

Editorial

Vinayasādhana: **Window to New Vistas of Formation**

Introduction

Self-awareness is deemed as the threshold of human evolution from biosphere to noosphere. In *The phenomenon of man* Teilhard de Chardin posits: "Man discovers that he is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself. The consciousness of each of us is evolution looking at itself and reflecting upon itself " (1959:221). Self awareness gives us the option to choose our thoughts and actions rather than being carried away by thoughts and responses stimulated from the circumstances of the moment. Realization of oneself as an individual entity or personality, with one's own unique traits, feelings, and behaviors are all part of self consciousness. Without a real, winning self-image, one will never have an integrated/holistic personality. We have a self-image in every area of life, whether it is career, relationships, health, or wealth. However, often people fail or forget to update their self-image. Still worse, some people make use of self-images they developed from opinions of others. Some get stuck with their old self-image they developed while they were far less experienced and talented than they are now. We often come across negative people, who always complain, act unreliably, and remain cynical. When good things happen to them they find a way either to mess it up or become disenchanted with it by finding some loopholes. Thanks to some past experience they are fully convinced that they are not supposed to be alright. And now this self-depreciation is part of their self-concept.

Human Predicament and Potential

human beings' most powerful need is to be recognized. That's what negative people fail to recognize. They mostly complain to get attention or act negatively out of low self-confidence, but they are making the deadly mistake of forgetting about their need to be *positive*. If any recognition comes their way it would clash with their self-image, and somehow they would make themselves right and at ease, by saying Good-bye to happiness they felt and embrace misery. However nobody is in fact condemned or destined to live a life of misery and to transmit it to his/her fellow beings. It is ignorance that blinds people from seeing the brighter side of life. Precisely it is in this context that the publication of *Vinayasadhana*, Journal of Psycho-Spiritual Formation finds its relevance and *raison d'être*. *Vinayasadhana* intends to open new vistas to human experience and expertise. It will assist its readers to develop the right self-image and enable them to lend a helping hand to others who are in similar situation. If someone feels uncomfortable with oneself, s/he has some work to do. *Vinayasadhana* is here to lend a hand. The forthcoming issues of *Vinayasadhana* are planned to incorporate leading articles on psycho-spiritual formation, theoretical and practical aspects of integral/holistic formation, reflection on relevant issues of contemporary importance, theological foundations of religious and priestly formation, technical guidance for formators, and revealing interviews with experts in the field of formation.

Christ-formation

In the past decades there were concerted efforts to elevate institutions of formation from being a dumping ground of information to fertile ground of personal transformation. Formation in the past often became a process of training candidates in faith and morals scrupulously following rules and regulations as per the vision and charism of the founder of the respective Order, Congregation or Organization. However, *Vita Consecrata*, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the late Pope John Paul II given on 25 March, 1996, unambiguously rectified this false notion and declared that formation is nothing other than 'Christ formation' (No.65). It demands an integral and interdependent growth of individuals to realize their full potentials and possibilities. Obviously, the whole storehouse of human wisdom has to be enthusiastically embraced and earnestly incorporated into the milieu of formation in order to make the Kingdom of God personal and communitarian experience and reality. St. Irenaeus' observation that God's glory is in a

humanity fully alive poses a perennial challenge before us to strive for perfection in every field. God's eternal Son himself invited us to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

Education and *Vinayasadhana*

The word 'education' derives from the Latin word *educere* (*ex* – out + *ducere* – to lead) meaning 'to bring out' or 'to lead out'. In the same way the Sanskrit word *vinaya* is the combination of *vi* – out + *naya* – to lead. This clearly indicates that the goal of '*vinaya*' and 'education' are one and the same. The Sanskrit word *sadhana* points to a resolute, concentrated, and uncompromising effort. Therefore, *Vinayasadhana* envisages an 'assiduous educational effort'. *Vinaya* has also a derived meaning: humility. Education which is meant to lead a person from the world of illusions to the terra firma of the 'really real' (*satyasya satyam*), from the blindness of ignorance to the brilliance of enlightenment, and from the ever-changing frailty to the everlasting eternity (*asato maa sadgamaya, thamaso maa jyothir gamaya, mruthyor maa amrutham gamaya* - *Bhahdaranyaka Upanishad* - 1.3.28) should also lead him/her to humility, the mother of all virtues. Education is an exodus from slavery to self-governance, selfishness to selflessness, brutality to humanity, rigidity to divinity, and pride to humility.

The Spirit of *Ubuntu*

The remarkable African wisdom expressed through the Zulu maxim "*umuntu, ngumuntu, ngabantu*" (a person is a person through [because of / other] persons) bears witness to the total dependence of individuals on fellow beings for their survival. True education will reveal the 'nothingness' or the total dependence of the 'ego' on the goodwill and generosity of others and on the providence of God. Any education that makes people proud and self-centred should be classified under pseudo-education or mal-education - a true malediction to humanity, to say the least. An education that fails to lead a person to humility, humanity, and divinity is not worthy of its name. When we are truly educated our 'luminous eye' (also called the spiritual or the third eye) will be opened and we will be in a position to see ourselves in others, and recognize ourselves as an integral part of *el todo* (a Spanish term for 'the all'). *El todo* is the favorite expression of the great Spanish mystic John of the Cross, which he utilized to represent God and he juxtaposed it with *nada* (a Spanish term for 'nothingness'), which according to him represents the entire creation (Kurian, 2000:34). Our awareness of being an integral part of *el todo* and thus crossing the boundaries of one's own physical

self is also known as 'oceanic experience'. The sufferings of others become our personal sufferings and their bondage ours. Spurred by genuine compassion such people will devote themselves to the cause and service of others. The query, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:10) will never be heard from them.

The Wisdom of Ages

The reach of our physical eyes is limited and restricted to the periphery, while the spiritual eye, like a double-edged sword (Heb 4:12), can penetrate deep within and expose the underlying reality. It is this vision or consciousness that spurred great men and women of the past to make great sacrifices, even to the level of self-immolation. Jesus, Buddha, Gandhi, and Mother Teresa are just a few among the long list of such colossal personalities. We too are called to realize this very same truth: *advaita* - our oneness and interdependence. Our growth in this awareness will decide our progressive *theosis* or divinization. The Veda proclaims: *prajnanam brahman* (Consciousness is Brahman - *Aitareya Upanishad* 3.3). This consciousness naturally and surely will lead one to the awareness of *ayam atma brahma* (This self is Brahman - *Madukya Upanishad* 1.2), *aham brahmasmi* (I am Brahman - *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10), and ultimately *tat tvam asi* (You are that - *Chandogya Upanishad* 6.8.7). As a result of this transformed vision all desires and fears will vanish and the Kingdom of God will become an experiential and existential reality rather than a future prospect. The *sunyata* consciousness of the Buddha, *advaita* consciousness of Sankara and the *nada* consciousness of John of the Cross blend perfectly without contradictions in this elevated state of awareness. True enlightenment will enable and embolden one to declare: *ekam sat vipra behudha vadanti* (The reality is one, learned people speak of it differently - *Rig Veda* 1.164.46). All divisions, pride, hatred, and wars are the result of ignorance or partial knowledge, which are to come to an end (Jn 17:21).

Chaos-cosmos Dynamics

In the beginning, generated and inspired by the divine *Ruah*, the eternal *Logos* transformed the primordial chaos into cosmos through the establishment of order. No sooner than later the chaos struck back with a vengeance. The 'evil spirit' of disorder and destruction opted to wage war on the 'holy spirit' of order and creation. In the paradise of perfect symphony, the cacophony instigated by the evil spirit resounded. True to the given name 'Israel' (both Jacob and his children) continued this rebellious attitude and struggled against their creator to get their will be

established. However, in the fullness of time, the *fiat* of a virgin, filled with the Holy Spirit, clothed the eternal *Logos* in human flesh and blood. Three decades and three years later, in the garden of Gethsemane, that virgin's son, though it was the weakest moment of his life, repeated the very same *fiat*: "Not my will; your will be done" (Mt 26:42). We see the very same Holy Spirit descending upon his apostles and they too coming out of the dark caves of their *ego*, shedding their fear and ignorance to proclaim to the world the good news of freedom and universal brother/sisterhood. Care and compassion for others are unambiguous signs of the indwelling Holy Spirit (which Cain failed to have). Enlightenment (liberation, *nirvana*, *moksha*, heaven) is nothing but the awakening of the 'son of man' from his deep slumber to live the life of the 'son of God' - his divine patrimony. When the scales that blind his vision is shed, when he breaks open the cocoon of his *ego*, the metamorphosis is completed. He inherits a new vision and mission with a totally different attitude towards oneself and others.

Perusing the Charism of the Founder

The apostolate of theological formation by the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) has a humble beginning when the Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the canonical founder, started a seminary in 1833 at Mannanam, Kerala. Our founder's modest initiative blossomed into the establishment of Dharmaram College in 1957, which was eventually raised to the status of Pontifical Athenaeum in 1983, now known as Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK). The title of the Journal, *Vinayasadhana* is, in fact, the name of the formative course that the DVK offers for the last 18 years to aid and equip those who aspire and are involved in the formation of priests and religious. The target group of the present journal too is the same. *Vinayasadhana* will try to assist formators and formees through disseminating the experience and wisdom of experts in this field. Since religious/priestly life is an attempt to realize the full human potential and its possibilities *Vinayasadhana* can be considered a 'Pursuit par Excellence.' However, on account of our awareness of human limitations and our total dependence on the providence of God, it is a 'humble effort' as well.

Challenges Facing Us

The formation of priests and religious has to take place in the context of the present day realities and challenges. Being-in-the-world one should not insulate oneself or turn a blind eye towards hard realities of life. The global and instant circulation of information makes us all the more

conscious of the sufferings in the world and the many problems facing humanity. The poverty of so many people who live in misery and know nothing other than suffering, sicknesses, and exploitation should have a resonance in the priestly/religious formation. There is even a greater poverty of not knowing Christ that, according to Mother Teresa of Calcutta, is "the first poverty of people," and of which no corner of the earth is exempt. Wars, injustice and "structures of sin" that might seem inevitable and impossible to eradicate from the complex world in which we live is another challenge we encounter. Aggression against life from conception to its natural end too is a matter of grave concern. The crisis of the family, irreplaceable basic cell of a healthy and prosperous society needs immediate attention. The imbalanced and myopic relationship with nature, its exploitation and also its "idolization" are matters of concern. Religious and national fanaticism and the resultant terrorism and callous insensitivity towards the human sufferings pose a serious challenge to our postmodern world. As "*Gaudium et Spes*" teaches us, often the world gives us reasons for worry and sadness yet it opens many opportunities and give many reasons for joy and hope as well. And this great message of joy and hope is Christ himself! *Vinayasadhana's* mission is to be a protagonist and a harbinger to spread the message of hope by opening a window to the new vistas of Formation.

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