

Human Relationships and Boundaries: A Psycho-Spiritual Perspective

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Abstract

Most of our joy in life comes from our happy relationships with other people, and most of our problems in life come from unhappy relationships with them. The lack of relationship skills results in rejection, isolation and ultimately limited the quality of life. We pay great price with regard to Human Relationships, by not dealing with ourselves and by not taking up the difficult challenge of understanding ourselves and others as persons, as we are. Christian relationship maturity is an ability to pursue healthy intimacy and relationships and to live rationally. It is an aptitude to sustain intimate relationships that are honest, non-manipulative and non-judgmental; a capacity to love specific individuals, with their strengths and struggles, in our communities and the world at large, where we live and interact.

Relationships are *connection* between persons. We share a relationship with our family, with friends and most important of all we share a relationship with our creator. Relationships can be personal, impersonal, close, distant or contained. A *personal relationship* would be a relationship on our own personal time. An *impersonal relationship* would be a relationship with the public. A *close relationship* would be someone who lives close to you or a family member. A *distant relationship* would be a relationship we share with someone we know who lives far away from us and we can only talk to them on the phone or through Internet. A *containing relationship* has the capacity to hold or include all of who we are (Cannon & Wilkie Au1994). A containing relationship promotes our growth in consciousness and wholeness because it makes space not only

for our positive but also for our negative image. If a relationship is to serve as a container for growth, it must be able to endure the realities of all relationships we go through in life. As Christians, our intimate relationship with Christ can be for us a kind of temple where we can see the face of God.

Over the several years of my Clinical experience one of the lessons I have learned about relationships is that the relationships we have with other people are the positive or negative transferences of the relationships we have *within ourselves* and very specially based on our family interpersonal relationships with significant persons. These significant persons are our parents, siblings and members of the extended family circle. They only seem different because we look at them through different lenses in the given or new environment we find ourselves in. Furthermore, our relationships with someone include what *we think of that person* and what *we believe s/he thinks of us*. Sometimes we tend to complicate our relationships by imagining or by projecting what the other person thinks we think of him/her, but ultimately those *internal representations* are all we have. In fact we are always viewing our relationships through the lens of our own consciousness and more subjectively than with true objectivity. Once we accept this truth, it will be much easier to relate with people. It is like having an accurate roadmap as we set out for a journey.

Relationships and Self-Esteem:

One easy way to improve our relationships is through *improving our self-esteem* or our internal relationships. These days the most important and valued form of intelligence is '*social intelligence*', that is, the ability to get along well with other people. Some of the young successful managing professionals will tell us that 85 percent of their success in life is determined by their social skills, by their ability to interact positively and effectively with others and to get them to cooperate with you to achieve your goals. Learning how to develop and maintain good human relationships can do more for our career and for our personal life than anything else we can accomplish. The inability to get along with others is the primary reason for our failure, frustration and unhappiness in life and work. According to one study, more than 95 percent of men and women were fired because of poor social skills rather than lack of competence or technical ability (Nelson-Jones 1990).

According to Sydney Jourard, Canadian psychologist, in his book on *The Psychology of Self-Disclosure*, "most of your joy in life comes from your happy relationships with other people, and most of your problems

in life come from unhappy relationships with them". An insight to understanding of Human Relations helps us in our lives because it is an important tool for personal commitment and professional development of human beings. It helps us to improve interpersonal relationships, so as to play a key role in developing the whole person. Through relationships, individuals have reached an important social reinforcement of the immediate surroundings that have helped them in their adaptation. But the lack of these skills has led them to rejection, isolation and ultimately limited the quality of life. Let us then review some of the skills that are important for human relationships that can help us gain better development in our daily lives.

Human Relationship Skills:

We need certain skills to improve and grow in our human relationships. Very often we have grown up with low levels of human relationships because of our low self-esteem/worth that was developed due to the numerous negative messages we received from people. While some messages help us to relate more effectively with people; others weaken our effectiveness. Sometimes these messages were consistent and at other times they may have been contradictory, not because they came from different people but also because they came from the same person. As children we were influenced in acquiring good and bad skills of loving others or being loved, through our interactions with family members, friends and acquaintances.

Let us look at some of those who have influenced and may still influence the choices we make in the relationships we have with people. They are a) *Parents, step-parents* and other substitute parents (teachers, superiors, elders). b) *Brothers and Sisters* who may be influential especially if older, and community members. c) *Grandparents* who brought up our parents and consequently influenced our parents, and themselves, if alive. d) *Aunts and uncles* mostly like grandparents. e) *Older friends*, friends of the family who would visit frequently. f) *Community Leaders*, people in the Church, parish, and others in positions. f) *Peer group* of our own age, outside our immediate family with whom we played, studied and interacted. g) *Famous people*, saints, film stars, sports personalities, historical or religious leaders, founders.

We are influenced by these people in maintaining our relationships and developing our skills through their strengths and weaknesses and through the messages we received from them. The most important and influential people among them are our parents, siblings and friends. Our rapport with these people leads to positive or negative consequences.

Our behavior and loving skills develop under their influence. The type of message they communicate with us and the way we receive them, especially in the areas of expressing affection, managing anger and conflict within and outside the family have enduring effect on our behavior pattern. Being the recipient in our significant relationships, whether we have been listening to our own feelings or whether we are tuning into the feelings of others is of importance. Often some of our feelings may be based on the feelings of people who are significant in our lives rather than based on our own valuing process.

All relationship messages are encoded by the Sender and decoded by the Receiver (Argyle 1983). Mistakes can be made at both ends. Senders may not send the messages they wish to send. At times the sender may intentionally deceive the receiver by sending a wrong message. At the receiving end even the clearest of messages could be decoded wrongly.

Sender	(Encodes)	Message	(Decodes)	Receiver
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Since people tend to send all sorts of messages the issue of *genuineness* becomes very important. Some of the important means of our communication are: *Body messages* (body language) which we send by means of our face and other parts of the body. There are *Touch messages* involving physical contact; *Voice messages* relating to how we talk - loudly or softly; *Verbal messages* that are expressed in words, depending on how we express our feelings and there are *Action messages* which point to *what you do* as contrasted with *what you say* or *how you say* it. Eye contact is another way of sending messages. Gestures have different meanings in different cultures (Ekman, 1984). Furthermore, it also depends on our ability to decode so as to look for congruence between what is said and how we have heard/understood it.

Nobody's upbringing is perfect. However, insecurities and fears, if not confronted and managed adequately, can be the breeding ground for hatred, distress in relationships. Robert Carkhuff (1983) categorizes families into two broad groupings: *Facilitative* and *Retarding*. The members of facilitative families help each other become persons of healthy self-worth, because they themselves have a secure self worth. The members of retarding families are in the process of becoming non-persons or persons of low self-worth, because of their lacking a true sense of their own worth. They send messages that undermine the sense of worth of their children. Children need the security of positive messages about their unique loveableness. Unfortunately many parents fail to realize that they often send messages that undermine the tender self-esteem of those they love. This can be applied also to the teachers in

the classroom or /and formators at the initial formation level with their formees. The Director of Formation must know, appreciate, and care for those with whom s/he is working. This requires time, perseverance, energy, conscious effort. Nothing can replace the aspects of time and listening, which go into any effective process of helping process. There is great wisdom in what Sigmund Freud said, "We are never so defenseless against as when we love, never so helplessly unhappy as when we have lost our loved object or its love".

There is a new awareness within the church that the human formation of candidates to the priesthood and religious life has lagged behind other aspects of formation and the current emphasis is that much more needs to be done to form them emotionally healthy and integrated priests and religious. It is important that the formators themselves be emotionally healthy and integrated. They need to have undertaken some inner work to deal with their relational and emotional baggage.

Relationships and Human Communication:

Harry Stack Sullivan, one of the late American psychiatrists confirmed that ninety percent of human communication was specifically designed not to communicate. Anxiety and fear on the part of both senders and receivers distorts much communication. It can be a powerful enemy of love. There is a close connection between your sense of worth and feelings of anxiety. People who feel worthwhile are relatively free from debilitating fear and anxiety. Children very often carry their psychological wounds and scars into adulthood, especially if they have not developed the skills to manage them. Adults are often overgrown kids. Adults are frequently full of fears and anxieties and as a result have difficulties in their capacity to love and communicate. Conflicts in relationships regularly point to fear of failure, change, rejection, loneliness, intimacy, others' envy, the unknown, of commitment, of being unhappy, losing independence, what others may think, of coping with the other sex, and other practical challenges.

Hence, it is imperative to be aware that along with these fears and anxieties, we also need to bring into our relationships certain skills in coping with our relational strengths and weaknesses. Along with these we also bring "the quality of our thinking, sex-role thoughts, feelings and behaviors that reflect more of our upbringing into our relationships" (Gill 1999). Unless we develop certain skills we may damage our relationships as we handle our on-going interpersonal relationships in our chosen way of life.

Relationships and Consecrated Persons in Community:

Community *is* relationship. Evelyn Whitehead points out how relationships in a community are lived out. The essence of community is the communion of persons and its primary value is relationship. "The core skills for creating community are the skills of reciprocity. Conflicts may arise from differing degrees of readiness and the capacity for reciprocity in relating" (Woodward 1983).

For those who opt for consecrated life; relationship becomes a topmost priority since they are meant to live in communities. The ability to develop and maintain relationships will indicate the failure and the success of an individual in religious life. In such situations, *maintaining boundaries is an absolute necessity*. This is important in the lives of both the young and the old. We need to observe and ask ourselves, "To whom do I choose to relate?" Some religious seek their security by relating themselves with those who are in positions of authority. Some others maintain their community involvement by relating mainly to the old and the sick. Some others find their place among the dissidents. Still others go for other kinds of relationships beyond the boundaries. It is very important that priests and religious develop relationships not in terms of their profession. Some religious are uncomfortable with the term "intimacy" thinking it refers to sexual or romantic relationships. The term "intimacy" really means the cultivation of transparent and trusting close relationships. It means, there is someone with whom we can really be ourselves, share our private thoughts and feelings without fear or pretence. The capacity for such intimacy is an important aspect of healthy living, whether in marriage or celibacy. Rosetti, a psychiatrist, based on his experiences in treating priests and religious makes the following observation that many of them do not have healthy and mature relationships or close friends who would have enabled them to acquire emotional maturity (Rosetti 1997).

Friendships develop gradually and naturally. However, the persons whom we choose and those who choose us indicate a great deal about our personality. The old adage, "like seeks out like" seems to be true. Some people find it difficult to make friends while others tend toward exclusive relationships that exclude those less liked. Some cultivate many friends; still others are comfortable with only a selected few. Numbers are irrelevant whereas capacity for intimacy in relationships is the decisive issue. A judgmental attitude indicates trouble in relationships and also reveals the lack of self acceptance. What we find unacceptable in ourselves is what we most often project on others. Negativity poisons the waters of community living, and compassionate love for self and others offers joy to all in community. Forgiving and

forgetting is crucial to life in a community that live together in close relationships. An inability to let go of past wrongs, either one's own, or those of others, would be a serious hindrance to communication and healthy relationships. Participation in the recreation is another equally significant indicator of one's capacity for community life. Being a good listener is a valuable asset for a healthy and mature relationships in community. Relationships within a small, close-knit community can be helpful where basic health of body, mind and spirit is balanced and boundaries are respected.

Types of Boundaries - Awareness of Boundaries and their Importance in Ministry:

At birth, when an individual is separated from one's mother, her/his life enters into and encircled by boundaries. The process of individuation and our acknowledgment of a personal boundary begin with a crisis of awareness. We need to recognize that we are separate, and so are our mother and all others. As we grew up we come to know that separateness is not abandonment, rather the human condition in which growth takes place and healthy relationships are built. With boundaries we move from entitlement as a child to be taken care of, to personal accountability and responsibility. Boundaries enable us to maintain our personal identity and yet have closeness (Ricoch 1991).

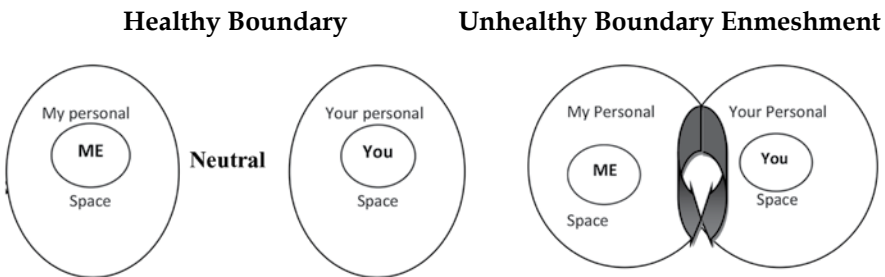
Boundaries are limits that delineate time, place, our person (i.e. where we leave off and the rest of the universe begins), and units such as family and community, ethnic groups and nations, and various religious denominations. Boundaries also define and limit various professions (Macke 1993, 2006). There are differences, for example, between a licensed clinical psychologist, a Roman Catholic priest who is pastor of a parish, a therapist with no professional affiliation or license, and a member of the clergy with no formal training who received his or her credentials in the mail for a fee.

Boundaries have texture. They can be placed on a continuum that ranges from rigid to structured, to flexible to chaotic. We observe that dysfunctional families often have boundaries that are either too rigid or chaotic - no rules and/or structure. When it comes to professional boundaries for those in ministry, boundaries that are too rigid or too fluid prove equally problematic. The secular culture advocates acting out certain sexual impulses often as a promotion of "human honesty." Often Church culture advocates dealing with those sexual impulses maturely and through a selfless altruistic love for the other and maintain a "chaste behavior". In an affective relationship a minister has to learn

how to maintain boundaries and allow his affections not to break the boundaries while being present in a ministerial relationship.

A healthy or mature boundary may be identified when two persons respect their 'personal space' and interact within the limits of the 'neutral space'. An unhealthy or immature boundary does not respect the 'personal space' of the other and the relationships will end up in an 'enmeshment' intruding the limits of the neutral space. Enmeshed boundaries are generally unhealthy and do not support the mental, emotional and spiritual growth of each person. In a marital relationship, however, the question of enmeshment does not arise as the nature of the marital commitment implies a freedom to interact in close physical intimacy between partner love (CCC, no. 2362). The following diagrams illustrate the dynamics of healthy and unhealthy boundaries. One of the most useful ways to understand the formation of both healthy and unhealthy boundaries is from the perspective of human growth and development (Whitfield, 1992).

Mature/Healthy Boundaries vs. Immature/Unhealthy Boundaries:



Boundaries in Ministerial Relationships:

Time is an important boundary that we often take for granted. Space too is a major boundary. How physically close we can position ourselves to another human being is usually prescribed by cultures. Each culture has different boundaries; however, no culture can violate our personal space. Enmeshed relationships very often violate the personal space.

Personal boundaries are important for religious ministry. Ordinarily we do not hug people once they finish their work for you. However there are some pastors who want to hug their parishioners at the end of their pastoral visit. Here the boundaries are fuzzier and this can cause problems. It is important for the religious and those in ministry to be aware of the impact of touch on the recipient. Good intention may not suffice if the action is unwarranted. For example, a minister

giving a kind hug to a grieving woman might not be aware that his innocent gesture is interpreted by the woman as a threat (because of a past trauma) or as a sexual invitation. Members of congregations may often meet clergy in private offices and share with them their deepest intimacies. These sharing can lead to relationships. If the concerned parties are careless about boundaries, under stress, involved in dual relationships, and lack training (to observe the positive and negative transferences and counter-transferences that occur in a counseling relationship), a disaster is waiting to happen. Misconduct may range from inappropriate to criminal (if a minor is involved) according to civil, and/or religious considerations (Gill 1999). Well defined boundaries and skills of boundary management is of immense help to formators, pastors, counselors, and professional therapists.

Some Preventive Strategies:

1. ***Be Professional.*** Think about appropriate professional boundaries and guidelines for ministerial relationships. Carefully reevaluate relationships that have a dual purpose – pastoral, business and social.
2. ***Work with Others.*** Many problems would be avoided if ministers would consult more with each other in peer supervision and carefully account for each of their relationships with a supervisor.
3. ***Develop a healthy personal life.*** Maintain our intimate friendships away from our professional ministry. Reduce personal stress by regular exercise, adequate sleep and by staying in good health. By reducing personal stress and with appropriate intimacy that is, keeping in line with one's life choice, a minister/professional will be less tempted to meet personal needs through professional relationships.
4. ***Maintain Self-Awareness.*** One needs to constantly monitor one's thoughts, motivations, attractions and feelings in our professional relationships. Be conscious of our positive/negative counter-transferences, physical interest in someone we are in helping relationship. Consider keeping a journal or going to a spiritual director/therapist. Develop a regular rhythm of personal and community prayer as a way of knowing ourselves and deepening our spiritual resources.
5. ***Recognize the Grave Consequences of Misconduct.*** Have a realistic fear of the serious legal and ministerial consequences of professional misconduct. This may help motivate us to avoid inappropriate behavior.

6. ***Avoid potentially Risky Actions:*** Don't go on overnight excursions with minors without adults present. Don't give gifts to people served in your ministry nor accept gifts from them especially if the gifts are substantial. Avoid any type of touching, hugging, kissing and know how your actions are received.
7. ***Adhere to Counseling/Therapy Guidelines.*** Counseling is not a mutual relationship like a friendship. Provide the client with a clear written contract describing mutual expectations, at your first meeting. Understand and abide by the rules of confidentiality. Develop referral resources and never counsel beyond your training and skill level. Limit self-revelation. Avoid interventions with the client outside normal work hours. Limit the number, duration and frequency of the counseling sessions in terms of the nature of the problem/conflict, professional diagnosis and prognosis of the client (Macke 1993, 2006).

Key to Mature Relationships:

Balancing our relationships is the key to mature relationships both at the same and complementary sex levels. It is important to have a balanced approach to all relationships, giving the right amount of attention to those in the community and outside, without focusing too much or too little on any of the two. A mature and healthy perception of life, especially in matters that absorb our attention is crucial for the success in our mission and apostolate. Acceptance of others, responsible partnership, creative fidelity to one's vocation, merciful forgiveness, sharing one's gift of love and a genuine relationship with God are some of the essential factors to develop mature relationships. In any adult relationship integrity, selfless presence, non-possessive love, wholeness and congruence are mandatory.

Having our priorities in order is another imperative in building mature relationships. We should keep in mind that there are many activities that make life what it is, and not just relationships. This means religious in particular should have a fair idea of what is absolutely essential and needs to be done and make sure that our prayer life, vows, community and mission do not take the backseat on account of our relationships.

Sufficient attention is to be given to our personal commitment and other areas of our community life so that our major concern may not be our self-fulfillment. Each person has one's own priorities and different ways of doing things. Do not allow ourselves to be forced to do anything. Put in love of God and love of neighbor in whatever we do especially when we are prone to compromise our religious values. Always try to maintain healthy and open communication with the significant

people in our lives, especially with our superiors, community members, colleagues and friends. This will help us to gain different perspectives and always ensure that we strike the right balance. In community, openly share our experiences and feel free to discuss what we think and feel.

We should not hide from our superiors if we are having a close friendship. It is always good to introduce our friends to our community and do it in a comfortable manner. Always respect our healthy boundaries in any relationship, whether in community or outside the community and especially in our mission area. Do not compromise our religious identity or security. Any compromise in this regard is harmful.

Relationships involve two people and the responsibility falls on both of them. Do not take excessive responsibility for our relationship. As a consecrated religious we are public personalities and members of a religious congregation and a community in particular. In any personal relationship we need to exercise restraint, especially control of our impulses. Being impulsive may complicate difficult situations harm relationships. If we continue to experience difficulties in our relationships and feel that we are unable to respect the boundaries, we should seek advice from an expert or counselor to arrive at an appropriate solution. This will help us to deal with our relationship in an appropriate manner and can develop an understanding of what we need to do.

Interpersonal Relationships and their Dynamics:

1. Relational Dimension:

Relationships are experienced at three levels: Primary, Secondary and Tertiary. Primary relationships are significant and committed relationships as with one's spouse or close friend. They may or may not include genital expression. A person engaged to be married could have a primary relationship with his future spouse but abstain from genital expression until marriage. Similarly consecrated persons may have primary relationships but without genital expression. Secondary relationships are enduring and committed relationships that include touch or physical contact like hugs, but no genital contact. Tertiary relationships are distant and temporary attachments and do not involve long term association or commitment. Healthy sexuality assumes that a person maintains healthy relationships at all three levels – primary, secondary and tertiary. It is also necessary that these relationships are mutual, i.e. they are on the same level with possibility for give and take on both sides.

In all our relational behavior and contacts we need to develop healthy relationships by maintaining appropriate boundaries keeping in line with one's status in life. The behavior dimension is not limited merely to sexual behavior. It also includes behaviors that facilitate or prevent a person from being emotionally present and available to relationships. An example of unavailability is getting over-involved in work in order to avoid spending time with people. Our Relationships may be further classified under three Dimensions: Emotional, Physical and Spiritual.

2. Emotional Dimension:

To ascertain one's emotional relationship as mature or not, one needs to ask: "am I able to be emotionally intimate with another in appropriate ways?" There are some who exhibit unmanageable avoidance behaviors. They virtually turn off any closeness. This lack of expression may be an attempt to control painful memories of past sexual tantrums or the anxiety of future acting out. There are others who tend to get overly involved in their intimate relationships that can lead to degenerative and destructive behavior. Neither "Acting In" nor "Acting out" is healthy intimacy. We need to develop healthy relationships by maintaining appropriate boundaries.

3. Physical Dimension:

Relationship with our body demands that we know it and understand how it functions and dysfunctions. Being comfortable with our bodies is part of intimacy in the physical dimension. The sexual trauma survivors with their experience of sexual shame feel uncomfortable with their own bodies. There are also those who grow up silently about their sexuality and their bodies. These at times feel uncomfortable with their normal sexual feelings. If we do not feel comfortable with our own bodies, no other person can help us to accept ourselves or deal maturely in our relationships with others in community or in our mission environments.

4. Spiritual Dimension:

This raises the question, "Am I centered on and connected with God?" Persons who are intimately involved in ministry need to develop a spiritual intimacy with God. While avoiding all extremes of spiritualizing every problem on the one hand, one needs to be aware of ignoring the power of the spiritual life and assessing it simply as a psychological function on the other. A true relationship with God should essentially lead us *to communion* with those we live with and minister to. The spiritual dimension also requires that we are able to live consistently and be faithful to our primary commitment. As

Christians and much more as religious, God gives us the grace of ongoing conversion.

Self-Knowledge & Self-Transcendence:

We cannot enter into a relationship with another person unless we have some sense of self-awareness and at least a minimal ability to be concerned for the other. Experience teaches us that in close relationships the best and worst in us are brought to the fore, providing us with a unique opportunity for transformation in the give-and-take encounters. Love relationships and other commitments, enable us to grow up, challenging us where we are stuck in certain areas of self-centeredness. In a close relationship we are faced with our strengths and weaknesses that sometimes we tend to deny and project them on others. When intimacy is accompanied by love, it can become a challenge inviting us to wholeness by leading us to face those areas of ourselves which we might have feared to face.

In the context of human relationships, communication plays an important role because it is through communication that we can create and maintain all types of relationships such as family, social and labor. Thoughtful human relationships help us to strengthen our goals and mind the needs of the people around us. We must develop attitudes of helping, trusting, respecting, and forgiving which are essential ingredients of strong relationship. St. Paul while speaking to the Ephesians recommends 'to live a life worthy of the calling they received, with perfect humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another lovingly" (Eph 4:1). God gives us the grace of transformation and ongoing conversion through faith in which we are rooted. But it can be hindered by psychological blocks and immaturity. In fact, *the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control*, as described by Paul (Gal. 5 :22) and very much seen in the life of Jesus, are the main characteristics of a mature person who relates with another and communicates with love, peace, patience, kindness and goodness... and self-control. We must not be proud or jealous of one another, instructs St. Paul. As religious and priests we are called to bear witness through our lives to Jesus in all our relationships, without discrepancy between our words and deeds. Mature relationships call for vulnerability - to be oneself in front of others, without masks or pretences, which can be described as "psychological nakedness" - baring one's heart and soul.

Jesus' relationship with his father was one of great intimacy, as he dared to call him "Abba". The parable of the prodigal son invites the

good news of God's way of relationship with the weak and the lost. His way of loving is lavish and forgiving. Like the older son we struggle to understand a loving relationship that is unconditional, a love without "ifs" and "buts". In the context of his farewell discourse Jesus says to His disciples, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.... Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:9, 12). As Christians we are called to love and relate with one another in a self-transcendent way.

Carl Rogers, based on his experience as a psycho-therapist tried to establish a criterion for the growth of the human person, in a helping relationship which can be a healing relationship. A relationship is either growth-producing/life giving or life-destroying. Every relationship which is positive in its direction is healing. Healing has to do with being wounded. It is only by reflecting on the causes of the wound that one can begin to create a healing relationship.

My own experience while working with the religious both as individuals and in group counseling surprised and touched me by the amount of suffering and pain they experience in religious life. Some of them are inhibited by fears and are unable to open themselves. They deal with their wounds with an attitude of self-pity and self-protection. It is not just a question of family background, of not having been loved in their early childhood. But many have been hurt by authority – whether personal or institutional, which never gave them the necessary space to develop and become what they were called to be. When authority considers itself beyond criticism, beyond any possibility of dialogue, it in fact destroys in the other the only power the person has: the power of becoming and growing. "Salvation is a total reality that comes from above, but also penetrates the human and respects human laws of growth" (Champoux, 1998).

One of the greatest difficulties experienced in the area of relationships in community, comes from the fact that we sometimes create under the name of charity, relationships which are a constant denial of the other's freedom. To be responsible for the other creates a relationship of domination, power, or constant striving either to protect others or push, lead or to restrain. With such an attitude, we can never allow the other person to be free, to be 'separated' from, and to be what s/he is called to be. Henry Nouwen (1974: in *Out of Solitude*), makes the distinction between caring and curing. Most of our time is spent trying to cure, when the ministry of healing requires an ability to care. From experience we know that those who care for us become present to us. When they speak, they speak to us. And when they ask questions, we know it is for our sake and not for their own. Their presence is a healing

presence, because they accept us on our terms, and they encourage us to take our own life seriously and to trust our own vocation.

Healing Relationships:

The experience of being wounded in a relationship and the recognition of some of the causes, must help us towards learning about healing responses in relationship. The ministry of healing is first of all a ministry of compassion; just as Jesus' ministry of power sprang from the ability to 'be moved with pity' (Lk 7:13), by the needs of those among whom he lived and moved. He listened to them.

In a relationship, we need to listen very attentively and perceive the pain behind the words, the fears behind the aggressiveness, the insecurity behind the rigidity, the bitterness behind the criticism. Such type of listening has to be done without judging, evaluating or even minimizing it. Jesus listened and said no word to the woman till the end. He listened to the Pharisees and he also listened to the silence of the woman. He accepted her guilt, her fears, her need to be accepted for what she is without being judged and condemned. Of all those who approached Jesus, he heard their need for forgiveness. Jesus' response to the woman was an affirming response: "neither do I condemn you". To affirm in a relationship is to say 'yes' to whom this person is: to recognize and affirm that there is in each person the power of self-reconciliation, of growth, and of becoming whole again. The greatest act of trust we can give to one another in a relationship is, to allow their inner power to operate. Doctors know that the success of their treatment depends upon the inner resources of the patient, whether physical or psychological.

Mature Relationships:

As we mature in our relationships with others, our search for wisdom also brings about maturation in our relationship with God, self and others. Often enough, it is only at midlife or beyond that we are able to see, as did Julian of Norwich, that indeed *All will be well*, for we meet at each turn of our life's journey, a God abounding in steadfast love, faithfulness and compassionate forgiveness. Relationships that mature into genuine friendships offer us opportunities to experience the gifts of deepening love.

Psychologists maintain that the developmental course of wisdom is linked with the maturation of the self, which moves from an egocentric force to a universalistic view of reality. Psychologists Joan and Erik Erikson identified a life-stage they called grand-generativity which speaks of self-transcendence. According to psychologist Emmons (1999),

generativity is related to higher levels of wellbeing. He contends that generative persons are spiritual persons, because generativity serves as “a vehicle for self-transcendence,” one of the central constructs of spirituality. Self-transcendence draws adults out of their preoccupation and connects them to higher powers, other people, and broader social and global concerns.

The special virtue they saw as characteristic of this stage was that of caring, not just limited to a closed circle of friends but that which opens to embrace a wider circle not bound by time and space but that which binds us all to each other. A high level of trust is needed as we make our way toward our final transformation. Faith is a quality of our personality and not a particular set of doctrines. Prayer brings about slowly, our transformation into Christ, that unification and concentration that calls us to a deep penetration into the mystery of God’s love, encouraging us to live lives of dedicated responsibility and commit ourselves to a lifestyle that embraces our relational values.

As we journey along the spiral path of our lives, our willingness to devote time and effort to our development as individuals, in relationship with others, and finally, towards self-transcendence brings us to the fullness of Christian maturity and the crown of wisdom. Experiments and observations have shown that one needs contact with others and with oneself to maintain equilibrium. Communication is both the soul and the elixir of life, and lack of contact with human beings results in loneliness. Interpersonal loneliness is missing someone you love; social loneliness is feeling cut off from family, values and roots, and cosmic loneliness is a feeling that the universe is absurd, life is pointless and God is dead. Psychological loneliness is feeling alienated from yourself and being out of touch with your own nature. Loneliness can be felt even in the presence of people and very specially when people are interacting on a superficial level.

Throughout our life cycle, human closeness and relationships are treasured and deep human friendships answer many longings, but some loneliness will always remain as part of our individuality and uniqueness. Here we are reminded of those wise words of St. Augustine of Hippo, “Our hearts are made for you O Lord, and they are restless until they find their rest in You!” We learn to live this loneliness as part of our life, to live with our strengths and fragilities, while at the same time recognizing the need to touch another person and to love others. We cannot solve all our problems. Our relational life invites us to new depths of human experience and have faith in the wonder of living. Victor Frankl, in *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* contends, “What

is greatly needed is to make the best of being lonely, to have the courage to be alone. There is also a creative loneliness which makes it possible to turn something negative – the absence of people – into something positive – an opportunity to meditate.... What is important is a sound balance between the creative and the experiential potentials of meaning fulfillment.” An adult does not run away from loneliness but experiences it as an existential reality that leads to a new knowledge and feeling of self. Christian faith tells us that we are in the hands of God in a very personal way and that only in the depth of faith and experience of a divine-human relationship we know that God is still with us.

Conclusion:

Maturity is the outcome of a developmental process. We are called to grow continually into maturity, to be present to and interact with life experiences in such a way that, as long as we are alive, we are never totally finished with the process of becoming more integrated and more whole. From my perspective as a clinical psychologist, I would like to suggest a few characteristics of a maturity that is specifically *Christian* and *Human*.

1. **Christian maturity is ‘Gospel-centered’.** These days we hear much talk about self-fulfillment and about the process of finding oneself and the individual’s gratifying his/her desires as the most important goals in life. By contrast entering into a journey toward maturity as a Christian (much more as a religious/priest) it necessitates becoming and remaining centered in Gospel values and imperatives. Values of compassion, solidarity, service, option for the poor and marginalized, openness to transformation even die to – what is not life-giving, and what keeps from recognizing and building up Kingdom values. Pope Francis says, “we should ask ourselves: How do I bear witness to Christ... to choose and live as a Christian through my faith? Do I have the courage of Peter and the other Apostles, to choose and to live, and lay down my life for others? Do I bear witness through my family relationships, work relationships and friendships” (Pope Francis’s Homily, Petrus, May 2013).
2. **Christian maturity is *Relation-centered*.** Jesus’ power was one of horizontal interaction among equally valued children of God, rather than a mere vertical power of hierarchy. Christian maturity requires that *we foster healthy relationships in our lives, with ourselves, with others and with God*. We need several characteristics of psychosexual maturity that are also essential for Christian relationship maturity: an ability to pursue healthy intimacy and relationships and to live rationally; an ability to

sustain intimate relationships that are honest, non-manipulative and non-judgmental; a capacity to love specific individuals, with their strengths and struggles, in our communities and the world at large, where we live and interact.

In the words of Ronald Rolheiser, we are called to “give oneself to community, friendship, service, creativity, humor, delight, sacrifice and even martyrdom in order to bring life into the world”. An intimate relationship, a friendship with Christ is the essential foundation for a mature, adult life of faith, discipleship and collaborative relationship in the Christian and religious community.

As a religious and a clinician, I see on the one hand, though we have many weaknesses in ourselves, we get impatient with the limitations of others. We want God to be merciful to us, but often we are not willing to give to others the same mercy we receive. On the other hand, we pay great price with regard to Human Relationships, by not dealing with ourselves by taking up the difficult challenge of understanding ourselves and others as persons, as we are. We are called to grow continually into maturity “measuring up to the standard God set when he called you” (Eph 4:1), i.e. by being present to and interact with life experiences and with one another, with the process of becoming more integrated and more whole. Jesus did not come to give human beings a religion; they already had that before He came. He came to give human beings a *deep human relationship* with the Father, through Him. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (Gal 5:1).

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