

## The Discipleship and Cooperation

To discuss the subject of cooperation could be compared to a review of some of the most enjoyable moments in our life. A magnificent castle on the beach is the fruit of working with buddies for hours or days under the hot sun. A successful science project at high school comes from the coordinated efforts with classmates who share the workload and joy. A raise at the workplace usually means you work hard and cooperate well with your boss and co-workers. A good marriage takes the joint commitment from a man and a woman. A beautiful baby is the fruit of the parents' mutual love. A perfect family in the eyes of the traditional Chinese is a happy cooperation of the old, the young and the middle-aged living together under one roof. Indeed, in the world we live, humanity has to cooperate with each other in order to survive and thrive.

In Christian community cooperation is not a solitary subject, but an attitude and action that needs to be understood and practiced in the context of pray, communal life and Christian spirituality. It is not the destination by itself, but the means to help attain the goal of unity and harmony as Christ prayed for us, through our common efforts to diminish the conflicts and frictions in the Christian community.

As Christians sometimes we fail to cooperate and we know we hurt the Church and Christ. We would naturally suffer from a deep frustration, remorse and anger. The first Christians also experienced frictions and conflicts. Acts of the Apostles accounted that "Barnabas wanted to take with them also John, who was called Mark, but Paul insisted that they should not take with them someone who had deserted them at Pamphylia and who had not continued with them in their work. So sharp was their disagreement that they separated.... But Paul chose Silas and departed.... He traveled through Syria and Cilicia bringing strength to the churches." (Acts 15:36-41) Paul publicly rebuked what he recognized Peter's inconsistency toward the Gospel. (2 Gal 2: 11-14) There were also the rivalries between the divisions in the Church. (1Cor 1:10-13)

In general the causes of the problems in cooperation share the common traits of the failure to understand clearly the opposite viewpoint, insufficient communication or lack of patience and tolerance. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have acquired even more complex syndromes that prevent us from good cooperation:

- more self-centered and egocentric
- more confident of our own thinking and judgment; more judgmental and self-righteous
- less patience, more anxiety and greater anticipation
- multi-tasking and short attention span leave no time for communication
- easy to be distracted and disappointed, quick to anger
- opt for quick fix or leave the problem unresolved

There are some practical strategies for resolving the problems, such as to be a good listener; to find out the root cause of the conflict; to use rationale rather than emotions; to focus on the subject matter instead of personality and to resolve one problem at a time. However, the fundamental principle, namely the Christian unity, needs to be reiterated here as the guideline of cooperation. "You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers." (Mt 23:8) "They may be one...as we are one" (Jn 17:21).

Notice that Christ depicted our unity with him in the likeness of the union of the Divine Persons, which reminds us that no matter how different our individual personalities could be, we are Christians in the first place, members of the one body of Christ, the Church. It is this oneness that identifies us and compels us to give up our judgment, prejudice and ego and to adopt the love, mercy and forgiveness that Christ has taught us. The Holy Spirit, the giver of life that has anointed us, bestows us with the ability and courage to break through the worldly barriers to reach out to our fellow humanities in the work of cooperation. Thus, we need to keep in mind the Christians standards in cooperation:

- The purpose of cooperation is to achieve unity under God rather than getting along or demonstrating one's talent or leadership.
- Recognize that the party I am working with or in conflict is my brother and sister and I should love and respect them as such without condition.
- Not to correct or judge but to promote and encourage people's initiative and good work.
- Pray to the Lord for the sanctification of the heart, mind and the intent.
- Uphold sincerity and honesty in communication.
- Use the language of compassion, mercy and love, like Christ did to us.

- When conflict arises, examine oneself and exercise tolerance towards others.
- Focus on work and pray while ignore negative comments and opinions.
- Respect and give sufficient attention to different opinions.

However the most difficult hurdle to get across is the exercise of forgiveness. Jesus said on the Cross, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” (Lk 23:34) Then how many times should I forgive that wicked person who hurt me and others so much? “Not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” (Mt 18:22) The ultimate forgiveness that humanity had ever heard or seen is the words and action from Jesus Christ. With this radical forgiveness on the Cross Jesus personified God’s ultimate love. It is the forgiveness from a heart deeply moved by true compassion (cf. Mt 18:27). It is the sincere forgiveness in its nakedness and entirety. (cf. Mt 18:35) It could sound foolish to the world, but it is the sign of a truthful disciple who follows Christ. Let’s try to be that disciple in cooperation!

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This happened on our trip in Europe. I felt bad afterwards, because I knew I preached without love and compassion, but with criticism and judgment. I knew she must have felt bad too, for she kept being non-communicative after she left for Shanghai. Out of my deep remorse I wrote her two emails, wishing her safe and sound in Shanghai and praying for the peace of her family. I also wrote that I enjoyed traveling with her. But she didn’t reply. I then called her son and husband in her N.Y. home, but nobody answered or called back. I realized in silence she was sending me a message: the untimely evangelization was not welcome and she preferred to be left alone for the time being. I learned my lesson with humility, but without losing the heart. I trusted her to be a decent woman and our friendship has been based on honesty and sincerity. I still held the hope that someday somehow our friendship could be re-established.

About four weeks later one day I received an email from her, telling me that she has returned from China, and her father who was paralyzed from a stroke has been recovering slowly in Shanghai. But when I read the next paragraph, I cried out with joy. It read, “Do you remember the CD you bought for my father? When I played to him, he smiled.”

Of course I remember. It was the “Ava Maria” music performed by a famous children’s choir that I picked up at a quaint shop after our ship docked in a small town in Germany. I remember that being a very thrift person she asked, “Why did you spend money on this since you have plenty Ava Maria music at home?” I replied, “This CD is too beautiful to miss, and your father would like it.” I still remember suddenly her eyes became wet.

She concluded her email in this way: “Thank you very much for being a good companion on my first trip to Europe. I apologize that I didn’t write to you because I didn’t have internet access in China.”

From this episode I learned my lesson of patience and cooperation while I realized that she must have learned something, too. Despite my personal imperfections, she couldn’t fail to see that Christians do have the enduring capacity to love and care for the fellow brothers and sisters especially those in suffering. Someday I will tell her that for Christians this is not a burden or work, but a joy dedicated to Christ who teaches us: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Mt 25:40)



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### **The Hope from a Failed Cooperation                      Yang**

Dear readers, in the last story I shared with you my experience of a failed evangelization. In retrospect, I could see that it also reflected the problem of cooperation: in my attempt to clarify for my non-believer friend some mistaken Christian doctrine I didn’t get around to intentionally cooperate with God’s timing and guidance, neither did I cooperate with her wants and needs -- she was in such a deep personal crisis that all she wanted was the companionship and sisterhood which I failed to provide because I was more interested in preaching the Gospel to her.

## 門徒與相互合作

當討論合作這個課題時,就好比回顧我們生命中的美好時刻。一個在沙灘上堆沙堡壘,正是三五好友在烈日下一起合作幾小時或整日的成果。一個高中成功的科研項目,正代表同學們共同分工的努力。升職正代表你與上司和同事相處融洽。一段美滿的婚姻,正是夫婦兩人互守承諾的見證。一個活潑的小孩,正是父母愛情的結晶。在中國傳統中,一個美滿的家庭,正是老、中、青三代在同一屋簷下的共融。確實,在我們的世界中,互相合作和分工正是人類生存和繁衍的重要因素。

在基督徒的團體中,合作不是一個單獨的題目,而是一種對祈禱和基督精神了解和實踐的態度與行動。它本身並不是我們的目標,但藉著它,門徒們能透過耶穌基督為我們的祈禱,和互相的努力去減少彼此的衝突和磨擦,從而達到在團體內共融的成果。

有時我們是會失敗的,更會損害到教會和令基督失望。我們會遭受挫折、自責和憤怒。宗徒們也曾遇到衝突和磨擦的時間,在宗徒大事錄中提到:『保祿向巴爾納伯說:「我們要回去,視察我們曾講過主道的各城,看看弟兄怎麼樣了。」,巴爾納伯願意也帶號稱馬爾谷的若望同去,但保祿認為不應帶他去,因為他從旁非里雅離開他們,沒有同他們一起去工作。二人於是起了爭執,以致彼此分離。巴爾納伯遂帶馬爾谷,乘船往塞浦路斯去了。保祿卻揀選了息拉,蒙弟兄們將他託於主的恩寵以後,也起身走了,他走遍了敘利亞和基里基雅,堅固各教會。』(宗 15:36-41)當伯多祿的行為與福音的真理不合時,保祿公開的指責他。(迦 2:11-14)更有黨派使教會分裂。(格前 1:10-13)

通常引致合作上的問題,都是由於不了解對方的觀點、欠缺溝通、缺乏耐性和忍耐。在廿一世紀中,我們有更多複雜的因素令我們不能彼此合作:

- 更自我和以自我作中心。
- 更執著自己的想法和判斷。
- 更少耐性,更多焦慮和更大的期望。
- 同時處理多重任務和減少專注能力以致溝通不足。
- 容易分心和失望,輕易發怒。
- 追求快捷的方法去解決問題,不認真了解問題的基本原因,甚至不去解決問題。

有很多方法去處理這方面的問題,例如做一個好的聆聽者;了解衝突的原因;不要感情用事,要理性分析;對事不對人,不作人身攻擊;和每次只解決一個問題。而最基本的原則,就是在基督內共融,「至於你們,卻不要被稱為「辣彼」,因為你們的師傅只有一位,你們眾人都是兄弟。」(瑪 23:8),「願他們在我們內合而為一,就如你在我內,我在你內。」(若 17:21)

基督要我們在祂內合一,因為我們都是神聖的,雖然我們每人都不同,但每人都是基督的肢體,同屬一體,同屬一個教會。我們應該接受基督教導我們的愛、仁慈和寬恕,放棄我們對別人的判斷、偏見和自私。聖神——生命之神,祂聖化我們並賜給我們能力及勇氣去衝破世間的障礙,以慈愛使我們互相合作。因此我們應該時常緊記基督徒互相合作的原則:



- 我們應該以在基督內合一為目的，不標榜各人的成就和才能。
- 在任何情況下都尊重我們的同工和與我們有衝突的人，因為在主內我們都是兄弟姐妹。
- 不判斷別人，多鼓勵和欣賞別人做得好的地方。
- 祈求天主聖化我們的心靈、思想和行為。
- 以誠懇的態度和別人溝通。
- 像基督對我們一樣，以同情心、愛和慈悲的心去對待別人。
- 當有衝突時，要忍耐並作出自我檢討。
- 不要理會負面的批評，專注工作和祈禱。
- 尊重和注意不同的意見。

但是最難做到的是寬恕。基督在十字架上說：「父啊，寬赦他們吧！因為他們不知道他們做的是什麼。」（路 23:34）「若我的弟兄得罪了我，我該寬恕他多少次？直到七次嗎？」耶穌對他說：「我不對你說：直到七次，而是到七十個七次。」（瑪 18:22）基督的言行正是人類所見最大的寬恕。寬恕應該以憐憫從心而發的。（瑪 18:27）寬恕應該是真誠的，不是不得已，勉強地做。（瑪 18:27）在世俗人的眼中好像很愚蠢，但這正是跟隨基督的標記，就讓我們一起做互相合作的門徒吧！

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## 教會一家

農婦

「凡你們對我這些最小兄弟中的一個所做的，就是對我做的。」（瑪 25:40）

在香港，最深的感受是來去匆匆。尖東的黃昏很漂亮，維港的美景就在顯亮的眼前，我走上了通過對面的行人天橋，被人潮推著向前。在這「東方之珠」熙來攘往的商業地區上，看見一個青年人坐在地上，穿著單薄的衣服，在十一月的天氣中應該不夠的。再看，看見他是斷臂的，目光只注視著地上的小碗子，碗中放著一些零錢，我心中不禁有點感動，他是行乞的！我下意識打開皮包，想找些零錢，但我記起，沒有港幣，只有美鈔。很有衝動上前給他，使他可以隨意買一些晚飯。可是，在這份感動的同時，在同一個心靈內，我又有一份警戒之心。他是否給人利用的呢？

最後，我並沒有拿出錢來。上了朋友的車，我們離開了繁華的尖東，這些漂亮的維港夜景漸漸走遠了，車上的朋友各自交換買來的手信互相欣賞。我卻感到深深的悔疚，為自己的「惡」而悔疚。小小的十元，我保持了，但是自己宣稱的愛德，相信天主是父，所有人都是我的兄弟姐妹的信念，在這一刻，明顯的失去掉了。在車上，我禁不住流淚，為自己的罪疚感而深深懊悔。原來，自己的信德愛德，在實際行動上，是比一張十元美鈔更微薄。原來自己最著緊的，不是愛人，而是保護自己的利益，就在一件微不足道的事上，自己的缺失，完全表露無遺。

在可見的未來，相信我沒有機會再與這斷臂青年相遇，如果有那一位兄弟姐妹在尖東的行人天橋看見他，請向他奉上一些零錢。回來可向我「算帳」…我可想不到最終時，才由天主向我算這筆帳。謝謝你！

\*筆者潤別了香港二十多年，逗留期間，感觸良多，因而成文。



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