

22A

TANGAZA COLLEGE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

**THIS IS UNCORRECTED WORK.
IDEAS OR OPINIONS EXPRESSED
BY THE WRITER ARE NOT NECESSARILY
THOSE OF TANGAZA COLLEGE.**

**LET LOVE BE GENUINE:
AN ANALYSIS OF ROMANS 12: 9 – 21 AND ITS APPLICATION
TO CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY LIFE.**

An essay submitted to the Department of Biblical Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the B. A. Degree in Religious Studies

By

EMILIO G. MWINGWA SSC



TUTOR: FR. A. LACOMARA C.P.


Nairobi
February, 2000.

2000

MWJ

I hereby declare that this is my original work. It has not been submitted for any academic credit to any other institution. All sources have been cited in full.

Signed



Emilio G. Mwingwa

Acknowledgement

I am greatly thankful to all those who have helped me in any way to accomplish this work. I am especially indebted to Fr. A. Lacomara who has patiently followed me in every stage of this essay with a lot of understanding. Special thanks to Fr. Giusto for his support and encouragement. I am also thankful to Mr. J. Gitau who has edited the whole work. Thanks to my brothers and sisters in the community. Through you and with you, I have known the joy of community life. May the Almighty God bless you all for your kindness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
---------------------------	---

Chapter One

Context and Structure	4
Context of Rom.12: 9 - 21.....	4
Structure of the passage.....	5

Chapter Two

Exegetical Analysis of the Text	6
Let love be genuine.....	6
Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.....	8
Love one another with mutual affection.....	9
Outdo one another in showing honour.....	10
Do not lag in zeal.....	11
Be ardent in spirit.....	12
Serve the Lord.....	13
Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.....	13
Contribute to the needs of the saints.....	15
Practice hospitality.....	15
Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them.....	16
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.....	17
Live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty.....	18
Associate with the lowly.....	19
Do not claim to be wiser than you are.....	20
Do not repay evil for evil.....	20
But take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.....	21
If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.....	21
Beloved, never avenge yourselves.....	22
But leave room for the wrath of God.....	23
For it is written, "vengeance is mine, I will repay".....	24
No, if your enemies are hungry, feed them, if thirsty, give them drink.....	25
For in doing this, you will heap burning coal on their heads.....	25
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.....	26
Conclusion.....	27

Chapter Three

Application of the Text to religious

Community life.....28

Introduction28

What is love?.....30

Sense of Belonging.....31

Forgiveness.....33

Fraternal Sharing and Correction.....36

Prayer40

The Outflow of Love.....42

Conclusion45

Bibliography47

INTRODUCTION

Love for God and neighbour is the essence of the whole law. This was categorically stated by our Lord Jesus Christ in answer to a scribe, who sought to know which was the first of all the commandments (Mk. 12:28 - 34). There is no love of God without the love of neighbour. It is for this reason that the command of love is central to Christian life. The love of Christians for others is enabled by the love of God, expressed in his Son Jesus Christ, who died for us while we were still sinners (Rom.5: 8). The same love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom.5: 5). We are therefore capable of loving others as Christ has loved us (Jn.13: 34).

Is this kind of love manifested in our Christian religious communities today? Ours are multi-racial communities. We live together coming from different cultures, tribes, nationalities and languages. We are people with different temperaments and personalities. We have different ways of looking at things. We are people with different gifts and abilities. Often we come to our communities carrying within us the biases and prejudices against the other members that we meet in our religious communities.

It seems to me that these and many other differences often cause so much tension, that the command of love becomes difficult for the very people who should be the model of others. The same differences also affect the way we relate with those outside our communities especially the poor, the sick and the disabled; those who are regarded as unimportant in the society.

At the face of these challenges, we need to be reminded that the love command holds today no less than yesterday. It seems to me that such reminder is found in Paul's

letter to the Romans, precisely in Rom.12: 9 - 21. It is for this reason I wish to develop a theses that reads, *Let Love be Genuine: An analysis of Rom. 12: 9 - 21 and its Application to Christian Religious Community Life*. My aim is to encourage my dear brothers and sisters in religious life to come to the awareness that in spite of our differences, it is still possible to live the Lord's command sincerely.

In Chapter one, we shall try have a brief survey of the context and structure of Rom.12: 9 - 21. In so doing, we shall try to find out how this text fits in the whole Epistle to the Romans. In chapter two, we shall make an elaborated exegetical analysis of our text basing it on our Christian Community life as a body of Christ. Chapter three will be dedicated to the application of the analysed text to the religious community life highlighting some of the major requirements for genuine love in community life. We shall conclude by appealing to genuine love in our communities, a kind of love that that is founded on the love of God.

ROMANS 12: 9 – 21 (from NRSV)

Let love be genuine, hate what is evil hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; out do one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If

it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE

CONTEXT OF ROMANS 12: 9 - 21.

The text we are studying falls within what has been referred to as "hortatory section" and deals with the demands of upright life in Christ.¹ This section runs from 12:1 - 15:13. This Christian conduct is supposed to flow from the transforming power of the gospel that Paul has described in the preceding eleven chapters.² In these chapters, he has shown that through faith in Baptism, Christians have been incorporated into the one "body of Christ." Led by the Holy Spirit they are now "individually members of one another" (12:5). It therefore makes no difference whether one is a Jew or a Gentile. What matters is the fact that they have all been justified through faith in Christ. Being still in the world, they have to offer their "bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God" (12:1), preparing themselves for the day "when God's just judgement will be revealed"(2: 5). To be in the world does not mean that they have to conform themselves to it. They have rather to be transformed by a renewal of their whole way of thinking so that they may discern what is God's will, good, acceptable to him and perfect (12:2).

Each member in the one body, according to his or her gift offers the spiritual sacrifice that is acceptable to God. There are various gifts like prophecy, ministry.

¹ Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans*, (Doubleday: The Anchor Bible Commentary, 1993), 637.

² Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 744.

teaching, exhortation, leadership and social work (12: 6 - 8). All these are to be used for the glory of God and for the good of one's fellow human being.³ It is now in the exercise of these gifts that Paul comes with the centrality of love (12: 9 -21). In it he shows that part of the unconformity with this world is the fact that Christian love must have no bounds. It embraces the brothers and sisters within the Christian community (vv. 9 -13, 15-16) and the people of God outside the Christian community (vv. 14, 17- 21). Christian love embraces even enemies in that it blesses rather than paying evil for evil.

This passage is also in line with Paul's purpose for the letter to the Romans. The Roman Christian community was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. It is possible that the two groups lived in tensions that often threatened the unity of the Church. This passage may therefore have been designed to exhort Christians to live in harmony like members of one family. Another point to note is the fact that Paul exhorts the Christians to practice hospitality to strangers. Paul himself intended to visit the Roman community and would depend on its contribution to support him on his journey to Spain. This passage would therefore serve as a preparation for the Church of Rome to receive him.

STRUCTURE OF THE PASSAGE

According to Douglas Moo⁴, there are four features that manifest themselves clearly from this passage. The first concerns its style. Paul uses sharp and short injunctions with little elaboration. Most of these injunctions are put in participle form. The second feature is its loose structure. Paul uses very few conjunctions or particles to indicate his flow of thought. The third is the theme of the passage. It offers regulations to

³ Paul Achtemeier, *Romans Interpretation*, (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), p.197

⁴ Douglas Moo, *op cit.* p. 744

guide Christian life. The last feature is its collection from diverse texts and traditions. It puts together teachings from. (i) the Old Testament (vv.16, 19, 20), (ii) the teachings of Jesus (vv 14, 17, 18, 21), (iii) the early Christian teachings to the new converts, and (iv) various Jewish and Greek ethical and wisdom sayings.

CHAPTER TWO

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

Let love be genuine...

These opening words have no explicit link with what has gone before. They appear as a heading for what follows. Paul is more concerned with exhortation rather than description. He uses the noun *agape* for love. So far the noun *agape* has been used to refer to God's love for human beings (Rom. 5:5, 8; 8:35, 39). *Agape* was a rare noun in non-biblical Greek before the second and third centuries. It was adapted by Paul and other early Christians because of the unwanted nuances in the other words for love in Greek, in order to convey their particular understanding of the nature of love.⁵

With Divine *agape*, Paul had presented the way in which God's saving action in Christ, represented a totally unmerited act of pure love and reconciliation, offered to those who were enemies and alienated because of sin (Rom.5: 6 - 10, 8:32).⁶ With the death of Christ, Christians are sure of being so firmly rooted in the love of God that no

⁵ For the other words of love, see Douglas Moo, *op. cit.* p. 775

⁶ Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, Sacra Pagina series, (Collegeville: A Michael Glazier Book, 1996), p. 375.

power can separate them from it. Such an abiding love, assures them of victory (Rom. 8:35 - 39). The same love has been poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to them (Rom.5: 5), so that now they are capable of loving as God loves.

Christian *agape* is thus the outflow of this love in Christian life towards fellow human beings.⁷ It is the believers 'yes' in thought and feeling, word and deed, unconditional and without reservation to that total claim of the loving God in so far as it relates to the neighbour - a 'yes' which is no human possibility but the gracious work of the Holy Spirit.⁸ *Agape* is the kind of love, which is based not on instinctive natural affection, but rather on self-esteem of someone. It is commanded by ones will and persists through the ups and downs of life.⁹ Being an act of the will, this kind of love calls for total self-commitment and self-giving for the good of the other without any conscious self-interest.

Through the Christian community of Rome, Paul exhorts us to let this love be genuine. By this he demands that our love be "like the love that inspired God's action in Christ."¹⁰ It must be "the real thing"¹¹ and not pretence like that of the actors on stage.¹² He warns us against making "an outward display or emotion that does not conform to the nature of God who is love and who has loved us."¹³

Paul tells us how this love can be expressed by means of the exhortations that follow. He here makes use of participles which act as imperatives. Why Paul uses

⁷ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁸ C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (Edinburgh: F&F Clark, 1979), p.375.

⁹ Allan Robinson, *The Treasures of St Paul: Selected Themes from Paul's Theology and Ethics*, (Middle Green: St. Pauls, 1995), p. 42

¹⁰ Brendan B., *op. cit.*, 376.

¹¹ John Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, (London: S.C.M., 1989), p. 301.

¹² Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans*, (New York: The Anchor Bible Commentary, 1993), p. 653.

¹³ *Ibid.* Cf. Moo, D., *op. cit.*, p.775

participles is a matter of controversy among the scholars. There is also no agreement as to whether they should be called 'imperative participles'.¹⁴ For us, we only need to note that through the exhortations, Christians respond appropriately to the "structuring grace within them."¹⁵

Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.

To show how genuine love can be expressed, Paul uses the exhortation of Prophet Amos, "Hate evil and love good" (Amos 5:15), seemingly because the Lord loves those who hate evil and guards the lives of his faithful (Psa.97:10). This exhortation was also known among the Essenes of the Qumran Community.¹⁶ It is therefore not something new, but the Christians have to live it as the expression of the grace they have received.

As Christians, we must know how to discriminate between the good and the evil. We have to choose the good and commit ourselves to it. We must reject evil and be always opposed to it. The Christians have the capacity to choose the good and reject evil because they are no longer under the domain of the flesh. Having been justified by God in Christ through faith, Christians now live in the Spirit and the Spirit of God dwells in them. It is this Spirit who acts in them as the power to hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good (Rom.8: 1 - 8).

However, Paul does not tell us here which is the evil that is to be hated. But we can think of it as what he has talked of elsewhere as the fruit of the flesh. Among the fruit

¹⁴ See study of the verbal form of this text by Philip Kanjuparambil, "Imperative Participles in Rom.12: 9 - 21," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 120(1983): p 285 - 288. See also Fitzmyer, *op. cit.* p. 653 and Moo, *op. cit.* p. 776 note 27.

¹⁵ Paul Archteimeier, *Romans Interpretation*, (Atlanta - John Knox, 1985), p. 196.

¹⁶ Cf. Fitzmyer, *op. cit.* P. 653.

of the flesh, he lists, "fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealous, anger, quarrels dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing and other such things" (Gal. 5: 20 - 21). In our society today, we can add such things like, corruption, greed, selfishness and injustices of all types. These are the kind of things that destroy the harmony of the community.

On the other hand, we can think of the good to which Christians must commit themselves as the fruit of the Spirit. This includes, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22 - 23). These virtues not only build the community but also make the members of the community more human. Genuine love is therefore that which leads us to that good, which is the result of a transformed heart and mind.¹⁷

Love one another with mutual affection...

The word used by Paul for mutual affection is *philadelphia*, which means, 'brotherly love.' It "indicates the tender and intimate affection as between the members of the same family."¹⁸ Paul strongly believed that through the Christ event, God has adopted us as his children (cf. Rom.8). We now belong to the same family, "whose members bound together in intimate fellowship, should exhibit towards one another a heart felt and consistent concern."¹⁹

This exhortation reminds us that as the members of the Christian community, we are brothers and sisters with God as our Father. We should therefore commit ourselves to

¹⁷ Moo, *op cit* p. 777.

¹⁸ Cranfield, *op cit*, 613. See also Horst Balz and G. Schneider, eds, *philadelphia In: Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), p.424, 424.

¹⁹ Moo, *op cit*, p.777

one another unselfishly and whole-heartedly. True love for my brother or sister with whom I share everyday life demands that I should empty myself in order to make him or her the focus of my attention, concern, care, appreciation, acceptance and everything that is good. In genuine fraternal love, I accept the shortcomings of the other. I understand my companions as they are and become ready to forgive and be forgiven.

True fraternal love does not put conditions like; "I will love you if you are like this or that." No. For it, it is, "I love you because you are my brother, you are my sister. You are important to me and you matter for my life." In this attitude, the other's imperfections become "invisible" to me and I become able to love as God loves. In true brotherly love, there is no domination of one over another. They are all equal.

Out do one another in showing honour...

This admonition echoes what Paul had earlier written to the Philippians, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, regard the others as better than yourself. Let each of you not look to your own interests but to the interests of others (Phil. 2:3 - 4). Genuine love does not permit competitive spirit in a community. We have all to go out of our own way in order to show honour to our brothers and sisters. This is because, "the other person is the representative of Christ to me, or rather the one in whom Christ is mysteriously present for me, that I must honour him, not just as myself but above myself."²⁰

This exhortation warns us against selfishness. Selfishness is an exaggerated self-love so that the self becomes the centre of my attention. In selfishness, I feel that all the others should be subordinated to me in everything. It so happens that every attention, care

²⁰ Cranfield, *op. cit.* p. 633. See also Karl Hermann Schelkle, *The Epistle to the Romans, Theological Meditation*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), p. 202.

and concern should always be directed to *me, I* and *myself*. If it is not so, I become resentful and jealous. Such an attitude divides and destroys a united community. So Paul reminds the Christians to put the interests of others before their own.

Do not lag in zeal...

Paul warns Christians here against lagging in zeal in the service of God and neighbour. This is probably demanded by the fact that they have to continually present their "bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (12: 1).²¹ It is common experience that "the temptation to lose steam in our lifelong responsibility to reverence God in every aspect of our lives, to become lazy and complacent in our pursuit for what is good, well pleasing to God and perfect, is a natural one but it must be strenuously resisted."²² This is because, "in lives that are being transformed by the renewing of the mind, there is no room for slackness or sloth, for that attitude which seeks to get by with as little work and inconvenience as possible, which shrinks from dust and heat and resents necessity for assertion as a burden and imposition."²³

Although the Roman Christians did not probably know Paul in person, Paul must have been exhorting them to live what he personally lived. Since the event of his conversion, he never lagged in zeal in the service of God and his fellow human beings. He himself talks of it in his various letters to different Churches (Gal. 1: 13 - 17; 2Cor. 11: 21 - 29; Phil. 1: 24 - 29; many other passages can be cited). No danger or threat would hold Paul from carrying out what he believed to be God's will. It is the same kind of zeal that he wants Christians to have.

✠

²¹ Cf. Moo, *op cit.*, p 778.

²² *Ibid.* p. 778.

²³ Cranfield, *op cit.*, p.633

This exhortation is particularly important for people who live in the same community. The brotherly love that we have already talked of can easily be relaxed in a community where I meet the same faces everyday. It becomes even more difficult if my efforts to love seem not to be appreciated. It is under such circumstances that one can easily get discouraged and give up the zeal. Hence the need for the Christians to be reminded that the grace they have received has made them new creatures who are not to conform to this world. As such, they should not lag in zeal in the service of each other.

...be ardent in spirit.

It is not clear here, whether Paul meant the human spirit or God's Holy Spirit. Some scholars take it to be human, while others favour Holy Spirit.²⁴ The NRSV Bible translation seems to suggest human spirit. If it is so, then the spirit refers to that "subjective inner impelling power governing human life."²⁵ Paul urges the Christians to maintain a strong and emotional commitment to the Lord in their own spirits.²⁶ If the spirit is understood to mean the Holy Spirit, then the Christians are to allow themselves to be set on fire by the Holy Spirit. This is so because, many times, we extinguish the Holy Spirit,²⁷ who is the consuming fire of the spiritual endowments that spring from God,²⁸ by our own faults. It is also the same Holy Spirit who makes it possible for us to offer ourselves for the spiritual worship.

It is surely true that genuine love in a community can not be possible without the help of the Holy Spirit. It is he who enables us to move out of our own selves and go to

²⁴ Some of those who take this to mean human spirit are, Fitzmyer and Barth. For those who take to be Holy Spirit, we have Barret, Brendan, Cranfield and Karl Hermann.

²⁵ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 456.

²⁶ Moo, *op. cit.*, p. 778

²⁷ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 634

²⁸ Karl, Hermann, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

meet others in their need. It is he who enables us to overcome the differences that exist among us and to come to the realisation that we are members of the same body. But the Holy Spirit does not work without our co-operation. We are free to say 'yes' or 'no' to him and he can not impose himself on us. It is with this awareness that I think Paul exhorts the Christians of Rome to "be ardent in spirit." For this reason I too think that the spirit here refers to the Holy Spirit.

...serve the Lord.²⁹

To serve the Lord is the motive of all Christian conduct.³⁰ Such service is done in humility and obedience as a proof of the zeal that the Holy Spirit has inflamed in the hearts of the faithful.³¹ So Paul urges Christians not to do anything for selfish motives. All their actions and conduct should be at the service of the Lord. It is only in serving the Lord that our love may be genuine.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

Hope, endurance and prayer naturally go together and they are closely related. Even in Rom.8: 24 - 27 Paul moves from hope to endurance and then to prayer. Hope is one of the Christian virtues that together with faith and charity endure (Cor. 13:13). Paul admonishes Christians to rejoice in hope because of what it guarantees. He has already told us what it guarantees in Rom.8: 24, where he tells us that in hope we have been

²⁹ Some ancient manuscripts read, 'serving the time', instead of 'serving the Lord.' It is said that some scribes of the original Paul's text mistook the noun *Kyrio*(Lord) and wrote *Kairo* (time). Or could it be vice versa? Those who favour "serving the Lord" argue that the phrase 'serving the time' in ancient Greek had the negative connotation of opportunism and it is almost impossible that Paul could have written it (cf. Moo *op. cit.*, p. 769, note 1 and Cranfield, *op. cit.* p. 634 - 636). However, some scholars believe that the original Paul's text was "serving the time" because according to Brendan B., *op. cit.*, p. 374, it fits better in the context of this text with eschatological overtones. If this is the case, Paul urges Christians to take advantage of the present time to be faithful in love. Christians have only the present time to discern what is the will of God and fulfil it.

³⁰ Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 654.

³¹ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 634.

saved. Hope therefore guarantees eternal salvation not only as a future reality but also has something that has already been accomplished through the Christ event.³² It is true that the fullness of this salvation will be in the future, but our hope for it is absolutely certain and can not be disappointed (Rom.5: 5).³³ It is this certainty that is the foundation of our rejoicing in hope.

Although they have a sure hope of eternal salvation, Christians live now in the midst of tribulations (*thlipsis*). This tribulation stems from the world's resistance and hostility to Christ. If the world is hostile to Christ, his followers can not be exempt of the same hostility (Jn.15: 18 - 25).³⁴ Paul urges Christians not to be discouraged at the face of these tribulations. They are "to endure because of their hope, their confident assurance, in God's ultimate providence and victory."³⁵ Such endurance is always the gift of God. It should be noted that Paul is not telling Christians that they should sit down and watch helplessly in the midst of evil structures. Christians, wherever they are, must strive to improve the human conditions as far as it is humanly possible by fighting the structures of sin in the society.

The tribulations of the world are sometimes so much pressing that one can easily give up. It is for this reason that Paul reminds us that we should "learn to commune with God at all times" (Phil. 4: 6; 1Thess. 5: 17).³⁶ Only in our reliance upon the "God of steadfastness and encouragement" (Rom.15: 5), have we hope of holding out to the end. That is probably why Jesus after his own example taught us to pray without ceasing

³² Cf. Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 654.

³³ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, 634.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 636.

³⁵ John, Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, (London: SCM Press, 1989), p. 302.

³⁶ Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, 654.

(1 k.11: 5 -13).

This exhortation is absolutely vital in the life of every Christian community. There can be no truly Christian life without devotion to prayer. Prayer puts us in constant dialogue with God and so enhances our intimate relationship of love with him. Each member of the community has therefore the duty of bearing witness to the great love of God, by dedicating a considerable amount of time in front of him every day in prayer. In prayer, we let ourselves be immersed into God's love, which we later radiate to our fellow human beings. The more we relate in a loving way with God, the more we open ourselves to our brothers and sisters. In this way prayer becomes the foundation of genuine love in a community. It is for this reason that Paul urges Christians to persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints...

The brotherly love that we have already seen is expressed by being in communion with the saints (fellow Christians) in their needs. By these needs, Paul refers to material necessities like food, clothing and shelter.³⁷ This is in line with Paul's exhortation to the Churches to contribute for the poor ones. Their support for each other will also show their unconformity to this world and their renewing of the mind. But it should be noted that Christians should not help Christians only but all those in need.

Practice hospitality...

This could also be translated as "pursuing love for strangers." When Paul was writing the letter to the Romans, there was an urgent need for Christians to practice hospitality because of at least two reasons. One is the presence of Christian travelling missionaries who moved from one place to another. They depended on the hospitality of

³⁷ Cf. Moo, *op. cit.*, 779.

those that they met. The second reason was the persecution of Christians by pagans who were hostile to Christian message. Such Christians escaped from their communities and sought refuge in another.³⁸ It is for this reason that this exhortation is very common among New Testament authors (cf. 1Tim.3:2; Tit. 1:8; Heb.13:2). Hospitality to these Christians "would be a special mark of their unity and harmony."³⁹ Paul does more than exhort Christians to practice hospitality. He urges them to pursue it by going out to look for those that they can show hospitality.

This exhortation is as valid to us as it was in Paul's time. We have the poor with us who keep knocking on our doors every day. We should never be tired of receiving them with generosity and kindness. In many parts of Africa, there is a pressing need to welcome the refugees who escape from their war-torn countries, in search of food and shelter. In the west there is the problem of immigrants. As Christians, do we have to keep quiet and imagine that none of these is our business?

Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them.

With this exhortation, Paul shifts his focus from the relations of Christians among themselves, to those of Christians with outsiders. This shows that genuine love, if it is to be like that of God in Christ, must have no boundaries. It has to extend even to those who see us as a threat to themselves and persecute us.⁴⁰ We have to bless them, that is, "to desire good for them and show that this desire is not mere pretence by actually praying for God's blessing upon them."⁴¹ To pray for God's blessing according to the Old

³⁸ Cf. Schelkle, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

³⁹ Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 655

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 655.

⁴¹ Cranfield, *op. cit.* 640.

Testament, is to ask God to bestow his favour upon them. To curse our persecutors is to ask God to bring disaster upon them.⁴² But genuine love requires Christians to strive for the good and avoid evil at all cost.

The call to bless our persecutors and not curse them recalls what was probably part of the oral tradition of the sayings of Jesus, which came to be recorded later by Matthew and Luke (cf. Mt.5: 44 - 47; Lk.6:27 - 28). Jesus enunciated this exhortation as a demand for those who belong to the Kingdom of God.⁴³ It goes contrary to the human desire for revenge. It is part of the Christians' non-conformity to this world and the transformation of the renewing of their minds (Rom.12: 2). If Christians are able to live out this exhortation fully, then their love will surely come close to that of God, whose Son died for us while we were still his enemies (Rom.5:8). It is possible if we open ourselves fully to the grace that has been given to us through the death of Christ.⁴⁴

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Paul here comes back to the Christian community and asks us to identify with our brothers and sisters in their joys and sorrows. "I love that is genuine will not respond to a fellow believer's joy with envy or bitterness, but will enter whole-heartedly into the same joy."⁴⁵ In the same way we should identify ourselves with their sufferings and sorrows. "This requires our being there with the preparedness of one's whole person for others,

⁴² Moo, *op cit.*, 779

⁴³ Those who belong to the Kingdom of God have been constituted anew humanity with new tasks and possibilities. Their relationship with God lays the foundation for a new relationship of man to man (Cf. Gerhard Kittel ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, v.1., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), pp. 46 -47.

⁴⁴Paul Arehtemeier treats the last part of the Letter to the Romans as Christian's response to the "structuring power of grace" that has been bestowed on them. If allowed to work, it brings about unity within the Christian Community and peace with the larger society. The offer of peace to enemies brings about repentance and reconciliation (Cf. Arehtemeier, *op cit.*, 196 - 201).

⁴⁵ Moo., *op cit.*, 782.

with one's will and one's heart."¹⁶ It recalls the wisdom tradition, "Do not avoid those who weep but mourn with those who mourn" (Sir. 7:34).

Paul's admonition fits very well with his theology of Christians as the Body of Christ. Although the body is made of many parts, each part has such a central place in the whole body that, the honour of one means the honour of the whole body and the suffering of one means the suffering of the whole body (cf. 1Cor.12: 26). In the same way, Christians must be members to each other, rejoicing with those who rejoice and suffering with those who suffer.

This is very important in a community where people are living together. As human beings, we are chiefly marked with a competitive attitude. No matter how well I do, if my brother does better than me, his success becomes a threat to me and so I become envious. Instead of rejoicing with him, I become angry at him and resent him although this may not be outwardly manifested. Under such circumstances, the community becomes a community of rivals. That is why it is much easier to sympathise and weep with those who weep than rejoice with those who rejoice. We can overcome this human limitation by recognising our own gifts and acknowledging those of others in our communities. All the various gifts should be put into the service of the community so that one's gift becomes the gift of the whole community.

Live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty.

The first part of this statement is also translated as, "be of the same mind." Christians are called to have the same regard and concern for all people, whatever their social, ethnic,

¹⁶ Hermann, *op. cit.*, 206.

political and economic status.¹⁷ They are also called to agree among themselves in all matters and with the world in whatever that is good. It should however be noted that, "by the same mind," Paul does not mean that Christians must think in the same way. It means that the different opinions be brought together and be discussed for a common understanding, that enhances their faith in Christ.

By telling Christians not to be haughty, Paul is warning Christians against ambition or pride. Pride consists in thinking that I am better than others, I am right and they are wrong, I am wise and they are fools. In religious communities, there is also spiritual pride, which consists in thinking that I am spiritually superior to my brothers. Pride strives for perverse excellence and no community can build on it. It brings about hatred and anger, which destroy the whole community. Hence the exhortation, "do not be haughty."

Associate with the lowly

Here Paul counsels Christians to associate readily and freely with the humble people both inside and outside the community.¹⁸ The lowly refer to the poor people, the handicapped (physically and mentally), the sick and all those who have no say in the society. Those whom our productive society considers "useless." Christians must associate with these and give them the dignity of feeling that they are important in the society. Christians must be ready to give them a more human face in their sufferings and be their voice where it is a must to speak.

¹⁷ Cf. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p 643.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 643.

Do not claim to be wiser than you are.

This recalls the counsel of Proverbs 3:7, "Do not be wise in your own eyes." Paul probably put it here because he recognised in the "attitude of the man who is self-sufficient in his confidence and own wisdom, something particularly destructive to the harmony of the community."¹⁹ One who claims to be wiser than he is, is not ready for any correction and normally thinks of his opinions better than those of others. A self-confident person in self-wisdom likes talking too much and listening too little. He likes to tell and not to be told. He has no willingness to learn from others. It is in this way that this kind of pride becomes harmful to the community's harmony. The tendency to self-exaltation is very human. We find it embarrassing to accept our limitations. Yet, it is in such acceptance that we free ourselves from those limitations and make a step towards overcoming them. To accept that there is somebody wiser than me in the community takes courage. Paul asks Christians to recognise their limitations and not to exult themselves beyond what they really are. They are able to do this because they are aided by God's grace.

Do not repay any one evil for evil...

This exhortation echoes the words of Jesus during the Sermon on the Mountain (Mt 5:38-39, 43-44, Lk.6: 29) and the wisdom of Israel (Prov. 20:22). For Christians,

¹⁹ *Ibid* p.645.

there is no room for retaliation.⁵⁰ This is because Christians have been elevated to a new and higher standard of life, which does not conform to this world. The exhortation is also in line with the principle of doing good and avoiding evil. Paul urges Christians to live a life that makes a visible difference from non-Christians. They have to seek to do those good things, which non-Christians approve and recognize.⁵¹

.... but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

Here Paul counsels the Roman Christians to establish good relations with all human beings whether Christians or not.⁵² They have to aim at and seek those things, which are good for human beings. To do this, they have to be led not by human standards but those of the gospel.⁵³ This exhortation was especially urgent to the Church of Rome, which was made up of both Gentiles and Jews. Paul tells Christians to avoid anything that may be offensive to any of these groups (cf. 1Cor.10:32 2Cor 8:21). Christians must not give any scandal or dishonour to God's name by their way of life.

If it is possible so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all ...

This means that Christians have to be peace-makers as much as possible (cf. Mat 5:9). Paul puts this exhortation in conditional form, because he knows through his own

⁵⁰ In the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus has set a new moral teaching for those who have heard his call to belong to the Kingdom of God. His moral code is basically a correction of the so called the law of talion. "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say this to you, Do not resist an evil doer. But if one strikes the right cheek, turn the other also." (Matt. 5: 38 - 39). This puts an end to any kind of retaliation or retribution based on human standards or logic. Instead, Christian dealings with any person are to be based on a love that guides towards perfection according to God's reign (cf. Matt. 5:48). See Gregory J. Polan, "Retribution," In: Carrol Stuhmueller, (ed). *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), pp. 841 - 844.

⁵¹ Moo, D., *op cit.*, p 784.

⁵² Fitzmyer, *op cit.*, p 656.

⁵³ Cf Cranfield, *op cit.*, p. 646

experience as a preacher of the gospel that at times conflict with the world is unavoidable. Such conflict is part of the world's hatred of Jesus and his disciples (Jn.16:33). For this reason Christians should not strive to attain the favour of men for the sake of peace while compromising Christ and his gospel. The gospel of Christ should never be made to comply to human sin. It probably alludes to the fact that Christians in Rome were in conflict to the world around them. However, "Christians are urged to pursue behaviour that will have a positive impact on all people."⁵⁴ They have to act as ambassadors of God's peace (2 Cor. 5:18-20).⁵⁵

Even within our communities, we can be peace-makers by avoiding anything that can be offensive to anyone. To be able to do this, we must be keenly sensitive to the needs of others. We must also be aware of our biases and prejudices so that our actions and words to others may not be conditioned by them. We can also be peace-makers by not engaging ourselves in unnecessary gossips against the other members of our communities. Peace can also be cultivated through brotherly correction done with love and respect and not a violent confrontation. It should be noted that in order to be peace-makers, we must start with the very people we share every day life before we move out to others.

Beloved never avenge yourselves

This admonition does not originate from the Christians. Paul borrows it from Jewish law

⁵⁴ Moo, *op. cit.*, p. 785

⁵⁵ God's peace is described in the Bible as *shalom*, that is a life of perfect harmony between human beings with God, human beings with one another and human beings with the rest of creation. This harmony was the original plan of God but was interfered with when human beings fell into sin. With his passion death and resurrection, Jesus overcame the chaos of sin and reconciled the universe with God. Christians are called to imitate and embody the way of God revealed to us in Christ. Thus, it is the task of every follower of Jesus to carry forward the reconciling mission of Jesus and bring God's peace to all people. Paul urges the Christians of Rome to do everything that is in their power to be faithful to this mission.

and wisdom tradition (Lev. 19:8, Prov. 20:22, 24, 29, Eccl. 28:1-7) Christians are now to live it in response to the grace they have received in Christ as a way of non-conformity to this world. They have never to repay evil for evil. As human beings, we are often tempted to identify as God's enemies those people who displease us.⁵⁶ We then take it upon ourselves to execute what we view as just and deserved punishment to our enemies by taking revenge. Paul reminds Christians that their task is to embody the grace they have received to enemies. Grace is the only way to reconciliation and peace.⁵⁷

Whether one is a Christian or not, revenge is never a means of executing justice or solving any problem. Popular wisdom has got it right in the saying, "vengeance is not cured by another vengeance, nor a wrong by another wrong; each increases and aggravates the other." This does not mean that the one hurt should passively accept the hurt as if it was a good thing. It means that we should speak to our offender in gentleness and peace and not with anger and bitterness. We should not fight back.

....but leave room for the wrath of God.

The expression "wrath of God" appears a number of times in the letter to the Romans (2:5 5:9, 13:4-5). In the Old Testament, the wrath of God is God's response to sin and disobedience on the part of human beings. In the Book of Exodus, we read of the infidelity of the chosen people when they asked for a golden calf as their god. Such infidelity invoked God's wrath and he said to Moses, "Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them." (Ex. 32:10). However, God's mercy usually overwhelms God's wrath. In the same event, Moses pleaded with

⁵⁶ Cf. Achtemeier, *op cit.* p. 203.

⁵⁷ See Daniel Harrington, "Wrath of God." In: Carol Stuhlmüller, ed. *op cit.*, pp. 1109 - 1110.

God "and the Lord relented in the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people". (Exo.32:14).⁵⁸

In the New Testament, the wrath of God refers to the eschatological punishment destined to fall upon the unrighteous at the final judgement.⁵⁹ God's wrath has however been definitely effected in the present time against the evil in the world through the Cross of His Son Jesus Christ (Rom.5:5). Paul celebrates Jesus as one "who delivers us from the coming wrath" (Thess.1: 10). In our passage, Paul is telling us that it is not our business to pass judgement on anyone. It is God's prerogative and we must not presume his action, whatever it may be on the Day of Judgement.⁶⁰ In leaving room for God's wrath, we entrust our enemies to God's mercy.

...for it is written, "vengeance is mine and I will repay," says the Lord.

Paul quotes these words from Deut.32: 35. They seem to suggest that God's justice rules by the law of talion. However, as we have seen, because of Jesus Christ, God's wrath has been tempered by forgiveness, love and mercy. The suggestion here is that we human beings are required to have trust and confidence that God will see to the restoration to the order of justice that has been disturbed.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 201

⁵⁹ Brendan, *op cit.*, 381

⁶⁰ Ziesler, *op cit.*, p. 305

⁶¹ Brendan, *op cit* , p.381

No, if your enemies are hungry, feed them, if they are thirsty, give them something to drink.

The whole of this verse is a direct quotation of Proverbs 25: 21 - 22. Food and drink stand for any sort of kindness to our neighbour. This kindness can be in form of our resources, advice or efforts. All this is in line with what Paul has taught concerning the love for enemies. He shows that such love must be put into concrete actions. Doing good to our enemies is also a practical way of putting into action our blessings for those who persecute us and a specific way of doing good in the sight of all people.⁶²

This way of treating an enemy is intended to get the enemy to turn from enmity to friendship. It does not always work. In some cases it increases the enmity but we should not be discouraged. Our hope should always be that, our gracious deeds to our enemies, will burn away the hatred and win reconciliation and peace.⁶³ To fail to do our enemies the good they stand in need of when it is in our power to do so is a kind of indirect retaliation.

For in doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.

It has been suggested that behind this quotation from the Proverbs 25: 22, lies an Egyptian ritual in which hot coals presumably in some sort of dish, really were piled on the head of someone who had done wrong as a sign of repentance.⁶⁴ Was Paul aware of this ritual that is alluded to in the Proverbs? What exactly Paul had in mind when he

⁶² Moo, *op. cit.*, p.788

⁶³ Cf. Archtmeier, *op. cit.*, 202.

⁶⁴ Ziesler, *op. cit.*, 305

quoted these words is a matter of speculation among the scholars.⁶⁵ "When used metaphorically in the Old Testament, the words coals and fire usually refer to God's awesome presence and especially to his judgement (2Sam.22: 9; Ps.140: 10; Isa.5: 24)."⁶⁶

Many Fathers of the Church, notably Origen, Augustine, Ambrose and Jerome, understood the coals to mean burning pangs of shame. The enemy would be moved by kindness to shame, remorse and humiliation which would burn like coals of fire upon his head.⁶⁷ This shame that results from an unexpected charity and hospitality is not meant to punish the enemy but to lead him to repentance and reconciliation. God himself acted this way with us when he sent his Son to die for us while we were still his enemies.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This seems to be the summary of everything that Paul has said concerning the love for enemies. Paul tells Christians not to let the evil that surrounds them drag them into "attitudes and actions that are out of keeping with the transformed character of the new realm."⁶⁸ Evil overcomes a Christian when he or she returns evil for evil. By doing so, the Christian becomes exactly like the evil person who has injured him. Paul wants us to overcome evil not only by not returning evil for evil but also by taking a positive step by doing good. This way we gain victory and triumph over evil.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ See studies by W. Klassen, "Coals of fire (Rom.12: 19)" In: *New Testament Studies*, 9(1962 - 63), pp 337 - 350

⁶⁶ Moo, *op. cit.*, p. 789

⁶⁷ Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, p. 658

⁶⁸ Moo, *op. cit.*, p. 783.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 783.

CONCLUSION.

Concluding this section of exegetical analysis of Rom.12: 9 - 21, we note that all that Paul is saying in these verses is that a Christian must be the visible presence of Christ on earth. Jesus Christ, sent by the Father presents to us the perfect model of genuine love. He who loved those who were his own up to the end, also died for us on the Cross, while we were still God's enemies. Even at the face of the hostility of the world, the love of Jesus remains intact. He is the one who truly shows how to overcome evil by doing good. He enables us to love as he loves by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is why Paul has the boldness to command, "Let love be genuine". The challenge remains to us.

CHAPTER THREE

APPLICATION OF THE TEXT TO RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY LIFE

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, there lived two brothers. They shared a mill and a field, each night sharing evenly the grain they had ground together during the day. One brother lived alone while the other was married and with a family. The single brother said to himself, "It is not fair that we divide the grain evenly. I have only myself to care for but my brother has a family to feed. He should get a bigger amount than me". So each night he would secretly take some of his grain to add to his brother's granary.

But the married brother said to himself sometimes later. "It is not fair that we share our grains equally. I have children to provide for me in my old age, but my brother has none. He therefore needs a bigger amount than me so that he can spare something more". So every night he secretly took some of his own grain to his brother's granary. As a result, both of them found their supply of grain mysteriously increased each morning.

It happened that one night, they woke up at the same time and met each other half way between their two houses. It is then they knew what was happening. They embraced each other in love. They called the place where they met "a place of love", a holy place, where God is made known to people through love. They built a temple there and up to this day it is called "a temple of love".

The call to genuine love is a call to make our communities into “temples of love” where the members truly care for each other. It is a call to make God visible in our communities through love. It is a project that involves a constant death to self. It is a project that we actualise with the help of the Holy Spirit who acts in us as the principle of love.

My research reveals to me that many times we come to our communities believing in our ability to love. We feel that we can get on well with every one that we meet. But when we start living together, things prove different. We discover that the community is a terrible place of revelation of the negative side of the self. We discover our inability to get on with others. We also get a revelation of our envy, pride, hatred and arrogance. Our limitations and weaknesses become clear to us.

Such revelation is very good and healthy. What is bad is the fact that what is revealed to us, is what we would like to keep forever buried in our consciousness. Once it comes to the surface, we immediately force it back again and pretend that all is well. We have no courage to face it and deal with it or at least acknowledge it. We continue in our communities pretending to love one another even when there is total hatred deep in us. This is the same kind of situation that Paul faced in the Christian Communities that he founded. That is why he boldly exhorts us through the Roman Christian Community to let our love be genuine. We must take away our masks and let love be the real thing and not pretence. In this chapter, we shall use Paul's text that we have already analysed to show how we can make our communities “temples of love” by truly living genuine love.

WHAT IS LOVE?

As we noted in the analysis, the love that St. Paul is concerned with is "agape". It is the love of God for human beings. Christians share in this love of God because it has been poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to them (Rm. 5:5). Christians have therefore the capacity to overcome their selfishness and love as God loves because of the Holy Spirit that is working in them. For Christians therefore, love is not an idea. It is not a source of security and not a purchase. It is an act - a human act that involves the will but at the same time guided by the Holy Spirit who is its source. It is an act that involves "the gift of self, a gift which is motivated by another's worth as I perceive it."⁷⁰

Writing to the Corinthians Paul tells us that love is the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.13: 13). It is faith and hope made alive and active in the communities in which we live. By genuine love, we share in the very nature of God who is love. If we share in the very nature of God, it means that "his love runs through our veins."⁷¹ In this way, when we love truly, we make God visibly present to those we love. That is why our communities can become "temples" of encountering God if there is genuine love.

If our human relationships are bound up with our relationship with a God who is love, then our love manifests itself in total dedication to the other's well-being regardless of personal cost. That is what *agape* is. *Agape* originates in the heart of Jesus who died for us while we were still sinners in order to reconcile us with God. For this reason, the love we share "in human relationships is part of the grandness of a God who cradles us

⁷⁰ James F. Sullivan, *The Relentless Hunger: the Heart's Search for Love*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), p. 25.

⁷¹ Donald Goergen, *The Power of Love*, (Chicago: the Thomas More Press, 1979), p. 18.

tenderly in his all-loving embrace.⁷² Whenever and wherever there is genuine love among human beings, God is experienced.

Agape is supposedly directed by Christians to all human beings regardless of whether they are known or unknown to us. It does not discriminate between friends and enemies, if it is really a sharing in the *agape* of God. If this kind of love is exercised among members of the same Christian religious community, it becomes what Paul has called *philadelphia* (brotherly love). The key expression used by Paul to explain the community of Christians is "Body of Christ". By virtue of our Baptism, we have all been grafted into the Body of Christ so that we are now members of the same body. Members of a religious community are also bound up by the common charism of their founder. In every aspect therefore, they are brothers and sisters to each other. Now one question we may ask is: how should genuine love be manifested within a religious community of members who claim to be brothers and sisters to each other?

SENSE OF BELONGING

At the heart of genuine love in any community is a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging gives us a sense of identity. My first day in Tangaza was very impressive to me as I met with people who identified themselves with their communities first before their own names. One could hear, "I am a Dominican, I am a Capuchin, I am a Passionist" and many others. This identity becomes the bond of our union. The other members of the community become "my people" not in the sense of domination but in the sense of mutual loving possession. "It means that they are mine as I am theirs."⁷³ In this way we are truly members of the same body. In this sense of belonging, I am so

⁷² Carmen L. Callagirone, *Friendship as a Sacrament*, (Bandra: St. Pauls, 1993), p. 3.

⁷³ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, (Sydney: A Saint Paul Publication, 1979), p. 20.

intimately united to my brothers or sisters so much that what hurts them, hurts me too and what delights them delights me too. What is mine is theirs and what is theirs is mine. With the sense of belonging, the success of one is the success of all and the well being of one member contributes to the well being of the whole body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26). The call to genuine love is therefore a call to investigate our sense of belonging.

Without the sense of belonging, we find in a community people with whom we never agree, people who make life unbearable for us. Their presence brings regression. We find others who arouse envy and jealousy in us. Such people are everything we would wish to be ourselves and their presence reminds us that we are not. We may also find those who demand a lot from us. Their presence becomes a threat to us and so we see them as enemies. Without the sense of belonging, selfishness becomes the order of the day. A community becomes a community of competing individuals. In this kind of situation, which unfortunately exists many times in our communities, genuine love can not be expressed.

It is the sense of belonging that allows us to open ourselves to others. This openness frees us from our selfishness. It is with such freedom that we genuinely commit ourselves to each other. In concrete terms, this commitment means "listening to others, being concerned for them and feeling empathy with them. It means answering their call and their deepest needs. It means feeling and suffering with them - weeping when they weep and rejoicing when they rejoice."⁷¹ Such is genuine love. Our communities are crying for it. May we heed the cry first of all by affirming our sense of belonging.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 23.

FORGIVENESS

As we come to live together, it is good to be aware from the very beginning that we are descendants of Adam and that we carry in us the wound of sin. Anger, hostility and conflict are all part of our human condition and part of our community life. It is completely unrealistic to imagine that we shall ever reach a point in this present life when these elements will be completely absent. In fact, conflict and anger are real signs of life in a community. The way we deal with these is what makes a difference. If we let them dominate and control our actions, we result to hostility and violence that end up destroying the community. If we express them through forgiveness, our relationships are strengthened and we become more human.

Genuine love demands that our communities must be places of forgiveness. Paul strongly hints at this when he counsels us to "hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good", to "live in harmony with one another" and not to "repay evil for evil". This is because, in living together, in spite of all the trust we may have for each other, there are always words that wound, self-exaltations that provoke anger to others and attitudes that lead to dissension. Since we are sinful creatures, we may also carry out actions that cause painful injuries on others. In all these, it is only forgiveness that brings about real healing. Forgiveness is more rewarding to the one who forgives than to the one is forgiven. The one who forgives "is freed from painful emotions and destructive impulses"⁷⁵, and is filled with joy and peace. One who forgives also brings about healing and life in community relationships.

⁷⁵ Sosfield, Juliano and Hammet, *Design for Wholeness, Dealing with Anger, Learning to Forgive, Building Self-Esteem*, (Bandra: St. Paul Publications, 1990), p. 62.

If forgiveness is so rewarding and so important for community life, why do we find it so difficult to forgive and to ask for forgiveness even for small faults? My research among various community members of both men and women, reveals that we find it difficult to forgive because of a false presumption that holding unto anger and revenge brings us more satisfaction. We also refuse to forgive because we fear that such a step will bring us face to face with our own inadequacies. So refusal to forgive acts as our defence mechanism. Refusal to forgive also helps us to keep our perceived "enemies" at a safe distance from us. We accuse them of being difficult people that we cannot cope with.

Our refusal to ask for forgiveness stems from our pride. In my pride I feel that I can not go to my brother whom I have wronged and say, "I am sorry, please forgive me." This I feel as bending too low to my brother - something that is unworthy of a person of my status. We fail to recognise that the humble expression, "I am sorry" brings a lot of healing to many injuries in community life. Instead of forgiving and asking for forgiveness whenever there is a wrong done, we choose to keep on holding to our own hostilities. We keep on pointing an accusing finger on others. They are the trouble-makers. I am innocent.

It should be noted that forgiveness for us human beings is not a natural but a learned response. To forgive is a decision that we make and commit ourselves to it. To forgive and ask for forgiveness demand courage and humility. It is in forgiving that we mirror God who has cancelled the whole debt of our sins through the cruel death of his Son on the cross. It is also in forgiving that we follow the footsteps of Christ and his teaching in the most perfect way. Throughout his public life and ministry, Jesus

witnessed to what it means to be a forgiving person. He unconditionally forgave the woman who was caught in adultery (Jn.8: 1-11). He forgave the sins of many of those that he healed (Mk 2:1-12). Jesus not only modelled what it meant to be a forgiving person, but he also continually taught the necessity of forgiveness especially through parables (Lk.15: 11-32, Mt 18:23-35). As a logical conclusion of his ministry on forgiveness, Jesus forgave the thief who was crucified with him and prayed for the forgiveness of those who had inflicted such a cruel punishment on him. So no matter how often or deep we are hurt, our challenge as Disciples of Christ is always to forgive.

In the process of forgiveness, we must first of all acknowledge that we are hurt and there is need to forgive. Forgiving benefits us with "emotional health, inner peace, spiritual growth and the healing of a fragmented relationship."⁷⁶ Secondly, there is need to try to understand the person that has inflicted the hurt. What were the circumstances and motivations? What would I do if I were the one? Such understanding can bring a lot of healing on our part. Following this understanding we finally decide and choose to forgive. When we choose to forgive, we really lift a heavy burden from our shoulders. It should be noted that this process is not automatic. The memory of the injury will always remain even after we choose to forgive. Aided by the help of the Holy Spirit we have to continually choose to forgive until we have no longer the desire for revenge.

May love be genuine in our communities through a constant effort to forgive each other. Note that forgiveness is the true mark of the authenticity of love. "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another and if any one has a complaint against

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p 67.

another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive" (Col. 3:12-13).

FRATERNAL SHARING AND CORRECTION

Together with our sense of belonging and forgiveness, fraternal sharing and correction is another powerful means of expressing genuine love in community life. Paul expresses this powerfully by exhorting us to brotherly love and to "contribute to the needs of the Saints". In our communities, we have come together from different cultural and spiritual backgrounds. We have brought together untold richness that can greatly benefit the whole community if there is generous sharing. We are greatly gifted people. We need to know that all we are and have is a gift. We therefore need to share those gifts with our brothers with whom we share life together. We need to share our time, our food, our abilities, our faith, our griefs and our frustrations. Fraternal sharing is a unique way through which we reveal God to each other.⁷⁷

What is most painful is the fact that we can and do many times live together without any sharing at all. There are communities with members living in deep solitude. They eat together, pray together and sleep together in the same house but without any effort at all to reach out to each other. They fear to open themselves to each other.

Genuine fraternal sharing calls for willingness and readiness to listen and to be listened to. Listening is an art that is difficult to achieve, but a must for community life. We must learn to listen with the whole person. To listen with the whole person does not mean listening only with my ears and the nods of my head. To listen with my whole person means to pay due attention to what my brother is saying. It means to listen with

⁷⁷ Caltagirone, C.I., *op. cit.*, p. 56

"my ears, mind, brain and nerves, soul and body. To take in to what he says, to understand it, to receive it not to falsify it, screen it, judge it, spoil it, but to respect it, welcome it, record it."⁷⁸ Genuine listening seeks to understand the other, to feel as he feels and to see as he sees. It does not look for the logic of argument or clarity of ideas. True listening flows from keen sensitivity. Without this sensitivity, "we hear one thing and understand another, we hear what he is saying, but we understand what we want to hear."⁷⁹

Fraternal sharing makes us sensitive to the needs of our brothers and sisters. It is the key towards "contributing to the needs of the saints". It is real charity at work to hear the hunger of the other and understand him. Through sharing I understand the dignity of my brother as a human being. The keen awareness of this dignity enables me to attend to my brother's needs before my own. This is because I am able to perceive him as a person for whom Jesus died - a person with whom Jesus so identifies, such that to serve him is to serve Jesus.

Connected with forgiveness and fraternal sharing is fraternal correction, which is also another mark of genuine love. Fraternal correction is an ancient norm that comes down to us from the Mosaic Law. In the Book of Leviticus, we read, "Sincerely correct your neighbour, so that you may not be responsible for a sin because of him" (Lev.19: 17). If this norm is respectfully exercised, it transforms our community life making each one of us an opportunity for salvation to the other.

⁷⁸ Carlos G. Lewis, *Living Together*. (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988), p. 87.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 87.

In spite of its importance, fraternal correction is largely neglected in our religious communities. We rather enjoy criticising and gossiping over other's faults instead of correcting them. I feel it necessary to emphasise that our communities will be really "places of love" only when we shall learn to control our tongues. The tongue is a small part of the body that can build or destroy a whole community. By use of our tongues, we easily sow discord in community life by spreading the faults and mistakes of others. We like to magnify the faults of others in order to hide our own. We must therefore strive to be careful of how we speak and try to hold our tongues from sowing discord. Taming the tongue is a Christian duty as St. James wrote a long time ago (cf James 3:1-12).

By fraternal correction, we are reminded that we are indebted to the community, and that we bear responsibilities to one another. It is not a duty to be left to the superiors only. It belongs to all of us. Fraternal correction is a way of living and growing together and of binding my life to that of my brother. It helps me to discover him in a new dimension of interpersonal relationship. "He is no longer just a travelling companion or some kind of colleague who lives in the next room or an intimate friend or an interesting or boring person who it is easy or difficult to love.... Rather he is the one with whom I share a plan which neither of us can realise alone, without the one."⁸⁰ It is in fraternal correction that we truly become brothers and sisters to each other. One who corrects me has concern for my growth. He or she rejoices in my goodness and regrets my failures. "This transcends indifference, fear, envy, rejection, attachments that are all too human, or jealousy."⁸¹

⁸⁰ Amedeo Cencini, *To Live Reconciled - Psychological Aspects*, (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1988), p 150.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 151

Another good thing with fraternal correction is that it helps me to discover my own sinfulness. The failures of my brother challenge me to look at my own self. Maybe I am responsible for his fall or maybe his fall is a warning to me. For this reason, fraternal correction calls for a high degree of honesty with self. Otherwise, it can easily become a Pharisaic admonition that denotes spiritual superiority, "God I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector (Lk. 18:11). That should never be the attitude of a brother correcting another. We are all sinful human beings and we need the support of each member of the community to help us grow.

Then how should correction be done? Let it be noted that not every fault in a community warrants correction. Correction must be done only in those circumstances in which the brother or sister is helped to know himself or herself better. It must be done with great respect, prudence and always in the best interest of the one corrected. It must be an expression of true love and a sense of responsibility towards others. Correction must also be done with a lot of gentleness. Shouting and quarrelling do not help anyone. They only increase hostility. Gentleness is a gift from God that we acquire only through deep prayer. Finally, in fraternal correction, it is important to remember that no one is perfect. If I am aware that I am a weak creature I correct my brother with an attitude that does not seek to dominate but to serve. In this attitude, I see myself not as better than the other but as one who walks side by side with him.⁸²

Let love be genuine in our communities through fraternal sharing and correction. May ours be modelled on the first Christian Community where all the members were of

⁸² Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 153-156

"one heart and soul" (Acts:4: 32). May we learn to live and share what we are and have and be concerned for the growth of each other through fraternal correction. May our communities help us to grow in holiness each individually and together as a community.

PRAYER

I strongly believe that no one can love genuinely without a deep enduring life of prayer. No one can reach out in an effort to really care for others unless he or she knows day in and day out how he is himself cared for. It is in prayer that we know how much we are cared for as we allow God to love us. It is only since God loved us first that we can try to love one another in his fashion. It is with this understanding that Paul exhorts us to be "persevering in prayer".

Concluding the part of the analysis of our text, we said that as Christians and members of religious communities, we are called to be the visible presence of Christ on earth. We can not be the visible presence of Christ unless we are deeply and intimately united with him in prayer. Our genuine love to others can only be the fruit of our being so united with him just as a branch is united with the tree. St. John's allegory of the vine and the branches holds very true here: "I am the vine and my Father is the vine grower.... Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn.15: 1,4-5). Our love, if it is to be genuine must only flow from that of Jesus, who loved us and gave himself up for us. Prayer is the way to make this love flow into us and through us to others.

It should not be forgotten that love is the gift of the Holy Spirit in us. It is in prayer that we get in touch with the reality of the Spirit's presence. Through our availability, the Spirit himself prays in us with sighs too deep to be expressed in words (Rom.8: 26). He also bears witness in us that we are Children of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom.8: 15-16). We therefore share in everything Christ is, has and does. If Christ loves genuinely, we too share in the duty of loving genuinely by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our unity with the Holy Spirit can only be founded on prayer.

For these reasons, prayer is a must for every individual member of a community and for the community as a whole because it is a necessary condition for genuine love to prevail. Every member of the community must learn to spend some time - a good amount of time every day in prayer. In prayer, God invites me to enter into his glorious presence with reverence and gratitude. He does this to me so that I can better fulfil the primary purpose of my existence by letting myself into his love.⁸³ This self-pouring of God into me becomes complete when I recognise, accept and return the same love to him and to my fellow human beings. In this way, prayer becomes the means by which I express my love to God. By means of prayer, I become more open to my brothers and sisters in the community in which I live.

Individual moments of intimacy with God for community members prepare us for community prayers. In community prayer we gather together as a family in the presence of God. It is in communal prayer that we best express ourselves as a single body. Every community has got its own moments of communal prayer. However, at the centre of them all is the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the highest form of prayer in which we have

⁸³ Cf. Bill Shock, *Prayer and Personal Growth*, (Bombay: St Pauls, 1994), p. 26.

been invited as a community. It is the act in which God's love for us, our love for God, and our love for each other come together. It is an act of the community and for the sake of the community. It is "a fellowship, a sharing, a coming together of brothers and sisters and a manifestation of the kind of love that a community is (should be)."⁸⁴

We celebrate the Eucharist through Christ, with Christ and in Christ. At the same time, we share the same Christ and communicate him to each other. If Christ is the source of our love, then the Eucharist becomes the highest act of actualisation of genuine love in community life. In this sense, the Eucharist is also the strength for the actualisation of the other aspects of genuine love that we have already discussed. As a moment of communal prayer, the Eucharist should therefore be given a privileged place in community relationships.

THE OUTFLOW OF LOVE

Through his life and teachings, Jesus shows that Christian love has no boundaries. It must be directed to all human beings without any discrimination. Concluding the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus says to the lawyer, "Go and do likewise" (Lk 10:37). As Lord and Master, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples during the Last Supper and then said, "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set an example so that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:14-15). Towards the end of his life, before his redemptive sacrifice, he said, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13). In our passage, Paul tell us that our love must flow out to those

⁸⁴ Goergen, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

outside the community. He exhorts us to love our enemies and do good to them - serving them in their hunger and thirst.

In this section, our concern is to show that the fraternal love of every religious community should flow out to all people but in a special way to the poor, the sick and the disadvantaged of the society. Every religious person is called to be the embodiment of Christ to the people that surround him. Like Christ, a religious has been anointed by the Spirit of God to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Lk 4:18-19). By this, I mean that the poor, the sick and the disadvantaged should be the preference of our love.

The poor are Jesus in our midst. Jesus identified himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the strangers and the prisoners in the account of the final judgement (Mt 25:31-46). Any service given to them is service given to Christ. That is why we should not be afraid to open our doors to the poor who keep on knocking everyday. This is why Paul exhorts us to "practice hospitality" and "associate with the lowly". Genuine love demands that we do everything that is in our power, to give them the dignity of human beings created in the image of God and redeemed by Christ. We do this by attending fully to their spiritual and material needs. What Pope John Paul II has written to consecrated people applies to all members of Christian Religious Communities. "The quest for divine beauty impels consecrated persons to care for the deformed image of God on the faces of their brothers and sisters, faces disfigured by hunger, faces disillusioned by political promises, faces humiliated by seeing their culture despised, faces frightened by constant and indiscriminate violence, the anguished faces of minors,

the hurt and humiliated faces of women, the tired faces of migrants who are not given warm welcome and the faces of the elderly who are without even the minimum conditions for a dignified life".⁸⁵

May our love for God and neighbour be genuine. May the divine *agape* flow through us to all the disadvantaged people that are often seen as "useless" by serving them in love that is founded on faith and hope. Through a spirit of genuine love, let us become signs of hope and of God's presence to the suffering and the oppressed of our world today.

⁸⁵ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (The Consecrated Life), No. 75.

CONCLUSION

A story is told of a certain Nathan, who used to visit a leper colony in a certain island. The inhabitants of this colony, were people who knew what it really means to suffer. Their faces were a display of horror, despair and rage. Their bodies were full of horrible sores and mutilation. To them, death seemed the only welcome guest.

Nathan noted that in the midst of this devastating horror, there was a sick old man whose wrinkled face was surprisingly luminous and decorated with smiling eyes. He suffered in body like the rest of his companions, yet he showed great love for life. His eyes radiated rays of hope and he showed great kindness in dealing with others.

Nathan kept on wondering what good the hell of this colony could be giving this man who was so stricken by illness, and yet had such strength for living. Out of curiosity, he started to find out the secret of his hope. He noted that the poor old man would drag himself to a particular spot along the fence surrounding the colony every morning. He would sit down and wait – not for the sun to rise.

To his surprise Nathan noted that the man waited until an equally old woman would appear on the other side of the fence. Her eyes were full of sweetness and her face broadcasted a tender healing love to the sick man. They would stare at each other with broad smiles, without any exchange of words. The silent exchange would last for some moments. As the two loving faces parted each other, the sick old man would go back to his hut with a brightened face to wait for another day. The thought of seeing his loved one each passing day made him forget the suffering he was undergoing.

When Nathan asked about it, the leper proudly said, “She used to care for me in a secret way before I was brought here. Every morning, she would tenderly wash me.

before anointing my body with some oil that somebody had given her...When they took me and brought me here, she followed me. She has helped me to know that genuine love truly heals. When I see her each morning, I know that God lives and that I am also alive. It is only because of her that I am still happy to live. With her genuine love, she is to me a visible presence of God.”

Yes, with genuine love we become the visible presence of God to our brothers and sisters with whom we share every day life. That is the point we have been trying to make through this essay. It is the great truth that was revealed to Paul and which he passes to us through his Letter to the Romans. After establishing the context and structure of Rom.12: 9-21,we went ahead to analyse each of the verses in the text. In the third chapter we applied the analysed text to our community life highlighting some of the major requirements of genuine love.

We now make a concluding note that the challenge remains to us. It is not an easy challenge, but it is not impossible either. It is made possible by the fact that God’s own love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Let us therefore take courage and become true representatives of God to each other in our communities. Let us strive to make our communities truly “temples of love.” Yes, let love be genuine in our communities first because charity begins at home.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achtemeier, Paul. *Romans Interpretation*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1985.
- _____. *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*. Vol. 1 London: Sheed and Ward, 1970.
- Balz, Horst and Gerhard Schneider, eds. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993.
- Barret, C.K., *The Epistle to the Romans*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971.
- Barth, Karl. *The Epistle to the Romans*. London: Oxford University Press, 1933 (1977).
- Byrne, Brendan. *Romans, Sacra Pagina*. Collegeville: A Michael Glazier Book, 1996.
- Brown, Roger, *A Guide to Romans*. London: SPCK, 1975.
- Caltagirone, F. Carmen, *Friendship as a Sacrament*, Bandra: St. Pauls, 1993.
- Cencini, Amedeo, *To Live Reconciled: Psychological Aspects*, Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1998.
- Ellis, F.E., "A note on Pauline Hermeneutics." In: *New Testament Studies*, 2(1955 - 56): 127 - 133.
- Furnish, V.P., "Love Command," In: *New Testament Studies*, 2(1955 - 56): 102 -108.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph, A., *Romans*. Doubleday: The Anchor Bible Commentary, 1993.
- _____. "The Letter to the Romans." In: Brown R.E., J.A. Fitzmyer and R.F. Murphy, eds *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990.
- Goergen, Donald, *The Power of Love*, Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1979.
- Hultgren, A.J., *Paul's Gospel and Mission: The Outlook From His Letter to the Romans*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.
- John Paul II, *The Consecrated Life*, Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 1996.
- Kanjuparambil, P., "Imperative Participles in Rom12 :9 - 21," In: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 102 (1983): 285 - 288.
- Kasemann, E., *Commentary to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.

Lewis, G. Carlos. *Living Together*. Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988.

Melanchton Philip. *Commentary on Romans*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992.

Dahood, Mitchell. J., "Two Pauline Quotations from the Old Testament," *The Catholic Bible Quarterly*, 17 (1955): 19 - 24.

Moo, Douglas. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.

O'Toole, F. Robert. *Who is a Christian? A Study in Pauline Ethics*. Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1990.

Shock, Bill. *Prayer and Personal Growth*, Bombay: St.Pauls, 1994.

Solfield, Juliano & Hammet, *Design for Wholeness, Dealing with Anger, Learning to Forgive, Building Self-esteem*, Bandra: St. Pauls, 1990.

Smoothers F.R., "Give Place to Wrath (Rom12: 19): An Essay on Verbal Exegesis," *In: Catholic Bible Quarterly*, 6(1994): 205 - 215.

Sullivan F. James, *The relentless Hunger: The Hearts such for Love*, New York: Paulist Press, 1994.

Tabert, C.H., "Tradition and Redaction in Rom12: 9 - 21," *In: New Testament Studies*, 16(1969 - 70): 83 - 94.

Vanier, Jean, *Community and Growth*, Sydney: A Saint Paul Publication, 1979.