

Positive Psychology in Formation

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Abstract

The appeal of positive psychology is its optimism about the human condition. Whereas traditional psychology failed to see the joy of life, positive psychology wants to emphasize it without overlooking the fallen human condition. To be broken is no reason to see all things as broken. Formation was looked on as something negative we do to our psychological self and physical self in order to discipline it. As the result of that, formation has not been viewed as a positive experience. Our formation programs shall envision a time when our adolescents are valued for their major strengths. The fundamental value assumption of positive psychology is that the positive is good and wellbeing is a desired outcome. A positive attitude is the royal road to success not only in everyday life but also in self-realization, too. A change from the medical model of formation focusing on negative symptoms to positive potentials will create more adjusted, happy and more fully functioning persons.

Introduction

What is wrong with these people? What is wrong with this brother or sister? Probably, most formators have raised this question to themselves. Given many forms of human fallibility, this question can produce an avalanche of insights into the human dark side. In the formation, we focused enough and more time looking for what is wrong in our clients and in our systems. If we don't get the right answer from the questions we have been asking, we need to ask different questions. A wrong

question cannot yield a right answer, I am sure. What is right with people and what are their strengths is the heart of positive psychology. To make life worthwhile and valuable, we need to focus on worthy and valuable concepts, ideas, behavior and thoughts. Imagine that someone offered to help you understand human beings but, in doing so, would teach you only about their weaknesses, shortcomings and pathologies. Will it help you?

All formation houses, seminaries, and novitiates want to produce the best people for the good of all concerned. If we have failed to do it by traditional approaches, why don't we try it differently and hence bring the positive psychology's insights to formation. Aristotelian tradition is the core root of positive psychology (Jorgensen & Nasftad, 2004: 27). Positive psychology concentrates on positive character or positive virtues. Positive psychology strongly associates with the Aristotelian model of human nature. This is why Christian spirituality and life can easily associate with positive psychology. The concept of good character is one of the conceptual cornerstones of positive psychology. Continuous development and realization of human potentials are the source of wellbeing and happiness. Such potentials include intellectual activities, giftedness, creativity and exceptional cognitive performance as well as the virtues of the soul. According to Aristotle the virtues of the soul are of two types: virtue of thought and virtue of character. Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching; that is why it needs experience and time. Virtue of character arises from habit. Habits also take time to take root. So, virtues are to be cultivated by taking time. Hence, the religious formation houses have intensive formation programmes. We are by nature able to acquire these virtues and we are completed by habit. Positive psychology in line with Aristotelian thinking assumes the human being is preprogrammed with a moral software of justice, courage, fairness and so on. As philosopher Vetlesen (1994: 217) puts it, "It is only through an ongoing process of dedication and habituation that the individual acquires the virtues..." (p.30). Thus, it is up to the individual to realize his/her full potential. As Sheldon and King (2001) state "If psychologists allow themselves to see the best as well as the worst in people, they may derive an important new understanding of human nature and destiny." In the Aristotelian thinking change toward good, better, or perfect is a fundamental dimension of the human being. Positive psychology argues, as does Aristotle, that human beings enjoy the exercise of their capabilities. (Jorgensen & Nasftad, 2004: 21).

Going positive makes sense

Nearly more than 100 universities and colleges have introduced positive psychology as part of the optional requirements of courses. In the last decade or so, there has been an explosion of books dedicated to various topics in positive psychology. The key tenet of positive psychology is the desire to accentuate the good in life (Snyder & Lopez, 2008: 475). Stressing what is positive in life was looked down upon as a paradox to enhance life, and personality development sounded like an odd theory in the first instance. We have been trained to look on bad as more powerful than good. So, humanity has spent more time to eradicate the negative than cultivating the positive. Negative thoughts and behaviors cannot be simply wiped out by one's sheer will power. And we know that nature does not tolerate a vacuum. As you weed out, you need to cultivate something new and more beneficial in the place of those things you mop out. A client who came to me recently puts it rightly; "I want to trade in some of my crappy, freaky habits for some better ones." She was right: the change towards a better life is a trade-in of positive healthy habits in place of unhealthy ones. Our media and newspapers thrive on bad news. Living in a society always bombarded with what is wrong in us and our surroundings, it is a real puzzle that positive psychology is making room as a thriving new offshoot of psychology. Perhaps there is something inherent in us which we overlooked so far, but it is there as a resource to be tapped. It is the belief of humanity that good will triumph over bad. We tend to think of it as something that is happening in eschatological times. Increased attention on the strengths of individuals and societies can be a good start to see the power of good now. We may have the fear that this is already a "me-generation" and emphasizing again on the positive will make it all the more a worse "me-generation." A true emphasis is to be given to the community and shall look for what is good for many rather than just one. Greater emphasis on long-range goals will work in this concern. Short-term goals are often self-centered. Positive psychology is not merely interested in the individual alone, it is equally concerned with the larger group. So, deferring gratification for the sake of achieving a greater good of the community shall prevail upon the decisions. Thinking of oneself in isolation and imagining that one's whole destiny is in one's own hands is rugged individualism (Myers, 2004) and is against the very essence of any Christian formation.

Psychology as a whole tends to promote this individualism as most of the psychologies arrived from the land of rugged individualism. Positive psychology is aware of this flaw. The essence of individualism is that any person with a good idea through his hard work can succeed

and can attain his/her personal goals. Since the core of Christian ideals is love, service, and brotherly concern, the pursuit of personal goals shall be tempered by one's love for God and neighbor. When a formee in his actions and pursuits is disposed toward individual independence and gain most of the time, I fear it is individualism. When one is concerned about the group in each of his actions and pursuits, he is more collective oriented. The collectivistic traits of the individual shall be emphasized and promoted by all means so that a harmony may be struck between individualism and collectivism. Both are strengths of the individual. One shall not be emphasized at the expense of the other. In individualism, people follow their own motives and preferences instead of adjusting their desires to accommodate those of the group. Personal goals may not match those of the group to which one belongs (Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1995).

As religious, we tend to overemphasize collectivistic culture without proper balance. Whether in individualistic societies or in collectivistic societies, individuals have a need to be unique in some respect (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). There is legitimate room for individual uniqueness, which is needed to be expressed in one area or other in life. Formators shall be able to affirm the uniqueness of the candidate in certain areas of his strengths. Researches show that people are motivated by a need for uniqueness when they feel so much similarity, and that they will strive for similarity when they feel too different. Most of us have a balance of *We* and *Me* motives. Extreme desire for uniqueness can lead to dysfunction in relating to others and potential social exclusion; so, too, can an extreme desire for similarity lead to such immersion that one loses one's own power in interpersonal relationships (Snyder & Lopez, 2007: 456).

Effective and productive individuals whether in or outside of religious life can think of the *Me* goals and simultaneously envision *We* goals. The realization that all people are part of a larger world is growing in our times. We are becoming increasingly interdependent, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the global markets that influence the everyday life of even the laymen. So, greater interdependence and cooperation are going to be a greater value and strength in the upcoming years. The once forgotten and overlooked Christian values are turning up again couched in different forms and shapes.

We need positive psychology for we were too much negativistic and pessimistic by the theologies and philosophies we inherited. We need positive and negative psychology and their contributions to make an integrated person. As long as there is room to accept the complexity of

human beings, positive psychology can contribute a lot in promoting the quality of life. When first articulating positive psychology, Martin Seligman envisioned three pillars beneath it:

- Positive subjective wellbeing (Happiness, life satisfaction, optimism)
- Positive character (Creativity, courage, compassion, integrity, self-control, leadership, wisdom, spirituality)
- Positive groups, communities and culture (Snyder & Lopez, 2007: 490).

Researches and studies were mainly on the first stage so far. The second and third stages are more critical, I believe. The first stage is a preamble to create the second. Without some sense of happiness, life satisfaction, meaning and optimism, advancement in the level remains as a mirage.

A proactive approach

With the emergence of behaviorism in psychology, humans are seen as machines that can be programmed either by classical conditioning or operant conditioning. The human potentials for building oneself from the inherent powers and strength from within were totally discarded. How can the negative behavior be repaired and fixed? Mechanical means have been our concern so far. Viewing human beings as essentially passive, we thought of repairing and restoring damaged behaviors and damaged childhoods. Since psychology and psychotherapy adopted the medical model, symptoms became the focus of treatment. The maxim "Prevention is better than treatment" has long been put on the backburner. It did not help humanity in its progress towards growth and wellbeing. Major studies in prevention have largely come from building a science focused on systematically promoting the competence of the individual. Researches reveal that there is a set of human strengths that are most likely buffers against mental illness: courage, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, hope, honesty wisdom, and perseverance. (Snyder & Lopez, 2007: 5). Seminaries and formation houses, after working decades on a medical model focusing on the weakness and fallibility of the candidates, left the system ill equipped to do effective prevention of the problems before it appeared. Formators shall realize that the best work they can do is amplifying the strengths rather than repairing the candidate's weaknesses.

Most times in human formation, interest was laid on reactive coping mechanisms in the wake of dealing with adverse events of life. Proactive

coping would be much more beneficial to the individual as well as the community concerned. Proactive coping involves goal setting, goal pursuit, personal growth, and corresponding self-regulatory processes. Proactive coping is not preceded by negative appraisal of threat, harm or loss. It is an endeavor to jack up general resources that enable one to face challenges. In proactive coping, people will have a vision. Proactive coping seeks risks, demands, and opportunities in the far future, but they do not appraise them as a threat, harm or loss. Rather, they perceive demanding situations as personal challenges. Proactively creating better living conditions and a higher performance level are experienced as an opportunity to render life meaningful or to find purpose in life (Snyder & Lopez, 2007: 493).

A medical oriented psychology based on pathology, deviations, symptoms, and treatment enjoyed priority to this date, whereas positive psychology wants to revitalize the positive aspects of human nature. For positive psychology, the concept of good character, therefore, becomes the central concept. Seligman (2002: 15) formulates what may be termed the basic assumptions of positive psychology:

- There is a human nature
- Action proceeds from character
- Character comes in two forms, both equally fundamental: bad character and good, virtuous character.

The individual has the capacity for good and bad; evolution has selected both sorts of traits. Human nature has therefore positive character, strength, and virtue. A basic distinction is the need to be drawn between man as he happens to be, and man as he could be, if he realized his essential nature. In our Christian faith and revelation, Jesus is the embodiment of the good character and positive strengths. A voluntary commitment to be a radical disciple of Jesus facilitates the positive character in the human nature. In the formation period, formee makes a systematic and committed endeavor to become like Jesus in his character and strength. Positive psychology shows an interest in finding out what works, what is right, and what is improving (Sheldon & King, 2001: 216). The predominant approach in psychology, social sciences, and religions has been that human beings are asocial and egotistic individuals. Seligman postulates an alternative presumption that humans are social and morally motivated beings (Seligman, 2002: 211). For positive psychology, wisdom, courage, justice, temperance and transcendence are categories of virtue that are postulated to be universal virtues (Jorgensen & Nafstad, 2004: 21). The individual

normally undergoes continuous development or growth toward the realization of the given virtue potentials.

Flourishers and languishers

Church and formational personnel want the formees not only to be happy, but also interested in whether they are realizing their potentials, pursuing their genuine interests, nurturing others and leading authentic lives. A sense of authentic joy, life fulfillment, and a sense of contentment in the life and vocation one has chosen are extremely significant in religious life and its effective witness and ministry. This is a major interest in positive psychology. Authentic happiness and life satisfaction are part of emotional wellbeing. The three-fold structure of emotional wellbeing consists of life satisfaction, positive affects, and the absence of negative affects (Bryant & Veroff, 1982; Smotkin, 2005).

Ryff (1989) posits self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy and positive relations with others as the six components of positive functioning. Many researches find these six dimensions are independent though correlated constructs of wellbeing (Snyder & Lopez; Keyes, 1998), which suggest that dimensions of coherence, integration, actualization, contribution and acceptance are critical components of social wellbeing. Keyes (Keyes & Lopez, 2002) suggests that complete mental health can be conceptualized via combinations of high-levels of emotional wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, and social wellbeing. Individuals with these high levels are described as flourishing. Individuals who have no mental illness but who have a low-level of functioning are described as languishing.

Based on these positive descriptions, formators and formees may re-invent strategies to achieve the highest level of functioning. It will be interesting to conduct some studies to find out the proportion of flourishers and languishers in formation settings. Presently, we know more about human fallibilities than assets. Positive psychology and its applications aim at boosting human strengths that will yield not only a more thorough but also a more accurate view of the human condition. Seligman (2002) suggests that a pleasant and meaningful life can be built on happiness that results from using our psychological strengths. Seligman's understanding of a happy life differs from the traditional Western view of happiness.

When wellbeing comes from engaging our strengths and virtues, our lives are imbued with authenticity. Feelings are states, momentary occurrences, which need not be recurring features of personality. Traits, in contrast to states, are either negative

or positive characteristics that bring about good feelings and gratification. Traits are abiding dispositions whose exercise makes momentary feelings more likely. The negative trait of paranoia makes the momentary feeling more likely, just as the positive trait of being humorous makes the state of laughing more likely.

The wellbeing that uses one's signature strength is anchored in authenticity. But just as wellbeing needs to be anchored in strengths and virtues, these in turn must be anchored in something larger. Just as the good life is something beyond the pleasant life, the meaningful life is beyond the good life (Seligman, 2002: 263).

The happiness Seligman envisions here, therefore, is self-transcendent in nature. Failing to reach self-transcendence is languishing.

Psychological wellbeing – a sign of healthy spirituality

Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life and have abundant life" (Jn. 10: 10). This abundant life is not something that is exclusively reserved to the next life. Because Jesus is the Lord and liberates us now from everything that restrains us and enslaves us, there shall be an experience of abundance now here on earth. A disciple's life is therefore to be understood as a whole life. Somehow some erroneous perceptions crept into Christian spirituality that this is the valley of tears; so escape from this valley at the earliest moment. The tendency was 'just make it and prepare for your next business of the coming world.' Somberness and a gloomy face were very much part of being spiritual. Now we have a new maxim: 'If you are a Christian, notify it in your face.' Interest in what is good about humans and their lives and in optimal human functioning has been a theme of human inquiry from Aristotle through Aquinas and from the Renaissance through humanistic psychology to the present phase in positive psychology. Scholarly interest in the human potential has always existed (Linley & Joseph, 2004: 3). Humanistic psychology movements speak to our inherent potential as human beings, with Maslow's concept of self-realization and Rogers' work around the fully functioning person, and have been milestones towards a more integrative concept of psychological wellbeing along with subjective wellbeing or the more generic happiness. It is this emphasis on psychological wellbeing that draws Christian formators' attention towards positive psychology. We deem psychological wellbeing as a sign of healthy spirituality. The spiritual is not any more one part of the personhood or an independent part of the personality. Spiritual is perceived to be the essence of the human person and, as such, it is related to the psychological self and

psychological wellbeing. The word psycho-spiritual is emerging in most writings related to religion. As spirituality is understood more and more in terms of wholeness, self-realization, vibrant living, and maturity, it seems that positive psychology could be a good handmaid of spirituality and spiritual formation.

Positive psychology is unique in the ways that it transcends traditional dichotomies and divisions within psychology and offers ways of working that are genuinely integrative and applicable across settings (Linley & Joseph: 4). Positive psychology thus accommodates all positive and healthy experiences irrespective of all where it comes from. Positive psychology is facilitative in the way it works to help people achieve their objectives. This approach is in keeping with the organismic valuing process. Positive psychology as a discipline rejects the Freudian “rotten to the core” view of human nature. Implicit within positive psychologies is the idea that human beings have the potential for good and that we are motivated to pursue a good life. Our implicit notion of value and morality declares that there is something good and valuable in us along with a potential to realize them.

Every organism by its nature tends toward achieving a higher level unless something interferes and blocks it. Cultivation of the forces and potentials that help towards self-realization is the aim of any facilitator. Formators are in the role of facilitators. The goal of formation is to cultivate facilitative social environmental conditions that are conducive to the formees self-realization. In a facilitative social environment, Horney (1951: 15) argues we become free to grow ourselves; we also free ourselves to love and to feel concerned for other people. We will then want to give them an opportunity for unhampered growth when they are young, and to help them in whatever way possible to find and realize for themselves when they are blocked in their development.

Positive psychology tries to bring out optimal functioning, which is an integration of subjective wellbeing and psychological wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing is the sum of life satisfaction or everyday happiness. In contrast, psychological wellbeing reflects engagement with and full participation in challenges and opportunities of life. They are moderately correlated but are not the same. Applied positive psychology information aims to facilitate the candidate’s development more fully towards beyond the zero point of psychopathology. When a symptom is put to rest or a distress has been alleviated, the work of the counselor is done. In the formation set up, this is only a first set up for something greater to follow. Psychological wellbeing and contingent spiritual growth, and a full range of human functioning

thereby are in the interest of the caregivers and spiritual directors. Instead of attempting to capture varied nuances of human behavior as being representative of some underlying pathology or problem, applied positive psychology encourages us to look to the person's strengths, capacities and resources – the key attributes and assets that have helped them to survive and in some cases flourish despite the obstacles they faced (Linley & Joseph, 2004). The often-used dictum 'Grace builds on nature' is realized in the context that we do discover our strengths and assets and bring them up for flourishing. As we complete our nature, grace will lift us up further. This is not to say that illness and disorder are to be neglected, but simply that they shall be deemed as one aspect of the person's experience (Linley, 2003).

EQ, IQ and SQ

Each day we are challenged by minor stresses (mean people, traffic, commercial calls through phones) and real problems (shortages of money, minor illness) that stir up emotions. Most people seem to benefit from them and grow positively by facing them consciously. If a formee turns attention away from unpleasant things every time it appears, he/she would learn very little about how these feelings influence them. By positive *emotion focused coping*, one may develop the tendency to face stressors directly and repeatedly and thereby habituate to certain predictable negative experiences. By doing so, the initial emotional pain does subside and time heals both psychological and physical wounds. Odds and ordeals of life, when they are faced squarely and willingly, will bring beneficial results in the long run and is simply part of human wisdom which formators often stress to their subjects. When spiritual meaning is added to this truth, positive coping is made much more effortless.

Neurological literature suggests that without emotion humans do not make good decisions (Damasio, 1994). Despite this understanding, many find it hard to acknowledge the role of emotions to our critical cognitive activities and adaptive behavior. James Averill (Salovey, Caruso & Mayer, 2004: 448) argues that just as intellectual skills are learned and developed so too can we acquire a repertoire of emotional skills that help us to realize our full potential. Emotional Intelligence (EQ) presumes that there is an intelligence involving the process of affectively charged emotions. Emotional intelligence involves both the capacity to reason about emotions and to use emotions to assist reasoning. It also involves the ability to identify emotions accurately in ourselves and in others, as well as understanding emotions and emotional language, and using emotions to facilitate cognitive activities and motivating

adaptive behavior. The emotionally intelligent individual can repair his/her negative moods and emotions and maintain positive moods and emotion when doing so is appropriate. Some people believe that when they are upset they can do something about it; others insist that nothing can be done to improve the negative moods. Individuals who believe in their self-efficacy will engage in active responses to stress situations and repair themselves without falling into depressive symptoms.

The emotional maturity required in religious and priestly life demands emotional intelligence. Human emotions are an adaptive mechanism, which is flexible and responds immediately to changing stimuli. Sometimes painful emotions like fear can guide us away from danger whereas love can guide us to build relationships. The future priests and religious at the initial stages of formation shall manifest the signs of needed emotional intelligence. EI is more important than the Intelligence Quotient (IQ), and without it even a person with a very high IQ cannot be successful in life. EI involves the capacity to be at ease with oneself and others. This is a basic quality needed for the happiness in religious life. EI is knowing what feels good and what feels bad and how to move away from bad to good (Goleman, 1999). It is noted that religious who acquired significant emotional maturity are at an advantage in all areas of life and are more likely to be content and effective in whatever they choose to do in their lives. Emotional intelligence accounts for 80% of work performance and life success. EI contributes to better teamwork and better decisions. Emotionally intelligent people are able to cope with stress and are self motivated. Above all, they have morally superior values (Murphy, 2006: 190). EI determines how a person is in touch with his feelings, understanding his emotions and its implication on life style and its balance. Without needed emotional intelligence, one may not be able to appreciate individual differences in interpersonal relationships. Further, emotional intelligence becomes a link between the rational intelligence and the spiritual intelligence. EI is so significant in religious formation for we need the head and heart to succeed in life. With emotional intelligence, one can make a better impact in one's own life and in the lives of others even if the IQ is average. Hence, in religious life formation is the time to give equal or more emphasis to EQ than to IQ.

The Spiritual Quotient (SQ) is closely related to IQ and EQ. It is the soul's intelligence and richness. SQ allows human beings to be creative, to change the rules and to alter situations (Zohar & Marshall, 2000: 342). It is the intelligence which can heal oneself and make one whole; it is this intelligence that rests on the deeper part of the self that is connected to wisdom from beyond the conscious mind (Singh & Parminder, 2010:

342). It is spiritual intelligence that prompts us to ask the ultimate questions of life. Zohar contends that SQ consists of at least five core characteristics: transcendence, heightened consciousness, endowing everyday activity with a sense of the sacred, using spiritual resources on practical problems, and engaging in virtuous behaviors such as forgiveness, gratitude, humility, compassion and wisdom (Singh & Parminder, 2010). When a person understands why things are as they are, the person is able to engage wisely and maturely. SQ brings maturity to EQ and IQ. When the faculties of mind, heart and intellect perceive, process and embrace the wide range of emotions, emotional integration occurs for a whole lifetime.

Hope and learned optimism

Good things and bad things happen in life. The optimist uses adaptive casual attribution to explain negative experiences or events (Snyder & Lopez, 2007: 181). A pessimist student who has received a poor grade may say “I screwed up” (Internal attribution); “I have done a lousy job” (stable attribution); “I am not doing well in any area of my life” (global attribution). Seligman and his associates see this kind of explanatory process as the basis of his theory of learned optimism. It is like an excuse, like the process of distancing oneself from bad things of the past, rather than the more usual notion of optimism involving the connections to the positive outcomes desired in the future. In Seligman’s theory, though there is no reference to any spiritual domain where the attributions can be made, it is in the ability of the individual to find attributions metaphysically. Believers who have faith in the love and guidance of a caring God can easily make attributions to the divine designs quite satisfactorily to distance oneself from negative things. Religious and priestly formations encourage candidates to find attributions from everyday life happenings as part of the design of God which respects human freedom and responsibility. A person may hold favorable expectancies for a number of reasons. It can be rational or spiritual. Whatever it is, the result should be an optimistic outlook. Seligman emphasizes the ability for attribution as the core of optimism, whereas some other definitions view it as the stable tendency to believe that good rather than bad will happen. Scheier and Carver (1985: 211) assume that when a goal is of sufficient value, then an individual would produce expectancy about attaining that goal. So, having clear goals and pathways defined will create a greater sense of optimism and an optimistic outlook. An expectant spiritual and mystical experience is something of great value as a goal in formation. Learned optimism helps to cope with the shortcomings of the spiritual journey. In positive psychology, self-efficacy, optimism, and hope are

all interrelated. Hope is understood as goal directed thinking in which a person has the perceived capacity to find out routes to desired goals. Hope is not genetically determined but an entirely learned, deliberate way of thinking. In short, scientific goal setting, thinking, and conscious guidance will enhance a positive life. Any formation to be holistic shall strive to realize all possible human potentials. This is best done when formees and formators hold a positive consciousness.

Learned optimism appears to have roots in the environment. For example, parents who provide a safe, coherent environment are likely to promote a learned optimism style in their offspring. Optimistic parents provide optimism by virtue of modeling because of their adaptive explanations to negative events. Children who grow up with learned optimism are characterized as having had parents who understood their failures and generally attributed these failures to external rather than internal factors (Snyder & Lopez, 2007: 183). So, it appears that formators and significant other people in the formee's life can promote learned optimism by their modeling and active presence. Although research is still in the early phases, it appears that there are neuro-biological markers in the brain that are linked to perceived control and pessimism.

Wisdom and courage

Positive psychologists are interested in two of the cardinal virtues, namely, wisdom (prudence) and courage (fortitude). Although the other two virtues – justice and temperance – have positive adaptive values, wisdom and courage have drawn wide attention. Wisdom and courage are given virtues to the human nature, nevertheless, it can be acquired and practiced, and they are intrinsically rewarding and beneficial to humanity. Erikson (1959) in his developmental theory emphasized that wisdom is gained through resolving daily crises. Jung (1953) proposed that wisdom grows through the resolution of psychic conflicts as part of individuation. Wisdom grows as people learn to think flexibly to solve problems and most theorists agree that wisdom builds on knowledge, cognitive skills and personality characteristics.

Monica Ardelt's (2000) research shows that a person's childhood does not have an impact on the development of wisdom, whereas the quality of one's social environment in early adulthood does (p.7). Here, I see the need of a right environment for the formees to be wise. Theorists also opine that guidance by mentors enhances wisdom. A brief self report model of measuring wisdom developed by Peterson and Seligman (Snyder & Lopez 2007: 221) lists five aspects of wisdom: curiosity, love of learning, open mindfulness, creativity and perspective. In this model,

a very intelligent or very creative person is not automatically considered a wise person. Crystallized intelligence is time bound; knowledge acquired today may become obsolete after a decade, whereas wisdom is timeless (Clayton 1982). Intelligence provides basic knowledge; wisdom provides the know-how in the concrete context for the common good. Unlike wisdom, an emphasis on courage (fortitude) appears lacking in the formational programmes. We are facing increasing challenges and odds in religious life from all quarters. Across history and cultures, courage has been regarded as a great virtue because it helps people to face their challenges. There is a link between courage and fear though it is not well understood. We could observe frightened people performing courageous acts. After very courageous acts, one is desensitized to the fear of the evoking stimuli. For example, parachuters after four or five jumps find that their fear subsides. Perseverance despite fear is the true form of courage.

O'Bryne et al. (2000) identified three types of courage worthy of our attention. (1) Physical courage involves attempted maintenance of societal good by the expression of physical behavior grounded in the pursuit of socially valued goals (someone rushing to a burning home to save an elderly person who needs help to exit); (2) Moral courage is the behavioral expression of authenticity in the face of the discomfort of dissension, disapproval, or rejection (a politician supports saving the ecological balance without fearing that he will lose his political seat next election time); and (3) Vital courage refers to the perseverance through disease or disability even when the outcome is ambiguous (a cancer patient maintains his therapy knowing that the prognosis is not great). Many counselors, spiritual directors, and mentors might have been intrigued by the inner battles and private courage displayed by their clients. Courage is not confined to some heroes that the media portrays. Moral courage involves preservation of justice and service for the common good. Authenticity and integrity are closely associated with the expressional personal views and values in the face of dissensions and rejection.

Without referring to psychological courage, I fear this discussion would not be complete. Psychological courage is the strength in facing one's destructive habits (Putman, 1997). Most humans struggle with psychological challenges in the forms of stress, sadness, and dysfunctional or unhealthy relationships. The vast majority stands up to these kinds of destructive habits by restructuring themselves in different ways. When unhealthy tendencies overwhelm, people seek psychological, spiritual, or other kinds of interventions. It appears

that there is not enough training to develop psychological courage as compared to physical and moral courage. Putman observes that the pop culture presents many physically and morally courageous icons in literary works and movies, but exemplars of psychological courage are rare. Perhaps this is due to the negative stigma surrounding mental health problems and destructive behaviors.

Wisdom and courage probably are the most valued virtues in everyday living for people in all vocations. Positive psychology believes most people, through a mindful approach to life, can develop wisdom and courage. About courage, Stephen Mansfield wrote: "It cannot be taught, though it can be inspired. And normally it springs from something like faith, a resolve – a commitment to something larger than oneself." When formees develop a greater sense of mission and commitment to their call, a greater wisdom and courage is likely to be dawn on the horizon of their lives.

Mindfulness a positive behavior

Why do our trainees sometimes repeat the same behavior that brings negative results? I acknowledge it is not easy to explain all negative behaviors with a single explanation. The change from being an autopilot to auto telic is the answer. The first one is the mindless pursuit of passive habits and the second one is a purposeful moment-by-moment pursuit of optimal experiences. Auto telic personalities generally enjoy life and do things for their own sake rather than in order to achieve some later external goal. Curiosity, persistence, and low self-centeredness are some of the traits associated with auto telic personalities who are thus able to achieve a flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). The kind of mind numbing experiences may have some short lived, stress relieving benefits, but often it distracts people from meaningful experiences. It is a flexible state of mind where one is constantly sensitive to context and perspective. Langer (2002: 215) contends that it is our attempt to reduce the uncertainty of life that leads to more uncertainty. Since change is the rule of life, going after the butterfly is foolish; on the other hand, one can be wise by giving up the need for control and loosening the grip of our evaluative mind-sets so that the changes need not be feared. By letting go of the control and loosening the evaluative mind-sets, humans help themselves to enjoy things as they are as it happens. When Jesus said, "Those who want to save their life will lose it", it has a spiritual as well as a deep psychological meaning. Buddhist tradition of cultivating awareness of physiological and psychological sensations, and the modern therapeutic technique of increasing attention in order to identify distorted thinking are synonymous with mindfulness. A great deal is

happening to us at any given moment. There is a goal, there is a mental content, there is a physical state, there is a mood, and there might be some emotional arousal. We can agree that the potential each moment holds are reflected in the thoughts, feelings, and physiological forces connected to each moment. From the positive psychological perspective, a day holds 20,000 opportunities for engagement for overcoming the negative and for pursuing the positive (Snyder & Lopez, 2007: 245).

Mindfulness in practice is parsimoniously described as attending non-judgmentally to all stimuli in the internal and external environments. In moments of mindfulness, some mindful qualities come into consciousness (Shapiro et al. 2002). To list a few: non judgment, acceptance, patience, openness, letting go, empathy, gratitude, gentleness, loving kindness, trust, etc. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to help people manage stressful situations by increasing one's awareness and by making the mind more receptive to one's current situation and internal state. It is a method of fully embracing with minimal resistance one's current life situations and internal states. A non-judgmental and compassionate attitude to all and every phenomena brings one closer to God's own attributes, thus, becoming spiritual without trying to be spiritual. Perhaps one of the problems we face in formation is too much pressure from all sides to have more control over life and behavior. Formees and formators are sometimes caught up in this vicious circle. As the result of that, a good number of behaviors and acts are mindless rather than mindful acts. Optimal experience and spiritual growth come through being mindful. Practicing mindfulness has benefits of psychological and physical health. It promotes social wellbeing. The more aware and mindful, the greater is the chance that we will be more holistic and self-realized beings. Attention and awareness – quality of consciousness – have the power to convert hidden subjects into conscious objects and thus can be integrated into the self. Proper mindfulness practiced develops the view that all facts are friendly. Rogers (1961: 250) deems that this attitude is necessary for full functioning.

Altruism and gratitude

Therapists occasionally come across people who assume that one shall not feel good when doing good or helping others. They perceive it as pride and lack of humility. This is puritanical thinking that life shall be all sacrifice and suffering in order to have worth. It is legitimate to feel good about oneself in healing or helping others. It is a byproduct of good acts and should be experienced as such. Greater empathy leads one to help others. Humans have more shared features than differences.

It is this shared feature that makes us similar to other people. Parallels in life circumstances and experiences help us to break down the “us” versus “them.” As individuals we are unique, but if the uniqueness is taken to the extreme, it will break the “we” feeling and make community living impossible. Formation houses shall emphasize shared features and parallels to promote cohesion. Listing all physical, psychological, and spiritual characteristics one shares in common with another is a good start to promote empathy. It will increase the propensity to walk in the shoes of another. Researches reveal that areas of prefrontal and parietal cortices are essential for empathy. Empathy requires internal simulations of another’s bodily or internal state. The feeling of empathy propels humans toward altruistic actions. This motivation has positive implications for people living in groups. As long as we feel empathy, we tend to help others and help them grow to achieve their goals. Faced with every day scenes of human misery and predicaments, many are inclined to mute their potential for empathy and optimal experiences. In the urban settings when people walk down the street, they are no more concerned about the street people stretched out on the pavement or sidewalk. By maintaining empathy and altruism (the desire to help), greater meaning, satisfaction, and optimal experience are possible as is exemplified in the lives of Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi. Religious motives in this regard may enhance empathic and altruistic behaviors.

Philosopher David Hume went so far as to say that ingratitude is the most horrible and unnatural of all crimes that humans are capable of committing. I brought up this negative framing in order to highlight its positive potential. According to Emmons and McCullough (2003), gratitude emerges upon recognizing that one has obtained a positive outcome from another individual who behaved in a way that was costly to him or her, valuable to the recipient, and intentionally rendered. By cultivating an attitude of gratitude, humans can promote a sense of wellbeing individually and collectively. An incorrect assumption people sometimes make about gratitude is that it is synonymous with lack of motivation and complacency in life. No researcher has found that gratitude is in any way related to passivity; on the contrary, gratitude is an active and affirming process that supports the growth of the giver and the receiver. Gratitude towards God and people and the nature for supporting and sustaining are essential parts of religious worship. The greater is the sentiments In this regard, the deeper is the spiritual life of the person.

A Japanese form of meditation called Naikan enhances a person’s sense of gratitude. Using Naikan, one learns to meditate daily on three

gratitude related questions: First, what did I receive? Second, what did I give? And third, what troubles and difficulties have I caused to others (Snyder & Lopez, 2000: 274). Emmons and McCullough propose to 'count your blessings in order to cultivate gratitude.' At the beginning and end of each day, list five things for which you are grateful, and then take a few minutes to meditate on the gift inherent in each. One means of elucidating this sense of appreciation is to use the stem phrases (I appreciate----- because-----). In the first blank, list the person or thing or event. In the second blank, state the reasons for each of the things you have expressed gratitude. Experience the effects of joy and contentment of life that springs from within.

Those who keep gratitude journals reported greater enthusiasm, alertness, determination, optimism, higher performance, and social warmth (Snyder & Lopez, 2007: 274). Focusing on the positive of life and feeling gratitude for the little things will make one feel that life is a gift, continuously being poured out to which you have no entitlement. Everything one has at this moment is a gift, for it need not be there for tomorrow. In the religious terminology, we say everything is a grace. Human societies are increasingly automatic in their expectations of good, amenities, health, and comforts. Gratitude meditation brings one to a greater awareness so we can appreciate each blessing and feel good and healthy in the process psychologically and spiritually.

Positive power of forgiveness

Without wanting to go through the process of forgiveness, I would like to highlight the positive dimension of forgiveness. Until recently, it has been considered as a religious virtue promoted by the Church and clergy. Now, psychologists are interested in the prospect of forgiveness in therapy having seen its many benefits. According to McCullough (2000: 43), forgiveness reflects increases in pro-social motivation toward another such that there is (1) less desire to avoid the transgressing person and to harm or seek revenge toward the individual, and (2) the increased desire to act positively toward the transgressing person (it is crucial that the forgiving person develop a benevolent stance towards the transgressing person. Tangney et al. (2005) suggested that forgiveness reflected cognitive affective transformation following a transgression in which the victim makes a realistic assessment of the harm done and acknowledges the perpetrator's responsibility, but freely chooses to cancel the debt, giving up the need for revenge and punishment or any quest for restitution. The cancelling of debts includes cancellation of negative emotions related to the transgressor. In short, by forgiving one essentially removes oneself from the victim's role. In this model

giving up of negative emotions and freeing oneself from the victim's role is the crux of forgiving. Forgiveness to oneself is equally significant as forgiving other people who hurt us. Counselors and mentors shall help their clients in understanding how their self-absorbed thoughts and feelings interfere with positive living. Given that we all must live with ourselves, the consequences of not forgiving oneself can be much more severe than the consequences of not forgiving another person. To dwell on one's past record of moral performance, either with a sense of self-hatred and self-contempt or with a sense of superiority, is an activity that is devoid of any real moral value (Snyder & Lopez, 2007: 282). The client shall exercise his/her moral agency responsible for furthering one's growth experience. Religion, having seen the need to give and receive forgiveness, has been promoting it by virtue of models, supernatural motivations, and various meaningful rituals. In what may be one of the most famous discourses of modern times, "I have a dream," Martin Luther King Jr. epitomized all the positive traits - altruism, empathy, gratitude, and forgiveness and, in doing so, he took himself to the height of optimal experiences and promoted the brotherhood and sisterhood of all his country at large.

Conclusion

At least for some, positive psychology may give the impression that it is an unrealistic magical concept that puts a gloss on most negative and bad things of life. Positive psychologists Ryff and Singer (2003) describe the good life as effortful and challenging and arise from the zest and engagement in living. Positively experienced emotions act as a buffer against stressors of life. Undeniably, the negative is part of humankind and individuals, but only a part. Positive psychology encourages us to look to the other side too - that which is strong and good in the individuals and in our formees along with ways to nurture and sustain these assets and resources. Our presumption is half is not the full; one is more than one's negative side. In our formation methodology, a new inclusive approach that examines the weakness and strength of people, as well as the stressors and resources in the individual, needs to be developed. From this perspective, formators have a new task of doing some detective work on the strength and competencies of formees and the many resources of positive environments. In assessing candidates, we have to find out a different kind of synthesis that honors the whole individual.

Today's mainstream psychology (cognitive) places emphasis on the individual and the internal processes. To understand the individual more fully, they must be seen as a small part of a larger social

environmental context, which likely has a strong influence over one's attitudes, behaviors, and cognitions. Positive psychology is an integrative theory of optimal human functioning.

Self-efficacy, a sense of wholeness, wellbeing, gratitude, and transcendence are fundamental dimensions of human life, which are also the desired outcomes of formation. Promoting positive experiences can not only diminish psychological and spiritual distortions but also promote overall well being in all human life situations. Formation as transformation is for the whole person as well as for the community and Church at large. It is not enough to fulfill certain apostolic functions. Formation involves inner transformation and its exterior expressions in attitudes, values, behaviors and dispositions. Transformation in the inner self shall be experienced and manifested in our whole being.

An authentic life is one in which the person remains true to himself/herself and to his/her nature. Humans naturally look for positive experiences and wellbeing. Without giving opportunities for positive experiences, the harmony, unity and wholeness we envisage in formation may not be achieved. It is not enough to affirm the human potential for self-transcendence; equally important is to affirm the physical, moral, and intellectual potentials so that a balanced integration may take place. Focusing on what is good and what is right, positive psychology believes we can achieve more than its alternative (looking for what is wrong and what is to be corrected and chained). The best way to shed off darkness from a room is to shed more light there than analyzing the darkness.

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