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Need of the Hour: Formation or Training?

Sebastian Athappilly

Visiting Professor at DVK, Bengaluru, and Hospital Chaplain
in the University Clinic, Graz, Austria

Abstract

Formation is a matter of spirituality after the models of Jesus Christ and His Blessed Virgin Mother Mary. This has to be distinguished from the mere training of some skills and practicing many devotions. The spirit of prayer is an essential element of spirituality and is different from reciting many prayers. In the evaluation and promotion of the candidates, positive criteria of spirituality should replace the merely negative norms of “having made no problems.” Formation also entails human formation and theological formation. Theological formation should promote liturgical and missionary spirituality and sound theological reflection which is at the service of faith. Theology is not to be perceived and pursued as a mere “objective” university discipline. The need of the hour is a holistic formation as conformation to and transformation into Christ, which is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit!

Formation, a Biblical Theme!

The whole Bible is in a way the story and history of God’s call and formation. God “calls” everything from nothing and forms it; He also calls mankind into being and “forms” them and gives formation to them. The first chapters of the book of Genesis narrate this. Then we have the history of Abraham and other patriarchs. There, too, we come across God’s special call and formation. All the later leaders and prophets

whom God called and appointed were also given the needed formation through him. This sometimes becomes very dramatic in the case of some of the prophets, especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Not only the individual agents of the people but also the whole elect people of Israel had to undergo formation through the Lord.

The Church's work of formation is a continuation in time of Christ's work, which the evangelist Mark illustrates in these words: "And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have the authority to cast out demons" (Mk. 3:13-15). In this sense formation in the strict sense as applied to the priests is to be a formation "to be with him and to be sent out." According to the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II (1992) "the formation of future priests, both diocesan and religious, and lifelong assiduous care for their personal sanctification in the ministry and for the constant updating of their pastoral commitment is considered by the Church one of the most demanding and important tasks for the future of the evangelization of humanity"¹.

Formation can mean the act of forming (active sense) and also the process of being formed (passive sense). We mean by formation in this article in both these senses. In the active sense, formation can take place in two ways: from outside (by someone else) and also from the inside (by oneself), as is also the case with training. Even in the passive sense, there is an element of activity, namely, letting (allowing) oneself be formed or in-formed. Forming oneself and letting oneself be formed can be called internal formation as opposed to the external formation from outside. What is ultimately important and rewarding is the internal formation achieved by and in oneself through the help of the Holy Spirit and accompanied, assessed and assisted by the formators.

Formation Versus Training

We may not also overlook the fact that by the time a candidate enters the seminary or a formation house, he/she has already been formed to a large extent at home; besides this, he/she might bring in certain good or bad habits as a result of the training at home or school. The success or failure of formation/ training in a formation house depends to a great extent also on this factor. That is why screening and careful selection are of crucial importance.

1 *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 2.

An important difference between formation and training is that training can also be given to subhuman beings, whereas formation is a process applicable only to human beings. We can train parrots, dogs, dolphins, elephants, etc. We do not speak of formation in this case, where there is no question of conviction or motivation, but merely motoric activity. We can also speak of physical (bodily) training of human beings, for example, in the field of sports and games as well as police and military training. All these are different from formation that affects and involves the internal sphere of the mind, spirit and the Holy Spirit.

In general, we can say that training is a matter of cultivating a habit, while formation is a matter of imparting and imbibing convictions, attitudes, and motivation. Training is more a matter of muscles (body) and psyche, while formation concerns the mind and spirit (nous and pneuma).

The Second Vatican Council does not apparently distinguish between training and formation in the above manner. It speaks of “training” and “formation” almost interchangeably in the English text of the Decree on the Priestly Formation. The following passages illustrate this:

“It proclaims the extreme importance of priestly training and lays down certain basic principles by which those regulations may be strengthened which long use has shown to be sound and by which those new elements can be added which correspond to the constitutions and decrees of this sacred council and to the changed conditions of our times. Because of the very unity of the Catholic priesthood this priestly formation is necessary for all priests, diocesan and religious and of every rite”².

“Major seminaries are necessary for priestly formation. Here the entire training of the students should be oriented to the formation of true shepherds of souls after the model of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd”³.

“The spiritual training should be closely connected with the doctrinal and pastoral ... Those practices of piety that are commended by the long usage of the Church should be zealously cultivated, but care should be taken lest the spiritual formation consists in them alone or lest it develops only a religious affectation”⁴. “so that the spiritual training rest upon a more

2 Decree on Priestly Formation *OptatamTotius*, 1.

3 Ibid., 4.

4 Ibid., 8.

solid basis and that the students embrace their vocation with a fully deliberate choice, it will be the prerogative of the bishops to establish a fitting period for a more intense introduction to the spiritual life.”

The original Latin text speaks of “conformatio”⁵ and “formatio”⁶ for the formation and “institutio”⁷ for training and also the verb “formare” (“formentur”).” Maybe the translators would have had in mind that often formation is misunderstood as training? The Apostolic Exhortation (1992) speaks of formation (formatio) in its very title and elsewhere, for instance, in articles 2, 42 and 43. But in the titles of the chapters 1, 5 and also elsewhere the term institutio is used, which is translated, however, as ‘formation,’ and not as ‘training’!

In stating that “the entire training of the students should be oriented to the formation of true shepherds of souls after the model of our Lord Jesus Christ,”⁸ the Council understands formation in the sense we have indicated above, namely, as a spiritual process, rather than merely developing a habit. Although the term “training” is used here, it is meant as an approximate English equivalent of the Latin term “institutio,” which means instruction or education. That means the Council does not think of training in the sense of developing a habit as a practicing “drill.” In the Decree, the term is employed as a general concept for a process of maturation, which has formation as its specific target. In other words, the Council focusses on the formation of the candidates and not merely on “training.”

That the candidates are not merely to undergo training, but real formation, is clear from the following text of the Council.

“They should be taught to seek Christ in the faithful meditation on God's word, in the active participation in the sacred mysteries of the Church, especially in the Eucharist and in the divine office, in the bishop who sends them and in the people to whom they are sent, especially the poor, the children, the sick, the sinners

5 “*In Seminariis Minoribus ad germina vocationis excolenda erectis alumni peculiari religiosa conformatione*” (Ibid., 3); “*Seminaria Maiora ad sacerdotalem conformationem necessaria sunt*” (ibid., 4).

6 Ibid., 8 (*formatio spiritualis*).

7 Ibid., 8 (*institutio spiritualis*).

8 “*In eis integra alumnorum institutio eo tendere debet ut ad exemplar Domini Nostri Iesu Christi, Magistri, Sacerdotis et Pastoris, veri animarum pastores ipsi formentur* (Decree on Priestly Formation, 4)..”

and the unbelievers. They should love and venerate with a filial trust the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who was given as mother to the disciple by Christ Jesus as He was dying on the cross. Those practices of piety that are commended by the long usage of the Church should be zealously cultivated, but care should be taken lest the spiritual formation consists in them alone or lest it develops only a religious affectation. The students should learn to live according to the Gospel ideal, to be strengthened in faith, hope and charity, so that, in the exercise of these practices, they may acquire the spirit of prayer, learn to defend and strengthen their vocation, obtain an increase of other virtues and grow in the zeal to gain all men for Christ”⁹.

The Council points out that the students should learn to “live according to the Gospel ideal” and “acquire the spirit of prayer”! Formation, as is envisaged by the Council, is thus not a matter of exercising many devotional practices or reciting many prayers, but living according to the Gospel values and imbibing the spirit of prayer. Gospel values seem to be clear generally, but the meaning of the spirit of prayer remains vague and unexplained.

Spirit of Prayer

The spirit of prayer is one of the most precious graces in the spiritual life. Some consider it as the most important of all graces. According to Teresa of Avila prayer is, in general, the raising of our heart to God, talking to and communicating with God. Borrowing the terminology of St Paul in his contrast of the spirit with the flesh (1 Cor 2:13-3:3: spiritual persons opposed to unspiritual persons or people of the flesh; cf. also Rom 8:5-8), we may oppose the spirit of prayer to the “flesh” of prayer. By “flesh” of prayer we mean, however, the many prayers one says, without thereby praying in the spirit and truth as Jesus wants to pray (Jn 4: 23-24). What Jesus says regarding spirit and flesh, namely, that “it is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is useless” (Jn 6:63), is in a way applicable also here. Worshipping in spirit and truth implies for Jesus that one lives in truth guided by the Spirit. Formation has, therefore, to do with truthful life and life in the Spirit. The test of this prayer is the life one leads. Simply saying many prayers does not mean that one is truly a person of prayer. It is the spirit of prayer that makes one a person of prayer. We may find people who say many prayers but are not at all forgiving or ready for reconciliation. This is a clear sign that the flesh

9 Ibid., 9.

of prayer does not make one conform to Christ unless it is enlivened by the spirit of prayer.

The spirit of prayer could be described as a state of the heart that is in constant dialogue with and in the presence of God. God said to Abram: “walk before me and be blameless” (Gen 17:1). The Council thinks of a seminarian or religious who is not someone who merely says many prayers, but somebody who lives in the spirit of prayer. Spirituality has to do with the spirit of prayer, as we find it in the life of Jesus Christ and his Blessed Mother. “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” (Jn 15:4). By the spirit of prayer is meant this continual abiding in the Lord.

There is thus a difference between praying and possessing the spirit of prayer, between having a kind of piety and possessing an inward life. We cannot always be in the act of praying, but we should always be in a state or spirit of prayer. St Paul exhorts us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:16) and to “pray in the Spirit at all times” (Eph. 6:18). This is possible if we learn to withdraw in spirit from all external things and come inwardly nearer to God and accustom ourselves to converse quietly with him. As Jesus says, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will also be” (Mt 6:21).

The spirit of prayer can be hence understood as habitual prayer, a lasting awareness of God’s presence. The Psalmist prays: “I keep the LORD always before me” (Ps 16:8). This spirit of prayer must pervade and sanctify everything we do. The formation should help the candidates to preserve this spirit even in the most absorbing occupations. Effective help in this regard is habitually living the life of prayer without permitting the activities to do away with the life of prayer. L. G. Lovasik admonishes that prayer should be the breath of our soul. Conscious of our human weakness, and trusting in God’s power, goodness, and fidelity, we should “constantly turn to Him in prayer.” In this way “the spirit of prayer will counteract the obstacles to prayer: pride, selfishness, and sin. The spirit of prayer will necessarily draw down the blessing of God upon your work”.

The spirit of prayer is in direct contrast to modern rush and activity that allows no time for the soul to rest in God. Formation must make it clear that the work of the sanctification of an individual soul is of more importance in the eyes of God than the material welfare. It is not so much what we do as what we become that is of value in God’s eyes. His plan

for us is that we become transformed interiorly. As St Paul writes: “This is the will of God: your sanctification” (1 Thess 4:3).

What can happen in the formation houses is that only the “flesh” of prayer is preserved and emphasized without paying due importance to the spirit of prayer. This happens when the formation is replaced by and degraded into mere training. Training permeates only the flesh and helps the trainees to form a habit; formation, on the other hand, penetrates the flesh and touches the spirit and impregnates the candidates spontaneously with hunger and thirst for prayer, in such a way that they pray, not because of a rule, but moved by one’s appetite. If this happens, priests and religious will remain in their prayer life even after the period of formation. It will be a contradiction if the rules are envisaged as to monitor whether the religious and priests recite their daily prayers! Those who have come voluntarily to follow Jesus nearly and ardently need not be “forced” or checked, but helpfully reminded! Prayer is their right and privilege and a voluntarily assumed duty! What if many of the “formed” members view this as a burden and unpleasant duty? What if they try to justify their regular negligence of prayer with the (lame) excuse of their apostolate and much pastoral work? It would only prove that their “formation” was not real formation, but merely training!

It is not a question of mere name about which we are concerned here, but the very nature of the process and procedure in the formation houses. Whether we call it training or formation, it should not be mere training, but real formation; not just information, but transformation! It can happen that we call it formation, but it could be merely training, just as the politicians observe *bandh*, but call it “*hartal*!” What can happen in the formation houses is that the candidates are merely trained for spiritual and religious life, and not really formed! There is fixed timetable to follow and precise rules to obey. Repeated exercises in this help one to develop some habits. This also happens at homes and schools. Children learn, for example, to say “please” and “thank you.” This need not come out of conviction and so from the heart. That is why we see many persons who are particular to say “thank you” for any small help and gift are not at all interested to thank God! Applied to the seminaries and religious houses it can also similarly happen that during the period of formation the candidates are merely trained to recite the rosary, pray the liturgy of the hours, participate in the Holy Eucharist, spend time in spiritual reading and in reading the Holy Scriptures. If this happens,

the candidates gradually forget and give up all this once they are out of the formation houses and formation period!

Formation as Conformation

“I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19). St Paul makes this statement clear that the goal of the ultimate formation of every Christian is that Christ is formed in him/her. This is indirectly expressed in the Decree on Formation by terming formation as *conformatio*, a conformation to or with. With whom? With Jesus Christ, as is made explicit in the same clause by stating that the formation should have to be after the model of Jesus Christ¹⁰. If this is the goal of formation, the nature of formation should be by it. Only in this way are the candidates to be equipped to play the role of enlightened leaders with character and competence. The candidates, as well as the formation personnel, should have no other priority.

Formation is, therefore, formation of conformation as transformation. This transformation is a gradual process of being conformed to Christ and also of Christ being formed in the candidates. This makes us focus on the person of Jesus Christ and his spirituality. This should impregnate the formees.

Spirituality-oriented Evaluation/Promotion

If the goal of formation is to be conformed to Christ, the norm of promotion should also correspond to that, namely, that the concerned person has shown reliable signs of this conformation. Positive norms of promotion are to be introduced in the evaluation of the formees. Candidates in formation are usually promoted to further stages based on negative criteria, namely, depending on whether the concerned candidate has or has made any problem so far! If no problem, one is promoted! Instead of this, the evaluation and promotion have to be based on positive norms. A chart of positive norms could be evolved. Only those candidates who have shown that they can live the expected spirituality of that particular stage will be promoted. The norm is thus not problem-oriented, but spirituality-oriented. Spirituality includes many factors.

Jesus, the Model of Authentic Spirituality

There is a common misconception that spirituality is identical with leading an ascetic life, making many and long prayers, and practicing

10 Ibid.

many devotions. Authentic Christian spirituality is based on the spirituality of Jesus Christ. Christian spirituality is based on one's experience of God in Jesus Christ. It is not a set of observances and devotions, but a principle and perspective of lifestyle after the example of Christ. This is to be distinguished from mere information and academic reflections. In seminaries and faculties, it can happen that the candidates are given philosophical and theological "formation" in the form of mere information and academic training neglecting the necessary spiritual counterpart. It can also happen that the training is imparted to make the candidates effective managers and activists. It would be at times good to remind ourselves what Jesus said to Martha: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her" (Lk 10: 41-42). It is striving after living and imitating Christ's spiritual outlook and values. Here it is not a question of saying many prayers or observing certain rituals. Spirituality is the motor of conviction and commitment. It affects the whole of a person's thinking and behavior. It is the underlying principle of each act of the person and shows itself in life and behavior in the face of all kinds of experiences, good or bad, joyful or bitter.

Jesus was a man of prayer, but not a man of prayers. He was a pray-er, one who prayed. He was in constant union, communion, and dialogue with God, his Abba. His food was to do the will of him, who sent him and to complete his work (Jn 4:34). As is written in the Letter to the Hebrews, "when Christ came into the world, he said . . . 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God'" (Hb 10:5.7). The litmus test of prayer is life itself. Jesus lived, what he prayed. The spirituality of Jesus can be summed up in his obedience. As the Christological hymn in the Letter to the Philippians makes it clear, he emptied and humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God also exalted him (Phil 2:7-9). By his obedience, the many are made righteous (Rom 5:19).

That means the way Jesus chose to work the salvation and redemption of humanity was precisely the way of obedience to his Father. "Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (Jn 18:11), he asked. "Whoever does the will of God" is for him his brother and sister and mother" (Mk 3:35). Jesus viewed whatever hinders him from fulfilling God's will as satanic temptation. To Peter who wanted to seduce him

from the path of suffering, he said: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things (Mt 16:23).

The obedience of Jesus to the will of God had its various dimensions. “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Hb 5:8-9). He teaches us to first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Mt 6:33). According to Jesus an important item of any prayer consists in praying that God’s will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10). Precisely because he sought to fulfill only God’s will, he was so free and bold to challenge and criticize any human tradition that was counter to God’s will. He forbade divorce. What God has joined, nobody shall separate (Mk 10:9); he challenged the traditional interpretation of the law of Sabbath (Mt 12: 1-8) and that of cleanliness of hands and cleanness of food (Mk 7:1-23). He was ready to accept suffering and death as God’s will: “Abba, Father ... not what I want, but what you want” (Mk 14: 36). He said: “I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (Jn 5:30).

He did not accept glory from human beings (Jn 5:41). Jesus did not also seek his own glory (Jn 8:50). According to him, we have to do good works, so that God the Father in heaven may be glorified (Mt 5:16). As St Ignatius of Loyola put it, everything should be done for the greater glory of God. The goal of the priestly ministry and religious apostolate has to be therefore not at all self-glory, but the glory of God. The formation imparted to the candidates has to take this as extremely important.

Jesus was not only for us; he was also with us. He is God-with-us (Immanuel). He became like unto us, except sin. The priests are to be not merely for the people, but also with them: they have to be in the words of Pope Francis “shepherds living with the smell of the sheep.” He said: “Be shepherds, with the ‘odor of the sheep,’ make it real, as shepherds among your flock.” This being with has many implications. One of them is to live the life of faith as is also demanded of the faithful. In the spirit of St Augustine we may say that for the people one is a priest, but with them, he is a believer. This would mean that the spiritual exercises such as adoration, rosary, a way of the cross, etc. are also meant to be practiced by the priests as well. They are not merely to order these observances for the people, but should pray with them. The eastward (ad orientem) position of the celebrating priest during the Holy Eucharist has the

advantage of indicating that he is one among the faithful and co-pilgrim with them to the same goal. The priest is both for the people and with them as one of them. Both these dimensions have to be well taken care of in the formation as well as in the actual exercise of pastoral ministry.

Jesus was a man of compassion. The suffering and plight of the people and individuals moved him to pity and compassion. Priests of Christ and the specially consecrated should be formed to be persons of compassion. Arrogance and superiority complex should have no place in their hearts.

Mary, the Spiritual Mother of Formation

Mary is the Mother and Model of the Church; she leads us to Christ. As a mother of Jesus, the High Priest, she is the mother of the priests. “The Virgin Mary, who at the message of the angel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world”¹¹ is the spiritual mother of priestly and religious candidates. As the “Bride of the Holy Spirit,” she has a significant role in their spiritual formation. As the Dogmatic Constitution observes, she-

“...was associated with the incarnation of the divine word: in the designs of Divine Providence she was the gracious mother of the divine Redeemer here on earth, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord ... Thus, in a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason, she is a mother to us in the order of grace”¹².

As “Daughter of God the Father,” Mother of the Son of God, “Bride of the Holy Spirit,” and “Temple of the Most Holy Trinity,” Mary can assist us in the formation. Humanly speaking, Jesus got his formation also from his mother. He by entrusting us to her care (Jn 19:26-27) wills reasonably that we are formed by her as a mother. Just as the Holy Spirit is the Uncreated Advocate (Jn 16:7), Mary is our created “advocate.” If she has exercised this role at the wedding at Cana (Jn 2) in a material need, how much more will she be for us to our spiritual needs! Both the Holy Spirit and his Bride Mary are united in their purpose, to form Christ in us. A sound Marian devotion is hence indispensable for true Christian formation. It was in her womb that the Word of God was formed with the help of the Holy Spirit.

11 *Lumen Gentium* (LG), 53.

12 LG 61.

Mary is not only the mother but also an excellent example of spirituality; she is “hailed as pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church, and as its type and outstanding model in faith and charity.” Her humility and obedience (“I am the handmaid of the Lord”; “Let it be according to your word!”); charity and service mindedness (“She went with haste to a Judean town...and greeted Elizabeth”); spirit of contemplation (“Treasured all these things in her heart”) reflect her spirituality which is a model for the candidates to priesthood and consecrated life.

Liturgical (Eucharistic) Spirituality

“Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness” (Ex 5:1). God wants to liberate his people so that they may celebrate a festival! This underlies the significance of worship in our life. When we speak of spirituality, especially of the priests and priestly candidates, Eucharistic spirituality has a very prominent place in it. As John Paul II observes, “The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates the heart of the mystery of the Church”¹³. The Second Vatican Council calls the Eucharistic sacrifice “the source and summit of the Christian life.” In the face of certain present-day unhealthy and untheological trends and tendencies among priests and the religious regarding liturgical celebration, especially of the Holy Eucharist, it is important to highlight certain basic matters that have to be given utmost importance in the formation. Those trends are related to the practice of popular devotions and also the way the Liturgy is celebrated, namely, often in a manner, each celebrant thinks, without caring for the officially approved text and rites by way of omitting, altering or/and adding. A basic mistake that is to be corrected is that Liturgy is not a subject of private piety and theology. Liturgy as the official act of worship of the church has to be celebrated according to the norms of the church who grants the celebrant the official permission to act.

Pope John Paul II had referred to certain shadows related to the celebration and understanding of the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. “In some places, the practice of Eucharistic adoration has been almost completely abandoned. In various parts of the Church, abuses have occurred, leading to confusion about sound faith and Catholic doctrine concerning this wonderful sacrament. At times one encounters an

13 Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), 1.

extremely reductive understanding of the Eucharistic mystery. Stripped of its sacrificial meaning, it is celebrated as if it were simply a fraternal banquet. Furthermore, the necessity of the ministerial priesthood, grounded in apostolic succession, is at times obscured and the sacramental nature of the Eucharist is reduced to its mere effectiveness as a form of proclamation . . . The Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation”¹⁴.

The Second Vatican Council makes it clear that although the popular devotions have their place in our spirituality, “the liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them.” The Council instructs, therefore: “The study of sacred liturgy is to be ranked among the compulsory and major courses in seminaries and religious houses of studies.” The Council wants that “in seminaries and religious houses, clerics shall be given a liturgical formation in their spiritual lives . . . Likewise, they must learn to observe the liturgical laws so that life in seminaries and religious institutes may be thoroughly influenced by the liturgical spirit”¹⁵. This is applicable also to the liturgy of the hours.

A comprehensive Eucharistic spirituality encompasses celebration, contemplation, and mission. Finishing the Eucharistic celebration as fast as possible, in seven to ten minutes, or celebrating without wearing the liturgical vestments, cannot be the results of proper formation in Eucharistic spirituality! Formation also includes the development of interest for the time to time teachings and instructions of the popes. The candidates should also learn to feel and think with the Church (*sentire cum ecclesia*).

Human Formation

Besides spiritual formation, there are also other fields of formation that priestly (and religious) candidates have to undergo and undertake, which we can summarily call the human formation, which is meant to “cultivate a series of human qualities.” “Of special importance is the capacity to relate to others. This is truly fundamental for a person who is called to be responsible for a community and to be a “man of communion.” This demands that the priest not be arrogant, or quarrelsome, but affable, hospitable, sincere in his words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening himself to clear and brotherly

¹⁴ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

relationships and of encouraging the same in others, and quick to understand, forgive and console”¹⁶. This includes affective maturity, team spirit, readiness for dialogue, accessibility, sociability, intellectual ability, docility, discipline, discernment, pastoral prudence, sense of humor, etc. On each of these points, there is much to say and reflect upon. Of these, we may highlight, however, five areas which seem to have usually been ignored in formation, namely, affective maturity, compassion, team spirit, freedom with responsibility and sense of humor.

Affective maturity has to do with psycho-sexual development and is important given the commitment to celibacy and the life of chastity. It is the result of an education in true and responsible love. What is needed here is suitable education to true friendship, fraternal affection and authentic interpersonal relationships between men and women¹⁷. A healthy emotional balance helps the candidates to solve emotional conflicts arising out of anxiety, selfishness, anger, sadness, fear of loneliness, etc. Growth in healthy intimacy and affective maturity require self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-esteem; this helps one to embrace old hurts and negative scripts and to make conscious decisions to act with integrity.

In the midst of suffering at different levels, people need priests and religious capable of empathy and compassion, who would be patient to listen to their problems and deal with them with understanding. This is especially demanded of those who are heads of various institutions. The candidates should also get the formation to do things in true team spirit. Group games help them develop this team-spirit and sportsmanship. This can also be a help to control individualism and one-man-show. Formation should not be preoccupied with forbidding many things but forming the candidates to exercise freedom responsibly. This is very important in the face of the use of internet and other mass media communications. The formation should enable the formees not merely to do things rightly but to do the right things! The sense of humor helps them on the one hand not to take themselves too seriously and makes them even to laugh at one’s follies and mistakes and on the other hand to practice a certain calm and peace in the face of the strenuous work in the vineyard, leaving the result and success to the Lord. A sense of humour provides us with the attitude of taking everything with a smile,

16 Ibid.

17 Cf. Ibid., 44.

even the apparent failures in the mission and ministry in the Lord's vineyard, entrusting everything into the hands of God, who is the Lord of history, and expecting everything from him, in the conviction that it is ultimately his work and that we are only his stewards and servants!

Theological Formation

Although theological formation is beneficial to all the believers, especially to those who are called to take up different roles of Christian leadership, it is especially needed to the candidates to the priesthood as part of their spiritual as well as intellectual formation. A sound spirituality is based on good theology. "In times of great spiritual and cultural change, theology is all the more important." Precisely in this area of theological formation, there is the possibility of unhealthy developments where theology is viewed merely as a university discipline deprived of faith. Whereas philosophy does not demand faith for its exercise, it is bad theology if it is not pursued in the light of faith. Theology is not to be confused with the philosophy of religion or of religions; it is also not to be misunderstood as a mere historical analysis and critical investigation.

The basis and basics of Christian Theology are undoubtedly faith in Jesus Christ as has been lived, proclaimed and taught by the church and witnessed in the Bible. The formal object of theology is God and divine revelation. In other words, not merely the subject matter of theology but also its formal perspective is God and eternity. Without this fundamental formal object of faith, theology ceases to be theology! To the extent theology is treated merely as one of the various objective disciplines of a university, it loses its identity and is relegated to be a mere human science without any subjective commitment. The apostolic faith of the Church as the living community of believers seems to be at the mercy of the individual academic research and speculations of the so-called theologians! Thereby they forget the basic principle that their magisterium (teaching office) is to be subservient to that of the church as a whole. But the role of the theologian is "to pursue in a particular way an ever deeper understanding of the Word of God found in the inspired Scriptures and handed on by the living Tradition of the Church. He does this in communion with the Magisterium which has been charged with the responsibility of preserving the deposit of faith"¹⁸. The Vatican Instruction hence makes clear that "since the object of theology is the Truth which is the living God and His plan for salvation revealed in Jesus Christ, the

18 Ibid., 6.

theologian is called to deepen his life of faith and continuously unite his scientific research with prayer. In this way, he will become more open to the ‘supernatural sense of faith’ upon which he depends, and it will appear to him as a sure rule for guiding his reflections and helping him assess the correctness of his conclusions”¹⁹. The phenomena of an “anti-Roman Affect” and group dissent among certain theologians are harmful to a sound theological formation of the seminarians.

Sound theological formation helps the candidates to develop a missionary spirituality. The candidates will realize themselves as sent by Christ as his disciples and apostles to preach the Gospel of salvation. As the Second Vatican Council points out, the Church is “missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, by the decree of God the Father.” Any theological trend that paralyzes the missionary élan of the church, whether in the name of interreligious dialogue or inculturation offers, in fact, a disservice to formation. Bishops and Major Superiors have to be alert in this regard and monitor the actual scenario under their care.

Co-Formation in and by Community

It is folly to suppose that formation takes place only in the formation houses and only in the stipulated time of formation. Much of the formation takes place by the influence of the larger community. There is, in fact, an indirect but effective co-formation taking place, whereby the community as a whole works as co-formators. The prevalent and predominant lifestyle and value system of the church/diocese/the Religious Institute will have a great influence, perhaps greater than is assumed, on the formation of the candidates. However holy and skilled the formators of a seminary or religious house may be, the co-formation imparted by the life of others from “inside” can undo to a great extent the efforts of these formators. If, for instance, someone is greatly appreciated, held in esteem and awarded mainly for being an able and efficient manager and organizer, executive or administrator of an institution, for erecting or running ambitious institutions, the silent message that strikes the candidates and impresses on their minds is to be like them by all means. There is no wonder at this. This is simple human psychology! The problem is not in emulating those personalities. It is good that there are such efficient men and women for the good of the church and society. Nothing against that! The real problem arises when

19 *Ibid.*, 8.

these persons are not also persons of authentic Christian spirituality. If the values they follow and the methods they employ do not suit the values of Christ but focus merely on success and reputation in the worldly sense, this implies the message that in actual life and apostolate spirituality is not the norm, but name and fame.

Cent percent pass is one of such modern crazy (!) norms of a reputation as far as educational institutions are concerned. If only three candidates appeared for the exam, and if all the three pass, it is still cent percent pass! More meritorious is, however, if 300 candidates appeared for the exam and 270 passed, although in percentage it is only 70! The real merit of an educational institution is to be assessed based on the Christian impact it has made on the candidates in character formation, faith in God, love and respect for parents and elders, civic sense, ethical behaviour such as honesty, justice and fairness, respect for human life and life in general, politeness, punctuality, patriotism, peace and harmony, etc., in short: an integral formation! There is no ground for reverie and self-indulgence merely for securing cent percent pass! The same is applicable in the case of ambitious projects, especially if this takes place not according to Christian values, for example, an extravaganza in constructing churches and parish halls, extorting money from the people or taking huge loans. It is not pride and prestige that should be behind all this, but real need and simplicity.

The lived example of the formators is another factor that determines the formation of the candidates. The need of good role models is here indispensable. Whatever is taught and preached in the formation houses may not affect the heart of the formees if the example before them would be counter to what is taught. The silent message of example is louder and more powerful than eloquent teaching and preaching.

Likewise, there is also a formation happening through the interaction among the members of the group. This is called peer group formation. This need not be always by the members of the same course; it can also come from senior as well as junior courses living together in the same house or on the same campus. The influence of the modern mass media and information technology (internet, mobiles and cyber world) is also an important factor. Formation in this connection is to be how these facilities can be responsibly made use of for the integral growth of the candidates given the vocation.

Another potential impact on formation comes from the present system of election of the superiors. In the election, the democratic principle of majority (by number) is the deciding factor. This can become a temptation to those concerned to ensure majority by stretching the values to suit and please the majority, which is often guided by more comfort and less constraint, more monetary gain, and less discipline.

Holy Spirit, the Ultimate Divine Formator

The Word of God became man in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit as the power of the Most High overshadowing her, just as the bread and wine are sanctified and transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, so, too, is the formation as conformation and transformation into Christ can take place only through the Holy Spirit. In so far as spirituality is the decisive basis of priestly as well as religious life and formation, the role of the Holy Spirit is of crucial importance. Therefore the Apostolic mentioned above Exhortation of John Paul II rightly states: “The Spirit of the Lord is the principal agent in our spiritual life. He creates our ‘new heart,’ inspires it and guides it with the ‘new law’ of love, of pastoral charity. For the development of the spiritual life, it is essential to be aware that the priest will never lack the grace of the Holy Spirit as a gratuitous gift and as a task which he is called to undertake. Awareness of this gift is the foundation and support of the priest's unflinching trust amid the difficulties, temptations, and weaknesses which he will meet along his spiritual path”²⁰.

“For every priest, his spiritual formation is the core which unifies and gives life to his being a priest and his acting as a priest. In this context, the Synod Fathers state that ‘without spiritual formation, the pastoral formation would be left without foundation’ and that spiritual formation is ‘an extremely important element of a priest’s education. The essential content of spiritual formation specifically leading toward the priesthood is well expressed in the Council's decree *Optatam Totius*: ‘Spiritual formation...should be conducted in such a way that the students may learn to live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit’”²¹.

It is only by the Holy Spirit that one can confess that Jesus is the Lord (1 Cor 12:3). H. U. v. Balthasar hence calls the Holy Spirit “the seeing eye

²⁰ *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 33.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

of faith.” He is the vivifying soul of the church, the body of Christ. The Letter to the Hebrews sees the high priestly office of Jesus as carried out through this eternal Spirit: Jesus offered himself to the Father through the Spirit (Hb 9:14). The intimate connection between the Holy Spirit and the sacrament of priestly ordination is very much established here. The solemn invocation of the Spirit at the rite of ordination illustrates this.

Formation in the Light of the Signs of the Times

Some of the main implications of the signs of the times that have bearing on the formation of candidates to priesthood, consecrated life and Catholic leadership are: basic faith formation, integrated sexuality formation, welcoming communities, ability to be treated as adult decision makers, share stories, communal discernment skills, conflict management skills, community living skills, intercultural, interreligious and intergenerational experiences and openness for dialogue in these areas, willingness to change themselves, hospitality, communal prayer and communal work, and the ability to use social media wisely. Although these pertain to the field of skills and expertise, they belong to holistic formation today. Basic faith formation is against the background of the poor religious instruction happening in families and society; sexuality formation becomes necessary in the context of the sexual abuses and disorders. Communal discernment skills are the need of the hour in the face of certain ministries becoming outdated or unwanted so that new areas of frontier ministries have to be identified in keeping with the original charism. Community living skills are meant to counter the growing trend and dency of individualism among the members. Conflict management skills are often called for in the present scenario of stress and strain that easily lead to conflicts within and without one’s arena of life and apostolate.

Conclusion

Throughout the history of salvation, we find formation as an important part of God’s call and mission. Understood in the narrow sense of the term it is applied to the formation of future priests and religious. This process of education is a very demanding theme and area, whether it affects the laity, religious or priests. It is not a matter of mere training of certain skills, but of being conformed and transformed into Christ. This process can take place only at the level of grace by the working of the Holy Spirit. Liturgical and Marian spirituality are integral parts of this process. It is not our skills and tools that we have acquired, but

our personality and spirituality that matters! The life example of the formators, the value scale of the community at large and the influence the peer group plays here a considerable role. Formation is not a finished product, but a continuing process. In this sense, we speak of the importance of on-going formation. If the assignments that one is entrusted with have nothing to do with faith or and spirituality, but merely technical skills and academic expertise, there is no wonder that one becomes gradually alienated from the spiritual domain; the sole interest would be in purely worldly excellence and efficiency. You need not, for example, need a life of faith or spirit of prayer to be an excellent coach, a scientist or a social activist. Care should be hence taken that the priests and those who lead a consecrated life should have assignments involving and demanding spiritual life and resources!

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