining the relationship.

6. There is consistency; no "here today and gone tomorrow." This consistency finds stability in relationships, not necessarily in the placements.

7. The members can confide in each other without fear that confidences will be violated.

8. The parties can rely on each other, as well as their word.

When characteristics such as these define our personal relationships, I believe we will be well on our way to the creation of communities of entrustment. Here we can gather in personal relationships and begin to entrust ourselves to each other in affirmation and challenge, in confirmation and contradiction. Here we can experience a context wherein we can move beyond issues of trust/distrust. And here, in that context of trust and loyalty, we will have reasons to remain. The challenges to our commitment coming from a distrusting society will have found us having discovered enough meaning to "stick around!"

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[i] See Michael H. Crosby, *The Dysfunctional Church: Addiction and Codependency in the Family of Catholicism* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1991).

[ii] Michael H. Crosby, OFMCap., <u>Transforming Religious Life</u> (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press Audiotapes, 1987), set of three.

[iii] James W. Fowler, "Faith and the Structuring of Meaning," in *Faith Development and Fowler*, ed. Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1986), pp. 15-42.

[iv] Margaret A. Farley, *Personal Commitments: Beginning, Keeping, Changing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 8.

[v] Ibid. pp. 34-35.

[vi] Lillian B. Rubin, *Just Friends: The Role of Friendship in Our Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 84.

[vii] For more on this, see Michael H. Crosby, *Dysfunctional Church: Addiction and Codependency in the Family of Catholicism* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1991).

[viii] Michael H. Crosby, OFMCap., *Transforming Religious Life* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press Audiotapes, 1987), set of three.

[ix] Mary Baird Carlsen, *Meaning-Making: Therapeutic Processes in Adult Development* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1988), p. 51.

[x] Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California, 1985).

[xi] Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Stephen M. Tipton, *The Good Society* (New York: Knopf, 1991).

[xii] John Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You* (Deerfield Beach, Fla.: Health Communications), p. 13.