

AUTARKY

July 1960 Editorial

I open my dictionary:

“Autarky (Gk. *autos* self , *arkeo* suffice) - a self-sufficient region or country”. Autarky is the selfishness of communities, a selfishness that threatens all communities: the nuclear family (couple and children) or the extended family. I am reminded of André Gide’s¹ insulting remark: “Families ! I hate you ! homes, closed in on themselves; doors shut; happiness not open to others”. Couples, Teams, Sectors are not shielded from this temptation, and I am not sure that they all resist it with enough energy.

I see teams who dream of an ever closer community life. Why not all live in the same block of flats (apartments)? spend our holidays together? In our spare time, we would hasten to each other’s homes. At a child’s baptism or first communion, we could well do without parents, uncles and cousins - provided the whole team is there. Sometimes, it is at Sector level that this tendency manifests itself: some Sectors organise outings several times a year for parents and children; they are always ready to help each other between members of a Sector - but it does not go beyond Teams.

At the level of the Movement, some write to the Secretariat asking for a house in the country in which to spend a holiday. And why should not the Teams organise “Family holiday homes”? - we would be so happy together ! Some ask for a loan to buy a home or a business, or the address of team members in such or such a town or country where they could stay during a business trip. Some offer a room for a student - preferably from a family in Teams - not to offer him favourable terms - but to be sure of whom they are taking into their home ! etc...

Far be it from me to condemn wholesale all these manifestations of community spirit; they must be judged according to the intentions that give rise to them. Nevertheless, even when they are inspired by true fraternal charity, they are not necessarily all justified, for all that. Let us go back to first principles. We are not an all-embracing Movement whose aim would be to offer its members everything they might need and which would ask them to devote most of their spare time to it. As a movement of spirituality, we have no other ambitions than to help our members to discover more fully the demands of God’s love, so as to respond to it ever better. Even in this sphere, we do not claim to meet all their needs, but rather to give them an appetite for deepening their Christian spirituality and to encourage them to draw from the best sources.

Not only does our Movement not claim to replace all other communities: family, parish, Catholic Action, leisure, cultural or mutual-help groups..., but it hopes to see its members joining these centres of living activities, have their place in them, contribute their dedication and witness, establish relationships in them and make friends. I would almost say that we meet, as members of Teams, just enough to find in them that explosive force - the love of the Lord - that will propel us out in all directions and in all company where, without faintheartedness or vanity, we need to be the witnesses of love, the yeast in the dough. What use would yeast be that is carefully kept away from the dough?

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¹ André Gide: French writer (1869-1951)