

FAILING FORMATOR The Divine Pedagogy of Formation - V

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ABSTRACT

In the formative venture of Saul, God makes use of an intermediary – Samuel. Here we see an analogy with the formation of our times, where God does not directly enter into the formation of the religious/priestly candidates. The story of Saul could be an inspiration for those who are engaged in the formation of the young people. The Divine Formator had great expectations of his formee. Saul began his new life as the king of Israel on a positive note by fulfilling meticulously the task assigned to him by his Divine Formator. But soon his reasons and the divine reasons, his plans and the divine plans were in conflict. The formee one by one shattered the hopes and expectations of his Formator. The natural qualities Saul was generously endowed with did not last long. When he got intoxicated with the opium of power, he could not let it go and was gripped by the fear of losing it. The divine formator, through his envoy severely warned him about the seriousness of the situation and sought to correct him. However Saul decided to stick to kingship by all means. He preferred death over surrender. Resisting and defeating the formation and the formator he opted to take his own life by falling on his sword.

Peculiarity

We have already reflected on the pedagogy used by the divine formator in the cases of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. He

was directly involved in their lives and formed them for specific tasks. Thus God was, strictly speaking, the formator.

Now, when we contemplate the story of Saul, the first king of Israel, we do not find Yahweh as directly calling, electing, and training the young man. It was Samuel who acted as the divine representative. Here we find an analogy with the formation of our times. Nowadays, the Lord does not directly enter in the formation of the religious/priestly candidates. He acts through the medium of the human formators. Thus the story of Saul may be an inspiration for those who are engaged in the formation of the young people.

A Startling Call

The Lord elected Saul in an unusual situation. He was engrossed in a mission, searching for his father's lost donkeys on the mountains (1 Sam 9:1-4). He approached Samuel, thinking that the prophet could help him to find the animals (9:5-14). Before his coming, the Lord had informed the seer that he had elected Saul as the leader of the people (16). As the young man approached, the Lord said to the Samuel: "This is the man! This is the one whom I have appointed to govern my people!" (17). The prophet lovingly welcomed the guest and announced that the homage of all Israel belongs to him and his ancestral house (20).

The Voice of the Insignificant One

As the young Saul heard these words, he reacted: "Am I not a Benjamite from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?" (21).

Reflection I

These words give articulation to the ideal mentality of one who is being called. Saul was not a man filled with egotism, nor was he a self-centred person; "I am a silly, irrelevant and worthless man. Nothing is in me of which I can boast. Even among the insignificant Benjamite tribe, my clan is the least one. My family is considered as good for nothing". The divine pedagogue can freely and without any hindrance do anything with a person with this kind of mental attitude. The Master can easily give direction, and salvation (*gathi*) to such a destitute (*agathi*) one. It is the ego-

centeredness that obstructs the unreserved flow of divine grace. There is yet another factor that further draws our attention. This young man had no inferiority complex that would prevent him from acknowledging his worthlessness. In such good soil, the seed of the Word could grow and produce a crop that would yield a hundred, sixty or thirty fold (Mt 13:1-9). Thus Saul possessed the necessary quality which is appropriate for those who are destined for a divine purpose. Saul did not cultivate this humble attitude by his own efforts. It was God who had provided him with such a natural quality.

The Rituals I

Anointing

As per the divine instruction, the human formator, Samuel, anointed Saul by pouring the oil on his head. Kissing him, the prophet declared: "Behold, Yahweh had anointed you leader over Israel, His inheritance" (10:1).

Providing the Bread Offering

The second ritual consisted in giving two of the loaves of bread which were intended as offerings, to the Lord (10:3-4). The anointed one is separated for the Divine service; someone who belongs to the Lord. Thus the called one is consecrated to God; hence they have to be dissociated from everything that is not divine. There should not be even a trace of evil in the consecrated one. At the same time everything that belongs to God becomes one's own property. One has rights in the things that are offered to the deity. In a certain sense, the act of giving the offering amounts to offering it to God, Himself.

A Man of the Spirit

As the divine Formator has promised through his intermediary, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul "in power" (10). A person who is called to be the leader of the people (in Hebrew language, *nagidv*, one who delivers his subjects from the hands of the enemies and governs them in the divine name as a shepherd) should be intoxicated by the Spirit. Only then they can protect the people, and lead them in the right path, in the name of the Lord.

A New Personality

Those who have received the Spirit should be persons who put off the old self and put on the new self, “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:22-24). Nobody can by their own power bring about such a transformation. The grace of the Lord should work in humans. This is what happened in the case of Saul as foretold by Samuel: “He was changed into a different person” (6); God changed the young man’s heart (9). Such a radical change may not immediately take place in the majority of those who are called. The Divine Formator usually does not provide such graces in the beginning. In Saul’s case it was different. Here we do not find a prolonged formative period. The reason may be that Saul had to begin the task assigned to him immediately. He was sent to deliver the people from the hands of the enemy, and act as their leader in guiding them through the divine paths. Saul needed the grace of the Spirit and a change of heart, in order to perform such duties. How can a person who does not have the divine Spirit, lead others to God’s rest? Only a new man can make the progeny of the old man (Adam) righteous.

The Gift of Prophecy

As the Spirit came upon Saul, he received the gift of prophecy, as Samuel had said (6). The young man joined the band of prophets and began to prophesy (11-13). Would that all the leaders of the church be endowed with the grace of the gift of prophecy! (Num 11:29). Then it would be easy to guide the people of God in the divine ways.

Taller Than Others

It is proper to think that Yahweh had elected right from the womb of his mother (Jer 1:5) the one who was to lead the people of the covenant. Thus the Lord equipped Saul, not only with the interior qualities, but also with external status, so that he could perform the task entrusted to him well. God had made him taller than others (23), and also good-looking. All these gifts were meant to help him win the appreciation and confidence of the people.

Offering Sacrifice

Usually the covenant was sealed, and authenticated by the ritual of sacrifice. This united the human being with God, and elevated

him to the status of the Lord's family member. Similarly, in the story of Saul, Samuel sacrificed burnt offerings as well as peace offerings (10:8). In the burnt offering the whole victim was burnt and Yahweh accepted it for himself. In the peace offering the people eat a portion of the offering. In this way, Saul became related to God and to people. The called one was to maintain this dual vertical and horizontal relationship. It was not enough that the formee be satisfied with cultivating union with God alone. The one, who is called to lead the people, should always remain in communion and communication with the faithful. This is implied in the ritual of sacrifice offered by the prophet.

A Reluctant Leader

Saul was well aware of his insignificance (9:21). Therefore, when Samuel assembled the people to anoint the 'one whom the Lord had chosen as the future king', Saul was not present. (10:21-23). The lot fell upon Saul. The people went in search of him and brought him to the prophet. Subsequently he was made king.

Saul was not a person pursuing glory or prestige. He did not think that he was worthy to be called. He never dreamt about power and authority, nor did he try to grab it by force. When the kingship was offered to him, he took flight. This should be the underlying trait of the one who is called - the attitude of the destitute; "I am nothing, I have nothing". Very often the human formator has to struggle to inject such an *agathi* attitude into those in formation. Their endeavours may not come to fruition, even at the final stage of formation.

Unfortunately this natural quality did not last long in the case of Saul. When he got intoxicated with the opium of power, he could not let it go and was gripped by the fear of losing it. He tried in all ways, to hold on to the power, and eventually used force and violence. This is something that can happen to almost anybody in any field.

The Rituals II

Certain rituals were enacted when Saul was raised to kingship.

Proclamation

"See the man the Lord has chosen!" (10:24a) - by these words Samuel introduced Saul to the people; for this is whom Yahweh had chosen as their king.

Acclamation

“Long live the king!” - the people joyfully shouted (10:24b). In former days the people had played a vital role in enthroning a person. Only with their consent and approbation could a person become king. First of all he needed to be the one whom God had chosen. At the same time the people had to acclaim him.

Statement of the Royal Duties

Even though one is appointed by the Lord, he should not rule over the people as a dictator. He has to undertake certain obligations towards God and the subjects. Thus the called one should belong to God as well as to the people. After explaining the regulations of the kingship to the people, Samuel wrote them down on a scroll and deposited the scroll in the shrine (25). It was the Lord who had called Saul and entrusted him with the royal task. He was indebted to God. If he failed to accomplish the divine will fully, the relevance of his status would be lost.

Reflection II

Nobody is called for themselves alone. The call is oriented towards the welfare of the community. Its vertical and horizontal dimensions cannot be separated. When the divine-human relationship is severed, the call will be deprived of its sense.

Part One: A Positive Beginning

Performing the Task I

One needs two qualities in order to carry out the duties of a called one, namely, the possession of the divine Spirit, and the change of heart. Saul was endowed with both of these.

One Who Was Filled With Spirit

It was to deliver and protect Israel from the enemy that the Divine Formator had called Saul. He immediately set out to perform that task. As he heard that the Ammonite king was trying to humiliate and disgrace Israel, “the Spirit of the God came upon him in power, and his anger was greatly kindled” (11:1-6) against the oppressor. This pouring out of the Spirit was a gift from the Divine Formator. God’s representatives should encounter with both heart and soul the evil forces who try to destabilize God’s designs. In his

zealous indignation Saul effectively organized the demoralized people (7). They courageously faced the enemy and defeated the Ammonites (8-11).

One who has the Heart of God

At the victory, the people turned against those who did not approve Saul's kingship (12). Then Saul showed the generous attitude of the One who had called him.

Forgiving Act

As his followers wanted to kill those who stood against him, Saul declared: "No one shall be put to death today" (13a).

An Avowal

The called one thus stated the reason for unconditionally forgiving his opponents: "For this day the Lord has rescued Israel" (13b). The formed one was attributing the whole victory to his Master. He does not utter a single word about his role in it. This should be the real attitude of those who had undergone successful formation; "I am nobody; I have nothing in myself. Everything was done only by the grace of God." Thus, in Saul's case, the expectation of the divine Formator was crowned with success.

Performing the Task II

Saul reigned over Israel for two years. He gave form to a skilful army, and defeated many enemies (13:1-4). Saul was fulfilling the task assigned to him by the Divine Formator, and thus beginning his life on a positive note. We find here that the disciple was rising up to the expectations of the Master.

Part Two: The Paths of the Downfall

The Faltering Steps I

Slowly, Saul, the called one, began to deviate from the way of the Master. Of course it was not a purposeful act. Saul had to face a critical situation. The Philistines came to attack Israel with a huge army and modern weapons. Only with great difficulty could the king gather the people together (13:5-7). Before the fight he wanted to win divine favour by offering sacrifices. In obedience to Samuel's instruction, Saul waited for seven days for the arrival of the prophet, but the man of God did not appear. The people began

to scatter. How could he withstand the attackers if his men left the place? The king was in a dilemma. Finally he dared to offer burnt sacrifice (8-10).

Reflection III

How would the modern formees have reacted if they were in the place of Saul? How would we encounter such a critical situation? At least some may be tempted to justify the actions of Saul. But this is the worldly thought pattern. The king had no liturgical or legal right to offer sacrifices. This was the privilege of Samuel, the prophet. Is it proper to forsake religious morality, even if one is hard pressed by the situation? Of course, this is an objective evaluation, and we have to take into account the subjective aspects. Let us study how the king reacted to Samuel's harsh criticism.

The Uncompromising Formator

As soon as Saul finished offering the sacrifice the prophet appeared on the scene. The king went out to greet him (13:10). This is the spontaneous attitude of a person who had done no wrong. The response of Samuel seemed to shock him. "What have you done?", the prophet bluntly questioned him (11a). Saul, in an innocent way, tried to expose the gravity of the situation (11b-12). It was vital for him to seek Yahweh's favour, so he was compelled to offer burnt sacrifices. The human formator was not satisfied with this explanation, which had resulted from an unscrupulous heart. "You acted foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord. Yahweh would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time, if you had obeyed the divine law" (13).

These words disclose the high expectations which the divine Formator had of the formee. He had elected Saul to kingship, and that not on a temporary basis. Yahweh had expected that the called one will be obedient to his instructions so that he could confirm Saul in his kingship forever. This means that the Divine Formator had great expectations of Saul, but the formee had shattered all His hopes.

Then the one who represented the Lord announced: "Now your kingdom will not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after

his own heart; Yahweh has appointed him to be ruler over his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command" (14).

Reflection IV

One may naturally think thus: "Is such severe punishment justifiable for a mistake, committed with good intention? Objectively, Saul was guilty of a grave sin. And this was committed in the presence of the people! They knew that liturgical acts were reserved for priests. The king is supposed to be a model for the subjects, especially in the religious matters. Will the ordinary people not be scandalized? Will it not give them licence to randomly break the divine command? In the history of Israel a new chapter on monarchy had begun. It was a novel structure in the life of the covenant people. The phenomenon of monarchy was a totally new experience, with which they were not familiar. The king was God's envoy, and was to rule over them in the name of Yahweh. How could the Divine Formator tolerate such a bad model, even if it was committed with good intention, since it would negatively affect the future?"

We have to take all these facts into account when we evaluate the severe punishment inflicted on Saul. Still a doubt may linger. Is it proper to reject the candidate at the first instance of sin?

Although God's representative's language was very harsh, the Divine Formator had not completely rejected Saul. He continued to maintain communication with the called one. In the light of this fact we may logically come to the following conclusion. Samuel's words can be interpreted as a strong injunction and warning of the eventual rejection, if Saul continued to offend the Lord.

Performing the Task III

As the account in 14:1-48 testifies, Saul continued to execute his task of delivering Israel.

An Adjuration

When the king set out to confront the enemies he bound the people under oath saying, "Cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!" (24). Saul took such an oath in order to win Divine favour. To fight for the Lord by fasting is a religious act. This

shows that the called one had not lost confidence in the Divine Formator.

A Leader with a Sympathetic Heart

The tired people committed an offence. They butchered the captured sheep, cattle and calves, and ate them, together with the blood (31-33a). Eating animals together with their blood was a transgression of the divine command (Lev 7:22-26). When Saul heard about this sin, he was pained, and said: "You have broken faith." Since he knew that the people violated the divine law because they were very hungry, he pardoned them. Firstly he convinced them of their sin. Then he suggested a method to eat food, and to become strong without committing sin. He also built an altar to the Lord (33b-35).

Reflection V

Let us ponder the implications of Saul's behaviour. Saul did not justify what the people had done. Rather, the king publically upbraided them. At the same time, he was ready to take into account the people's existential need that had compelled them to break the law. To become enslaved by a mere legalistic attitude, bent on condemning others, is not to be embraced by the disciples of the compassionate Master. It is true that the king did not punish the offenders. An authentic verdict would take into consideration the concrete circumstances. Saul and his army were defending themselves against the enemy who had come to exterminate Yahweh's people. Is it desirable to eliminate the people who had violated both the law and the vow in their a struggle for survival? Is the God of the Bible the defender of the legal principle of law for law's sake? Do not compassion and pardoning belong to the essential nature of God?

Saul did not defend the culprits. Rather he took initiative so that they would not repeat the offences, and he removed the situation which may induce them to do wrong. Can we find fault with such an act? Moreover the king built an altar to the Lord. The Bible does not mention if he offered sacrifices on the altar. One can assume, though, that Saul would have offered the burnt offerings. The called one did rise up to the urgency of the times.

Seeking God's Will

Before starting to defeat the enemy, Saul, (according to the instruction of the priest), enquired of the will of God (14:36-37 a, b). He asked: "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you deliver them into Israel's hand?" These words give articulation to the essential attitude of a formee, as well as to the desire to find out the divine will. The king was not asking the Lord to hand over the assailants into his own hands. Rather, he was entreating Him to give them into Israel's hand. There is no ego-centred attitude reflected in this request. The people belong to Yahweh. Hence he gave importance to Israel. Here we see the ideal humble attitude that is essential for those who are elected to become biblical leaders.

Executing Justice

The Lord did not answer Saul. Somebody must have offended Yahweh. The ruler tried to find out who the culprit was, and he was not doing so in a haphazard manner. Emphatically, Saul proclaimed: "As surely as the Lord who rescues the Israel lives, even if it is my son Jonathan, he must die" (39). Then the king prayed: "O Lord the God of Israel, give me the right answer. If this guilt is in me or in my son, Jonathan, respond with Urim. If the people are at fault, respond with Thumim" (41). Is this not the portrait of a faithful formee? Here we have a living testimony of the disciple's total commitment and utter trust, in his attitude of dedication to the Master.

Yahweh responded. The lot had fallen on Jonathan (41). "Tell me what you have done?", the king questioned his son. Jonathan acknowledged his guilt (43). The just judge then swore saying: "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan" (44).

Reflection VI

Is not this a true picture of the called one who acts in accordance with the mind of the Divine Formator; trusting again and again in the Lord, sincerely attempting to expose a culprit, even if this should be himself or his son, then acting without partiality, with the readiness to punish the guilty one by death, having made this declaration under oath. All these are the authentic traits of a formed one.

The Gratified Formator

The people resisted the execution of Jonathan, and affirmed that the prince had courageously acted according to the will of Yahweh. At their insistence Saul retracted his decision to put his son to death. The Lord was pleased with such a step, and gave him victory in his pursuit of the enemies (47-48). Thus the formee could deliver Israel from the hands of those who were plundering her. (52).

Reflection VII

The fact that Yahweh had given Saul victory in his battles, illustrates that he had not totally forsaken this called. From this, we can surmise that the harsh indictment spoken by the Lord's envoy did not imply God's final and definite rejection. It seems that the severe rebuke as well as the threat of rejection were meant to induce the formee to correct his faulty steps and proceed in the way of Yahweh. A formator should have the mind of God in adopting this kind of method in considering the needs of the candidate.

Formator's Directives

Samuel who was entrusted by Yahweh with Saul's formation, also used the art of friendly persuasion and tactfulness (15:1-3). He approached the king and reminded him that it was the Lord who had anointed him as the king of the people. Hence he was bound to do the will of the one who had called him. Then the prophet revealed the divine desire. He should annihilate the Amalekites who had attacked Israel during their march to the Promised Land. Promptly the king did as he was asked (4). We find him dealing magnanimously with the Kenites, who had earlier shown kindness to the covenant people. Since they were living among the Amalekites, Saul made them settle at a different place. Those who are called should be guided by this kind of bounty.

Faltering Steps II

Partial Submission

Although the king defeated the Amalekites in the battle, he did not fully execute the divine instructions. Saul spared the king of the

Amalekites and let the army take the best of the sheep and cattle, fat calves and lambs (7-9).

A Sharp Reaction

Divine Repentance

This action grieved the Lord. He opened his heart to Samuel, as His trainee had violated His command. Saul had not followed the divine path, and had turned away from Him (10-11). Yahweh was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel (35b).

The Weeping Envoy

As the prophet heard the Divine lamentation, he was troubled and cried out to the Lord all that night (11b).

Reflection VIII

Does the Lord repent about what he had done? Is the Lord feeling a prick of conscience about calling Saul to kingship! The Hebrew term *nḥmis* is pregnant with meaning. Yahweh has made the one who was lowly into a noble being, and had bestowed upon him His choicest blessings. Instead of daily remembering such an ineffable grace and praising the Lord with a heart full of gratitude, and lovingly obeying the Divine commands, the called one has dared to interpret the holy will according to his personal whims and fancies! In place of practising blind submission to God's commands, Saul had only partially obeyed, prompted by his personal desires! The heart of the compassionate Lord was broken at such an ungrateful action, and Yahweh repents; "I have made a mistake in showering graces upon this unworthy fellow!"

It is not wrong for those engaged in formation, to share their agonies and anxieties with each other. The human formators should identify with the inner feelings of the Divine Formator. They also should, like Samuel, cry out to the Lord all the night.

A Fake Argument

Early in the morning the prophet came to meet Saul. The king greeted Samuel with a blessing (12-13): "The Lord bless you!" Then he added, "I have carried out the Divine instructions".

Reflection IX

Let us analyse the formee's behaviour. Saul's response is not that of one who had done wrong. How could Saul utter the words which would flow out of an innocent heart? How could he invoke the Divine blessings upon Samuel and make claim that he had accomplished God's instructions? Can we evaluate his words as insincere speech? We find the same tone in his response to the prophet's question.

This is a complex situation. The modern formators may sometimes have to face such phenomena. How should one look at this issue? There may be some candidates who are possessed with this 'Saul-syndrome'. They may not be intentionally telling lies. Can we call this phenomenon a mental disease? One may be justified in labelling it so. How should one encounter such a crisis? Let us first see the method which Samuel followed.

Interrogation and Rejection

Questioning

The human formator began to interrogate the candidate who had joyfully welcomed him: "What is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"(14)

Justification

Sincerity is reflected in Saul's response. The soldiers had brought the best of the sheep and cattle from the battle field "to sacrifice to the Lord your God; the rest had been totally destroyed" (15). See how subtly the king justified this act. "It was the people who had taken the animals; the rest I and they ('we') had destroyed." The statement has the following implication: if it was wrong to keep the best for the purpose of sacrifice, it was not I who had done it. Also in v.21 the king has made clear the difference between his and the people's attitude.

Condemnation

The prophet did not allow Saul to continue his words of justification (16-23). Samuel announced that the Lord had rejected Saul whom He had called, since he had violated the Divine command. Even then the king did not understand the gravity of his offence. He insisted that he had obeyed Yahweh and had taken

the path which God had asked of him (20-21). It was not he, “but the people who had kept the animals”, and that also was for the noble purpose of sacrificing them to the Lord. At these words Samuel made clear that obedience is better than sacrifice, and thus concluded: “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king” (23).

Repentance and Appeal for Forgiveness

Convicted, the king understood the gravity of the situation. He confessed his sin (24). “I violated the Lord’s command and your instructions”. It was because of his fear for the people that he had given into them. “Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord”.

Proclamation of Rejection

Samuel was not ready to relent. He once more openly repeated the verdict of rejection (20). As the prophet was turning to leave, the deserted one caught hold of the edge of Samuel’s robe, and it tore. At this the human formator unkindly reacted: “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it ...to one better than you” (28). According to the prophet, God does not change his word, and turn back from his decision, as humans do.

Confession and Supplication

Saul humbly acknowledged his sin. At the same time he pleaded with the human formator to come back with him so that the elders and the people may continue to respect him, as their king (30).

The Yielding Formator

God’s representative agreed to heed to this request. He went back with Saul and they worshipped the Lord (31).

Formative Process Ends

After this, Samuel left Saul, and never returned. For the prophet this separation was not easy. He mourned for the king. Also the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel (34-35).

Reflection X

The story of the call was coming to a tragic end. The modern audience may not be ready to subscribe to this kind of rejection.

According to the human point of view there may be reason to justify the action of Saul. As the king had repeatedly stated, it was the soldiers who brought the animals for the purpose of sacrifice. The king was forced to comply with their inflexible attitude. Saul had again and again insisted that he had fulfilled the command of the divine Formator. Perhaps he would have acted with a good conscience. But we should not forget that the king had given preference to human considerations. As he became convinced of his guilt, he promptly confessed his sin and asked for forgiveness. Can we not see here the figure of a wretched and helpless man? Why did Yahweh, who is the Lord of compassion, not pardon this miserable fellow?

Mere human logic underlies this kind of thinking. Let us try to look at the situation from the perspective of the divine Formator. Saul was called and well equipped for performing a specific task. In a certain sense His formation was completed when He had anointed Saul as king of Israel. The human envoy is supposed to rule over the people in the place of the Lord, and by no means should he lead a self-centred life. To be the leader and defender of his subjects and guide them through the divine path, which was the purpose of the royal existence, the king should have always been ready to listen to the voice of his Master, assiduously say 'amen' to it, and then strictly put into practice the divine instructions. The sacred duty of this good shepherd was to bring back the strayed sheep. Otherwise Saul's call would have ceased to have had any significance.

Unfortunately the elected one conveniently forgot the Divine instructions, and succumbed to the demands of the people. He seems to have been afraid that they would turn against him if he opposed them. What would have happened to the Divine dreams concerning the people of the covenant if the Lord ignored this transgression? His designs would never have been realized. Should Yahweh protect the weak one who does not listen to His heartbeat? The status of kingship is a great honour as well as a heavy burden. Is it not better to remove from that position the one who has proved himself unable and unfit for the responsibilities of this position?

It was not the person of Saul whom the Lord had rejected. The Lord only removed him from his position of kingship. The survival of the people of God would have been threatened if Yahweh would have permitted the feeble Saul to continue in the office of kingship. Thus the Lord, with a grieving heart took away kingship from him. Moreover God repented of his decision to make such a person the ruler of Israel. "Indeed, I have failed! A human being has defeated me!" The loving God of the Bible wept. The human representative joined in the Divine lamentation. Samuel was crying out to the Lord all that night (15:11). It is wrong to retain those candidates who deserve to be eliminated. The formators are called to drink the chalice of suffering in the company of the divine Master (Lk 22:42-44). They have to participate in the divine anguish concerning the sent-out candidates. This is God's will for them. At the same time the human formators are requested to maintain respect and cordial relationship towards the rejected ones. One should not forget that, although these persons have forfeited their vocation, as human beings, they are nevertheless worthy of respect and esteem. Let us follow the example of Samuel who was in God's place in the formation process.

Faltering Steps of the Forsaken One

The life of the called one who had forfeited that status because of his unfaithfulness, became miserable.

Departure of the Spirit

"Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul..." (16:14a). The Hebrew term *sur* indicates the forceful action of turning back from someone. It denotes an irresistible act of leaving an evil fellow. Saul brought upon himself such misfortune on account of his repeated infidelity.

Presence of Evil Spirit

At the disappearance of the Spirit of the Lord, an evil spirit came upon him (14b,15,16,23; 18:10; 19:9). It was Yahweh who had brought about this situation. The evil spirit disturbed him so much that he behaved like a mad man who had lost the rhythm of his life (the Hebrew verb *bat* means to terrify). The royal physician diagnosed his condition and suggested music therapy for its

alleviation (16-18). A musician would play the harp before the king. This pacified Saul (19-23).

Reflection XI

The fact that it was the Lord who had sent the evil spirit to torment Saul whom he had called, may disturb us. Is this action justifiable? First of all we should understand the Old Testament belief that regards Yahweh as the cause of everything that happens in the world. It is He alone who is the apex of history. Nothing will occur without his consent. In this light we have to evaluate the statement that the evil spirit was from the Lord. Another factor also deserves our attention. The heart of one who repeatedly rejects and rebels against Divine inspiration and instruction, will slowly be hardened. What happened to Pharaoh of Egypt would also happen to them. The Book of Exodus has documented this. As that monarch again and again rejected the divine signs and purposefully stood against Yahweh's salvation plan, something strange happened to him. The Lord Himself hardened Pharaoh's heart. It seems that the same thing took place in Saul's case.

The Terrified One

The story of the rejected one also tells us how he tried to survive. The self-centred king became the slave of fear and jealousy. A crooked and murderous fellow was born in him. When the Philistines challenged Israel through the giant Goliath, Saul was terrified (17:1-11), since he knew well that his former Master would not come to his aid. He would surely be defeated, if God did not help him. Everything had become dark. The rejected one began to sink into the depths of fear and despair.

The Jealous One

As the women folk praised David more than the king, Saul's heart was filled with anger and jealousy (18:6-16). He became panic-stricken at the thought of eventual dethronement. The king lost his senses when he realised that his own son and daughter loved David with their heart and soul (28-29).

A Crooked and Murderous Fellow

Although the king repeatedly tried to hurl his spear to pin David to the wall, he did not succeed (18:10-11; 19:9-10). Then he devised

a devilish plan. Saul made David his military general and asked the youth to lead the battles by promising him his daughter as wife. He had thought that the Philistines would kill David (18:17-18). But he was mistaken in that also. Then he commanded his son and the attendants to “do away his enemy”, but they were unwilling (19:1). Still Saul did not refrain from his attempts. He sent men to David’s house to watch it and to kill him in the morning (19:11-17). But Michal saved her husband. When the king heard of this, he became angry with her and pursued her fiendishly (19:19-23; 22:6-19; 23:7,15,23-26; 24:1-2; 26:1-4). Every time David escaped the traps that Saul set.

The Wrathful One

Since Jonathan did not cooperate with him, Saul’s anger flared up at his son and shouted at him using indecent language; he even hurled his spear at Jonathan to kill him (20:30,33). This is a portrait of a mentally disturbed fellow who tries to cling to power by using every imaginable evil way. This ex-candidate tried his best to thwart the divine designs. What a downfall!

Sparks of Goodness

Of course Saul was not the personification of wickedness. There remained in him traces of kindness, affection, readiness to accept the truth and to acknowledge the wrong.

A Man of Kind Heart

We have already mentioned how Saul dealt with kindness and saved the lives of the Kenites (see Nr 18.1).

One with an Affectionate Heart

When David expressed his readiness to face Goliath, Saul tried his best to make the youth turn back from that risky endeavour (17:33). Still the young man insisted on going and fighting with the Philistine. Then the king sent him with the words of blessing: “Go, and may the Lord be with you!” (37). He dressed David in his own tunic, and put a coat of armour on him and a bronze helmet on his head (37b-38). As David had proved his skill in the battle field, the noble king made him the captain of the army (18:5).

One Who Acknowledges the Truth

When Jonathan warned the king that he would be committing a grave sin if he sheds the innocent blood of David, Saul listened to

his advice. He swore: "As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death" (19:6).

One Who Confesses his Sin

"Is that your voice, David my son?" - thus wept Saul (24:16-22; 26:17-25), who was pursuing his son-in-law. Yahweh had given the king into David's hands; still, David did not kill Saul, who was determined to kill David. At this merciful act Saul confessed: "You are more righteous than I; you have treated me well, but I have treated you badly." "I have sinned; surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly." Then the king blessed David: "May the Lord reward you well;" "May you be blessed, my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph."

Destroyer of Sorcery

We find Saul honouring the divine command that Israel should never go after the evil spirits (Dt 9:13). Accordingly the king cut off the mediums and wizards from the land and forbade the practice of sorcery (28:9).

Reflection XII

Some may be tempted to consider those who have left priestly/religious life as abominable creatures. This tendency should not be cultivated. Nobody will become an immoral being merely on account of rejecting the divine call. The formators and others must appreciate, encourage and nurture blossoms of goodness in them. Such a positive approach may help these unfortunate ones to retrace the faltering steps.

Missteps of the Desperate One

The last days of Saul were tragic and pathetic.

The Terrified One

As the Philistines came to attack Israel with a huge army, terror filled the heart of the king (28:4-6). The rejected Saul did not know what to do.

An Attempt to Contact God

As in the past he enquired of Yahweh, but the Lord did not answer him in dreams or through Urim or the prophets (28:6). All the

proper channels were closed. Still the king wanted to re-establish communication with the Lord. Unfortunately he ventured to following an improper way.

Enquiring of a Medium

The one who had earlier dispelled the mediums and wizards and had tried to establish the true worship of Yahweh in the country, went to consult the witch of Endor (28:7-20). Saul was sinking into the depths of sin. He wanted to establish contact with the spirit of Samuel. He even swore to the witch by the Lord, that no evil would befall her. To do something which was forbidden by Yahweh, he was swearing in the divine name itself. Was that not ridiculous?

Formator as Antagonist

At the appearance of Samuel Saul bowed down with his face to the ground and did obeisance (28:14). The response of the prophet was very harsh (16-19). He questioned the action of the king, as Yahweh had already rejected him. The distressed man explained the gravity of the situation in a pathetic way, and begged Samuel to tell him what he should do. The prophet thus replied: "Why do you consult me, now that the Lord had turned away from you and become your enemy? Yahweh has done what he predicted through me. He has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to David, since you did not obey the Lord... Yahweh will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me."

A Pathetic Figure

Immediately Saul fell full length to the ground, filled with fear (20-25). Although the witch again and again pleaded with him to take food, he declined. Finally at the urge of the attendants he complied.

Reflection XIII

How can the divine Formator become an enemy? The Hebrew term *or* refers to the action of instigating the opposite party against somebody for their unfaithfulness. This means that the Lord was not directly fighting against him, though he had transgressed the divine command and turned away from the Formator. Because of

Saul's serious offence Yahweh instigated the Philistines to attack Israel; it seems that He had joined on the side of enemies and encouraged them to fight against Saul. One may ask if it is meaningless to help the one who had failed to perform the duty entrusted to him? One may nevertheless feel uneasiness at this divine decision. Our finite intelligence cannot grasp such enigmatic behaviour.

A Tragic End

Israel was utterly defeated by the Philistines (31:1-13). As Saul was mortally wounded, he did not want to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised enemies. So he fell on his sword and committed suicide. The Philistines cut off his head, put his armour in their temple and fastened his body to the wall. Some Israelites took down his body, burned it, and took the bones and buried them. Thus the curtain fell on the tragic life drama of the first king who was called and formed by Yahweh.

Resisting and Defeating Formation

We live in times in which many, who were destined to become God's and His people's, through the formative process, leave their vocation. At times, formators tend to retain those who do not positively co-operate during the time of formation, and push them on to the next stage, hoping that such a candidate may become good at a later stage. The formators who later try to send out these unworthy fellows, may have to pay a heavy price; their superiors may remove them from the formation field, labelling them as unskilful. With this background let us once again reflect on God's failed pedagogy of formation in the case of Saul.

Who was at fault that Saul, destined to lead the covenant community, miserably failed? He began well. The divine Formator showered upon him all the graces necessary for performing the office of kingship. Thus his first steps were very positive. But slowly the called one began to take the wrong path. He faltered and fell. The Formator did not hesitate to severely warn him about the seriousness of the situation. Still the response of the formee was inadequate. He even dared to justify his shortcomings. God, through his human envoy, questioned such an attitude, and threatened him with eventual rejection. As Saul promptly

acknowledged his sin, the Formator was ready to change the harsh attitude into a mild one.

It was only from kingship that the candidate was removed. The Lord did not reject Saul as a human being. Unfortunately he tried to retain his kingship in various ways. Again and again he set traps for the anointed David in order to kill him. Because of such evil designs Saul completely lost God's blessings. Finally we find him seeking the help of a medium, who, through witchcraft made Samuel appear. This was the climax of his downfall. We have made an attempt to analyse the whole issue from the perspective of the divine Formator.

Jesus too, in the paradigm of the formators, had to encounter failures in the process of forming the disciples. Many of his followers left him, as they heard the discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn 6:60-66). Judas, whom he selected as one of the twelve Apostles and trained till the end, betrayed the Master. Thus Christ became the symbol for the failed formators. But such a failure was not a failure in the divine eyes. Humans can at any stage misuse the freedom given by God. Even the Almighty will not be able to prevent such cases. This is what provides human formators with comfort and courage.