

Congregation of the Sacred Hearts
SS.CC. Formators' Course
2005 - 2006

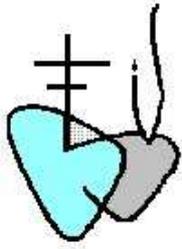
SS.CC. FORMATORS' COURSE

GOING DEEPER INTO THE SS.CC.
PEDAGOGY, SPIRIT and CHARISM

PHASE 3

"GENERAL MEETING"

"Spiritual Direction
during SS.CC. Initial Formation"



Congregation of the Sacred Hearts
SS.CC. Formators' Course
2005 - 2006

PHASE 3

“Spiritual direction
during SS.CC. Initial Formation”

Objective:

“That the participants experience and understand some processes of spiritual growth -individual and community- and acquire formative resources with an SS.CC. pedagogical style.”

STUDY MATERIALS

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2005-2006

Spiritual Direction during S.S.C.C. Initial Formation

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General Overview of the Study Materials

This material is intended to offer formators reflections based almost exclusively on personal experience regarding the spiritual direction of young men in formation, considering the entire period of Initial Formation as a process of spiritual and vocational growth.

The general idea is to explain in the most orderly and complete manner possible the experience acquired during these years in the field of Initial Formation in some places of the Congregation and its different stages. In fact, we have gradually developed very rich thinking in the formation teams, to which many brothers have contributed their own experiences. Under our direction we have had many young members of our Congregation, both men and women.

In addition to spiritual direction as such, we will also tackle various other complementary themes.

1. Some general aspects and orientations underlying current styles of formation.
2. Some particular themes which must be taken into consideration in spiritual direction during Initial Formation.
3. The characteristics proper to each stage of the process and the corresponding pedagogical and spiritual challenges in spiritual direction.

Most of these reflections will be presented in the form of proposals and will have to be compared with one's own experience both in having received spiritual direction during formation, and in having provided spiritual direction to those in formation.

It is our wish that at the end of this endeavor the Brothers attending the Formators Course will feel better skilled and better equipped for this important and delicate pedagogical and spiritual task during the time of Initial Formation.

Note: This Course is directed to the SS.CC. Brothers; in many parts of the document there are references to the SS.CC. Sisters, because this document was originally written for both Brothers and Sisters (2nd Formators Course of CIAL, 2002).

Chapter One

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION:

PERSONALIZED FORMATION

(José Vicente Odriozola Gurruchaga ss.cc.)

- 1. Sense and understanding of the task: personalized formation**
- 2. A new style of formation: self-formation or personalized formation**

1. SENSE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE TASK

The actual style of formation in our Congregation has changed radically with respect to what was experienced in our seminaries in the past. This is how we understand the situation on the basis of having studied the precious themes. Gradually implemented throughout the Congregation in the wake of Vatican Council II has been a new style which we were recently able to set forth in an organic manner in the Document on Initial Formation in the Congregation.

Were we to express in a few words the fundamental difference between these two styles, the seminary-convent and the community of formation, we would tend to focus on the subject in formation, the young man who approaches the community or the Congregation to begin his journey of formation to the Religious Life.

In the former the young man learned a life style perfectly formulated in a program of life with its respective timetables, studies, practices of prayer and community exercises perfectly designed to make this learning process an almost infallible mode of formation in the religious life and the faith.

In the latter the accent is placed on the young man embarking upon a gradual process with very strong personal responsibility rooted in his own search and creative participation, which will be required of him in full, much more so than his mere ability to adjust to a well established and failsafe program.

In this new style of formation, which we shall be discussing at length, personal or spiritual direction comes into the picture as a way to accompany and sustain the process to be lived by a young man throughout this time of Initial Formation, with its distinct times and stages, distinct high points and concerns, as well as different challenges and questions.

This practice of direction or accompaniment has existed in the Church ever since the time of Jesus, has gone under different names with differing features, and is today the object of renewed interest insofar as it falls within a new method, which, amidst trial and error, has had to forge ahead in a gradual manner in order to reach the point of becoming an organic and well grounded method. That person, who in the past was called Father, Master, Spiritual Director, Spiritual Counselor, Formator, Guide, Physician of Souls, etc., will today be called Spiritual Chaperon or Mentor because the intention is to underline new aspects that will become readily understandable as we go along.

What we are dealing with here is a relationship of dialogue, which, albeit one of assistance, reckons with the maturity or adulthood of the other person when beginning a journey or process with him in which he will be accompanied by his own personal growth in all its facets, including his spiritual growth.

Perhaps it would be helpful to indicate what **isn't** spiritual direction.

It isn't a mere function of providing information, even though information will have to be given in many cases, especially when it is a matter of explaining certain situations, and particularly when coming face to face with the theological and spiritual sense of others.

Nor is it a therapeutic relationship where healing an illness or resolving a conflict is at stake. Many a time will a director tend to tackle conflict-related zones or experiences, but

when it becomes a matter of a serious illness or conflict, he should be wise enough to call upon a specialist or refer the young person to such a specialist.

Then again, a spiritual director is not an advisor in the sense of telling a person in formation what he should do in this or that situation. A director is not the one who knows what is to be done, while in many cases he will help the person in formation to discover that through suggestions, proposals, or the like.

In **positive** terms we could say the function of the spiritual direction encompasses two areas: clarification and discernment. When we discuss the method later on, we will have an opportunity to analyze the distinct functions which the spiritual director may exercise. For the time being we would just like to flag what is essentially distinctive about this service and highlight what is fundamental about it. We have already seen that this is a dialogue in which the most active part will have to be played more by the person in formation than by the spiritual director. Accompanied by the director, the person in formation will have to journey in the search for the sense of his experiences, the ideals proposed to him, and the forms in which they are to be achieved in the journey of the spiritual life.

We could also deduce that this role of direction-accompaniment may be carried out by any mature and adult person, without necessarily being a priest. Therefore, in order not to repeat the same concept over and over again, let us distinguish from the very outset between spiritual director (which can be the formator of the Initial Formation stage being lived by a young man) and confessor (perhaps referred to unduly at times as spiritual director).

Before proceeding any further we would like to give a more detailed description of the global context of direction-accompaniment as understood at present, at least in the mainstream of our Congregation's orientations for Initial Formation.

2. A NEW STYLE OF FORMATION: SELF-FORMATION OR PERSONALIZED FORMATION

Perhaps the most complicated challenge religious congregations have had to face in the recent past has been that of projecting and proposing to young people a journey of Initial Formation to religious life suited to both the demands of today's world and the new reality of religious life itself, especially in Latin America.

In effect, the vast majority of congregations – if not all of them – have witnessed and lived the crisis of the traditional seminary format, together with the vocation crisis inside and outside convents and religious communities.

It is not our intention to delve into an analysis of this situation, nor explain such a difficult and complex reality. We are more interested in collecting and processing the direct experience lived in some communities that responded to this challenge in a creative and innovative form set forth in a pedagogical project distinct from the traditional one.

It would be absurd to pretend everything was created out of nothing or is brand new and original. Already back in the 1960's we observed a pedagogical search underway in all the areas education in Latin America, and consecrated as a model of education at the Conference of Medellín was what Paolo Freire called "Liberating Education". The search forged ahead and today we speak in terms of self-formation, personalized education, etc.

The term 'self-formation' began to appear in all formation plans during the 1970's and 1980's. Some people understand it as mere stress placed on certain pedagogical features, while for others it is the development of a method. In certain cases it is nothing more than the manifestation of a new and wholesome intention, but without breaking away from the most traditional forms of 'top-down' pedagogy.

Gradually emerging on the basis of the experience lived in houses of formation was a consistent project in a new style of formation.

2.1. Self-formation as a formation attitude

It may well be premature to speak about a pedagogical attitude without explaining the method we will apply. And yet this is precisely where we have the specificity of the pedagogical approach we wish to present. This is the way we want to respond to a cultural world where the individual wants to be in control of what happens to him and does not settle for the experience lived by others; a world pulsating with the challenge of the sciences that have opened unexpected horizons; a man who in his own flesh has experienced the revolution of the human sciences, which have not only rendered knowledge of his own mysteriousness accessible to him, but also enabled him to delve into knowledge of other cultures that put to the test what he took as true and known.

Taking place within this context is the crisis of imparted truth, static truth, and what we could call 'true truth', while making headway is truth sought, truth discovered and truth unveiled in distinct processes of education, liberation and self-formation more than teaching, direct learning, formation, and Magisterium.

We know it is not a matter of pedagogical opponents, but of accentuations and emphases which go far beyond method or form, and the accentuation resides mainly in the attitude.

In effect, we know we can tackle life itself with a receptive, submissive and a-critical attitude, or else leap into life with an attitude of questing, questioning and commitment with the truth you have to discover, the truth which urges us on and makes us restless. In much the same way, we can approach the young man in formation as someone to whom the truth is to be handed on, proper behavior taught and errors corrected, or else look upon him as a subject in the throes of a search, a person challenged by the truth which transcends us, an individual who must create and construct his life on the grounds of his truth.

It is readily evident that we do not exclude the dimension of learning or apprenticeship. We know there are values and truths we must transmit, above all when it is a matter of the ones which constitute the essence of the religious life. We would like to insist, however, that it comes down to a giving priority or pride of place to a form of accessing the truth, which bestows greater authority upon the experience lived and meditated upon by a person who learns, than upon the transmission of truth by someone who 'knows'. While there will be no opposition between receiving and searching, the accentuation of one or the other will define not only the method, but also the objective pursued and consequently the outcome achieved.

What we understand in this way is that one attitude or another is by no means the same thing as a point of departure, as methodological constancy and as objective pursued. Whoever has confidence in the creative capacity of man and his dynamic originality will accept taking the risk of placing his trust in personal searching as a learning process, with

the added risk of critique on the part of the young man in formation. Whoever prefers proven and sure truth will hand on his teaching without any risk of misunderstanding, but without the force of a personal encounter with the truth.

What we are referring to is the attitude necessary for the formator, the person in formation and the community.

2.1.1. The attitude of the Formator

Formators are the ones in the community entrusted with generating the “atmosphere of self-formation”. Dependent upon them is the implementation of a formation process inviting those in formation to their human and vocation development on the basis of their truth, on the basis of being persons, being active subjects responsible for their own formation.

It is on the basis of this premise or assumption that we believe formators will have to develop certain attitudes illustrated below, with the accent on the ones we consider most important.

a. Self-acceptance and confidence in one’s personal and vocational journey.

As we shall see in greater detail later on, the formator exercises his role by virtue of his presence in the community. It is not just his words which accompany those in formation, as he knows, but his person as a whole, the person he is, with all his deeds, words, attitudes, expressions, etc. He exercises a true role of formation as a witness. And yet, not as a pedagogical witness who wishes to endorse truth taught, but a person bearing witness to the authenticity of life. This is why we pointed out that whoever wishes to exercise this role is someone able to accept himself and live in all authenticity, knowing he isn’t perfect, but joyful and truly free because he has received everything from God. In this manner, those in formation will benefit from the tremendous support inherent in knowing they are called to trustfulness, liberty and joyfulness, as well as to full trust placed in God.

b. He will have to be able to manifest true trust in those in formation as individuals able to take upon themselves their own processes and called to make their decisions and commitments.

In the final analysis, we know these commitments will be theirs and no one will ever be able to take their place or do so, on their behalf.

The constant temptation facing a formator is to think that without his presence those in formation are not able to make good decisions, or just can’t decide on their own. Experience, however, teaches us just the contrary: a young man will always make the decision on his own. Doing things the other way around means making an erroneous decision which is neither personal nor free and, sooner or later, will lead to a crisis situation.

Placing trust in a young man means believing he is the one called to self-astonishment over the truth, to search, to believe, to live and exercise his condition as a unique individual and develop his own abilities. The formator will accompany those in formation along this journey or process of creative responsibility in such a manner that their vocation response to the Lord may truly be their own, and not a sheep-like or dependency reaction. This is why we nowadays tend to refer to the formator more in terms of

‘accompaniment’ rather than ‘direction’; he is more of a mentor than a professor, more of a big brother than a parent.

c. It may naturally be inferred, therefore, that the major formation effort will have to attend to the process or journey being lived by each one of those in formation (and the community at large) more than to the spiritual or religious contents to be provided or explained.

In many cases the sole function of said contents is to support, illustrate and explain the selfsame processes being lived by a young man in his response of faith to Jesus Christ in both the Church and today’s world.

In other words, there are no standard or uniform universal responses. Each response will be personal and distinct, albeit subject to the same regime of community life. It therefore does not suffice to know whether a young man abides by the rules or not, complies with established practices or not. It will be a matter of seeing what is happening within him, how he lives his processes, what steps he is taking. With such a deep and attentive interest in a young man the formator will be in a condition to accompany him, suggest new steps, sustain him and help heighten his awareness, etc. A person in formation will cherish this form of responsible and affectionate support, and thereby really be able to take upon himself his own decisions.

This is a particularly necessary attitude when we are faced with the challenge of welcoming into our communities young persons of different origins and cultural backgrounds, whose values are not known to us in full. They are the ones called to be familiar with such values, interpret them and orient them from the viewpoint of the faith and the religious community.

d. Albeit repetitive, it must be said that attended to in formation must be the person as a whole.

Literally devastating can be the focus of a formator who reduces the life of a young man to a series of watertight compartments and deals only with his spiritual life or only with his moral life. One of a formator’s new attitudes will be to accompany a person in formation in all the aspects or facets of his life. He will therefore have to attend to his interests and activities as well. Only in this way will he be able to understand the person in question and accompany him in the personal decision-making process. We are not far removed at all from the attitude Sacred Scripture ascribes to God when stating that He knows the heart of man, the innermost depths of the heart of man. . .

e. Gradually taking root is a feeling of affection for the young man in formation.

We are apprising him for who he is, with both his achievements and his difficulties, his qualities as well as his shortcomings. Only such an affectionate and respectful attitude will make it possible for the formator to expedite his educational task for the good of that young man’s personal liberty.

2.1.2. The attitude of a person in formation.

A young man in formation will readily appreciate a style of formation akin to the one we are presenting, and his initial reaction will be enthusiastic. Perhaps for the very first time he is being offered the possibility to assume real responsibility for himself. He

somehow perceives the fact that he is being treated like an adult, as a person able to make decisions, to commit himself, and to take his life upon himself.

The selfsame formation journey will naturally bring to the attention of those in formation the difficulties, challenges and demands of the method. Everything seems easy, with no one telling you what to do at each and every moment, and not much in the way of rules, etc. Each person must decide on his own. In some communities, at certain times in the year, or under special circumstances, the young men themselves will have to make decisions beginning with what time they rise in the morning. There is no bell. The common schedule is limited to what is strictly necessary: prayer in common, meals, and other endeavors in common. As far as the rest is concerned (e.g. study, personal prayer, preparation for community tasks, etc.), each person may arrange his time according to his own possibilities. “You decide, and you accept the consequences”, said one formator: provide the means, await the outcome, make a commitment.

From the very outset of formation a young man will see himself summoned to nourish an attitude of full responsibility for his life. He decides, assumes responsibility and is accountable for each and every one of his acts. Rarely will he find restful refuge in what has been planned and decided by others.

Such responsibility undoubtedly requires the development of several attitudes on the part of a young man in formation.

a. Trust in the Love God harbors for him.

This young man must be sure that the grace of God provides him with the strength and generosity necessary to embark upon a demanding and beautiful vocation journey that involves him as a whole and is pleasing to God. The call of God is authentic and in itself embodies the strength of grace making it possible to embrace it not only as possible, but also as auspicious, as something to be desired.

b. Trust in the Love of God at work within us should lead the young man in formation to sound trust in himself.

The experience of difficulty or failure may well lead a young man to lose self-trust quite rapidly. This is understandable. Especially during the first stages of formation a young man not only lives a period of his life which is unstable, insecure, and prone to self-depreciation or self-underestimation, as is the case during adolescence, but also has to deal with constant decision-making, which exposes him head-on to the experience of failure.

There is no doubt that it is easier for a young man to comply with something ordered or established beforehand than to decide for himself and then do what he has decided. In the first case, mere compliance makes him feel good, feel able, feel like he is appreciated and heighten his self-esteem with greater ease and in a less demanding way.

When a young man has a propensity to demean himself he should make more of an effort to take a close look at his life with utmost objectivity, learning how to recognize his achievements, successes, and qualities, etc. This is why it will be necessary to bolster in a young man this attitude of self-esteem that enables him to construct on the basis of achievements and values more than focusing on the correction of shortcomings and defects. One together with the other, but always with the positive outlook of self-confidence.

c. Inferred from this attitude is an additional one: the need for absolute transparency, authenticity and truthfulness.

No one who wishes to assume his own formation in a responsible manner will be able to make progress in growth if he does not take upon himself his own truth in all rectitude and frankness.

This fundamental attitude will gradually turn into such a degree of trust with the formators that a person in formation will open up to them with the same transparency he does with God. Only in this way will a young man be able to receive the formator's necessary support and assistance, as well as that of the community. Nothing is more counterproductive than lies, activities concealed from both community and formators, or other forms of falsehood. In the long run, such things are a counter-indication for assuming any religious commitment, and therefore a factor which will impede a person's healthy development.

d. Lastly, we would like to highlight that the self-formation process as a whole requires a desire on the part of a young man to change and grow.

This should become more evident as a young man discovers the difficulties inherent in any growth process, such as leaving behind the easier to live and more pleasant stages of childhood. These are moments when it is necessary to forge ahead towards more mature and committed attitudes with values that will serve as the foundation of life.

Only with this desire to grow, to be faithful to a vocation in the process of development, will a young man field all his creative forces, his idealistic thrust and his creative talents. Such an attitude or disposition easily becomes a motivational spiritual experience of capital importance in a vocation of service and oblation as is the religious vocation.

2.1.3. The attitude of the community

Albeit obvious, it must be said that the community is made up of the brothers, the young men in formation and the formators. The community as a whole plays a role in our educational endeavor. Therefore expected of it is a role that assumes substantive form in certain community attitudes. This is something perceptible in the environment, something you can feel when entering the house itself, and which may be achieved only through conscientious cultivation and painstaking care.

a. The formation community should be cordial, affectionate and above all respectful of each of its members.

There is no such thing as religious 'off the assembly line'. Each brother is a value in himself and is needed by the community as such with his originality and authentic truth.

There is nothing more alien to self-formation than formation which expects uniformity of members, where all have the same needs, the same rights and the same obligations.

This is undoubtedly one of the great challenges of this method. It is above all a matter of learning a distinct attitude with respect to each member; respect lived in a friendly and exigent manner. This is far from a permissive attitude which admits individualism or lack of resolute purposefulness. An environment with common requirements, similar styles and

programs, and an atmosphere both warm and cordial where personal and creative responsiveness is stimulated will create the real conditions for respect and personal liberty.

b. As well as being respectful, the community must have a clearly defined attitude as a community of religious life where each of its members attends to his own identity.

Here there are no inspectors, no dualism between those in formation and formators, nor any other forms of control. The community at large is 'auto-formative', if we can use that expression. Nonetheless, there are distinct roles. What's most important of all, however, is that the common aims are clear, the ideals are shared, and that projects are proposed and taken on by the selfsame community. No one except the community itself will keep a watchful eye over its fidelity. Helpful in bolstering this attitude will be the joint preparation of the community project to be revisited and assessed on a regular basis. In addition, the judicious practice of fraternal correction is a precious exercise in the formation to religious life.

Experience has shown that from the very outset the community must require fidelity to its own project of religious life, in which the personal fidelity of each member will have a positive or negative impact for the life of the community. Nothing is more benumbing for the life of the community, as well as for the journey of those in formation, than the lack of clarity in the community's aims or that such aims are subject to variations in formulation by the formator.

This religious identity must be bestowed from the outset upon the community, because it alone will make it possible for a person to live initiation to the commitment of the vows on obedience, chastity in celibacy and poverty, to prayer and to the life of fraternity. Incumbent upon the community at each stage in the period of formation is the responsibility to define the levels at which these religious values will be lived with their distinct expressions in the community itself.

c. The fundamental community attitude should be that of a community ever seeking God's will for itself, as well as for each one of its brothers.

This is an attitude of discernment, listening, prayer and dialogue, where right on the line is the community and the individual religious vocation. Therefore, a formation community will constantly nourish this attitude of being disciples called by Jesus, whose constant presence among them stimulates and permits faithfulness to His call.

d. Lastly, it would seem opportune to point out that a formation community like this must be very demanding

It is a matter of a self-exigent attitude wherein strictness stems not from an inflexible program or schedule imposed from on high, but arises out of a authentic desire of fidelity in the face of all trials, which spares no efforts and takes into due consideration brothers' weaknesses as well as the individual condition of each member of the community.

This attitude fosters an interior thrust to be self-demanding as a result of commitment and not dependent upon the fear of punishment or feelings of guilt. Nothing could be more in conflict with the concept of formation community we wish to highlight than such fears or feelings. Therefore, there could be nothing more contradictory than a community where intransigence is imposed and where, as a result, there may be no such thing as a response swelling forth from the heart.

2.2. Self-formation as a global pedagogical method

Without aspiring to formulate a coherent and complete method, we do venture to glean from our own experience a series of pedagogical practices, which, as a whole, could be considered a certain sort of global method.

Above all, and as indicated earlier, we are dealing with a pedagogical option where the focus is brought to bear on a particular attitude towards the individual or the individuals in formation.

What we wish to highlight as an option is the preference given to the person in formation more than the contents or forms of formation itself. In effect, we want to make the individual ‘the active subject of his own formation’, the main agent of growth and personal development. We therefore concentrate on the person who wants to assume full responsibility for himself in his response as a Christian and as a religious to the profound feeling of having been called by God to give a personal response as a vocation of life.

The method therefore brings to the forefront the individual’s direct responsibility as regards knowing this personal call, discerning what actually is God’s will for him, and establishing what should be the means for responding to this call in all fidelity. It is a matter of establishing the fact that the protagonist in formation is the individual in formation himself, the individual who wishes to respond to He whom he acknowledges as his one and only Lord.

In this sense, and from the viewpoint of the young man in formation, self-formation will consist in the commitment made or effort undertaken to make progress in the development process of his personhood in all its complexity, with a view to a special vocation.

On one hand we would like to point out that it is the young man himself who takes action for his own growth and development, while, on the other hand, the aim of said action is the response to a vocation perceived as personal and intended for him alone. Two poles of one and the same endeavor which take it for granted that the person in question is involved in a dynamic orientation process, whose point of departure is he himself as subject, and whose end is his fulfillment as person or the realization of his vocation.

In other words, it is a matter of a formation process whose outcome depends to a fundamental degree on the initiative, responsibility and effort invested by the person in formation in the construction of the aims of his formation.

It is in this sense that we would like to illustrate some pedagogical means.

2.2.1. Experience as the principle and privileged source of knowledge and learning

Upon entering religious life a young man is open to receive everything proposed to him. The great danger we run with respect to such an admirable attitude is to believe that we have everything there is to be said, everything there is to be ‘taught’, as if it were a question of transmission from he who knows to someone who knows nothing and has everything to learn.

There is some truth in all this. The journey embarked upon is both new and mysterious. And yet, who begins from absolute zero as far as learning is concerned. We all have previous knowledge of things that no one can replace. This is the knowledge we have

garnered on the basis of our own experience, as well as what we have received from our own feelings, and which, absorbed by our rational being, has been transformed into knowledge. Circumscribed as it is by our personal limitations of age, culture, and ignorance, etc., such knowledge is nonetheless abounds with the richness of our individuality and originality. Therefore, the point of departure for any new knowledge can count on this prior personal experience, which will make the learning process all that more authentic.

We would like it to be understood that we are talking about ‘experience’ in a special and full sense. We are talking about this knowledge provided to us by the serious and weighed reflection of the feelings and concrete experiences we have in life. “Perhaps the selfsame etymology of the word gives us initial access to its understanding. Ex-peri-ence is the science or knowledge acquired by a person when he goes out of himself (ex) and studies all the facets and aspects (peri) of the world of things here (ence) and around him”.¹ Experience, therefore, turns into a privileged source of knowledge. It certainly won’t be the only source, but there is no doubt that in an active learning process and in spiritual direction it can be the most effective instrument of knowledge and commitment when it is a question of learning spiritual values.

This is something we may consider whenever, on a community or individual basis, we wish to deal with matters such as the vows, prayer, life in common, etc. It’s always possible to begin by posing the question about what each person has lived and experienced thus far. In a gradual manner through reflection with the director or formator, this initial experience can lead to the true ‘experience’ of what we wish to learn.

The formator therefore plays a role far removed from that of a ‘teacher’. He is the one who helps to ask the right question at the right time and forge ahead in reflection until the person in formation truly assumes personal ownership of what we wish to explain. This does not mean reflection and presentation are moved into the background. What this does is place priority on the point of departure.

Experience-based learning will reach its culmination when, in private or in community, people can reflect upon what has been lived and assess not only what has been learned, but also how we have taken that into our lives. In the community learning process, the revision of life exercise undertaken by the community strengthens and solidifies what we wanted to learn and live.

2.2.2. A person’s personal history as fundamental experience.

Nothing can be more negative and obstructive in the journey of formation to the religious life than to conceal one’s life or hide away from it. Stated in more positive terms, the experience of one’s life is fundamental for the journey we wish to undertake in growth and personal development, as well as in the sincere desire to follow Jesus in this style of life. One’s life will be the basis for all later learning, the grounds for any and all change, as well as the foundation for everything we receive and wish to integrate into our lives.

Therefore, the first step any young man will have to take in the process of formation will be to ‘re-cognize’, to know anew, to assume in all clarity and truthfulness his own history and reality with all of his family and social features. On that basis will he then be able to begin a journey of liberty, a journey of self-acknowledgement, a journey of

¹ L. Boff. “God’s Witnesses in The Heart of the World” pg. 59.

reconciliation with those dimensions of his life that have been lived as failures, faults or frustrations. All we are able to construct without this first step is something akin to external scaffolding, which, no matter how bright and beautiful it may be, can collapse when the first conflict occurs or when medium level crises arise.

This is where the formator plays a fundamental role. In the context analyzed above the formator will be in a position to help the young man in formation to acquire the necessary confidence in himself to feel that the call he is experiencing is neither escapism nor facile accommodation, but a personal and mature response. The judicious invitation to open up, to talk about his personal life, and let himself be assisted in reflecting upon it will be the best helping hand a young man will receive from his formator in taking these first steps forward. It is not a matter of delving into pathologies, Once again, it is only a matter of assigning due importance to what has been learned from experience, whether positive or negative, whether the source of assurance or conflict. When we deal later on with the first steps of Initial Formation we will return to this point and suggest some tools available to formators.

In any case, we may already say that a young man will grow and develop to the degree that he is able to acknowledge himself and take his individuality upon himself. He will live in the community as a motivated person willing to live the requirements and values of religious life with his whole person. Self-formation means this process of interiorizing and making one's own the distinct demands and concrete consequences inherent in these values, coming to terms therewith according to his own way of being, as well as his qualities, shortcomings, talents and limits. Therefore, this prior process of liberty will be necessary so the young man in question may project his initiatives, concerns, creativity and free enterprise as an irreplaceable part of his learning and growth process. Only in this way will each young man incarnate the common values with personal particularity.

2.2.3. Teaching presented as proposal more than imposition or presentation of a definitive truth

Here we are talking more about an attitude than a method. Once again, it is a matter of accepting the fact that our effort is one of seeking the truth more than knowing the truth as something set in stone. We seek the truth in order to make our life a consequence of it. Moreover, in this process we involve those in formation as active subjects in this quest which concerns them as well.

This is why we propose, suggest and request a personal and committed statement.

It is nigh unto obvious to say that here we have all the work involved in knowing, studying and meditating upon the Word of God in Sacred Scripture, daily events and the teaching of the Church. The truth is grounded in The Truth, and towards It are we journeying in a never ending search. The point, therefore, is not to relativize everything, but only to take as sure and definitive what truly is so.

It will always be easier for a formator to dispel doubts or objections by using his authority, both when he wants to get across a fundamental value or has to resolve an in-house discussion. And yet nothing could be in more open contradiction with the style we want to have in our formation. Everything takes longer and proceeds as a much slower pace, but everything is more sincerely accepted and more deeply interiorized as truth.

2.2.4. Necessary accompaniment by an adult

This is something we have been inferring all along. As we understand it, self-formation supposes the close accompaniment of the young man in formation by an adult. What it comes down to is accompanying a process which may only be traveled by the person in formation himself. The adult or the formator will be there as a sort of tutor or guide who accompanies, suggests, stimulates and asks questions along the journey, at times like a trusted friend, other times like an older brother projecting a sense of security, and at other times like a figure of authority or an understanding father. This was the ‘accompaniment’ experienced by the disciples of Emmaus, who were on their way back to their hometown in the throes of a crisis when Jesus appeared and took them aside.

The formator must be at the young man’s side prepared to listen to him, to accompany him when doubts arise, posing a thought-provoking question, making his trust readily evident, etc. Only in this manner will a formator be able to respect the pace of each young man, succeeding in the personalization of a community process which must necessarily be offered in the same form to all the members of the community, but which each person must take upon himself on the basis of his distinct individuality.

This accompaniment will play a distinct role during each stage, and we shall deal with this when we analyze the characteristics of each stage from the viewpoint of self-formation and personal accompaniment. At this point we could say that this accompaniment must be well defined in its objectives and periodical in time. Ill-placed would be accompaniment only when those in formation request it. Formators should realize that both young men and young women have a tendency to act in such a manner, but it is more characteristic of women to want to be exhaustive in the details of daily experiences than to become involved in a long term process with its stages and long-lasting requirements. The periodical nature of these encounters will help people to rise above what is both immediate and circumstantial in order to get more deeply involved in the long term processes proper to spiritual life at large. In effect, this periodical encounter with a formator helps those in formation to make gradual progress in the interiorization and personalization of the values of religious life in such a manner that they then become habits fully assumed in their lives.

2.2.5. The development of love and openness to newness a young person

It is important to incorporate this aspect into the self-formation method. In young people we often come across a propensity to isolate themselves within their own world, and this may well be a natural form of self-defense against what may be alien, unknown or a potential source of destabilization. A young person’s fears or lack of security may make him ill disposed towards what comes from outside as something new. Then again, he may be induced to assume a certain form of conformism that begins to reign supreme in all things.

Whoever wishes to embark upon this journey in the footsteps of Christ must be able to open himself to the newness of the Gospel. Moreover, he must yearn to respond with the completeness of the vocational experience of feeling he is called by Jesus, and do so in such a manner that his life as a whole will have to become a development of this wish, this yearning, this authentic form of expressing love for Jesus and His Gospel. This is the condition of ‘pilgrims of the Absolute’ implicit in each and every person.

This dynamic thrust is undoubtedly one of the major forces of human and spiritual growth. The yearning for completeness and ensuing dissatisfaction propel us along in the ceaseless search for 'otherness', for what transcends us and then fills us as an absolutely free and gratuitous gift of God. How may this be accomplished without love for the newness which enters my life? How may the truth of my life be attained without love for both of them, for truth and life?

Perhaps the simple exercise of pausing at the end of a conversation or a meeting to take stock of what was new could be used as a technique to generate in a young person a sense of enchantment so he will look on newness as something good and as openness to the newness of the Gospel.

2.2.6. The community meeting

Very important in the style of formation being illustrated is the regular community meeting. Formators and those in formation gather together on a weekly basis to discuss the ordinary life of the community, household matters and sundry formation issues or themes inherent in the formation process underway. These meetings constitute a privileged opportunity for the formators to become really familiar with each one of the young men in formation; become familiar with their reactions, sensitivity, interests, temperament, and natural role in the community. This is a meeting where those in formation lead the discussion on some subjects. They are the main actors during most of the meeting, especially when under discussion are matters regarding daily life and household activities. The formators may reserve part of the meeting for formation issues, which, insofar as possible, will be tackled in an active and participatory manner by the community at large.

This is customarily the moment when the community sets its own requirements: daily schedule, live projects, program of activities, etc. In this manner the community itself may every so often revisit what it had proposed in terms of objectives and goals. This is an enriching process for the community and each young man projects therein his personal yearnings, difficulties, conflicts, etc., which will become manifest during this meeting with the discrete assistance of the formator. Once again, the latter must refrain from leading the group and seek to accompany it with appropriate and thought-provoking questions that make it possible for the group's needs and requirements to come out into the open.

There can also be various types of meetings. We have already seen that one and the same meeting may take place in distinct sessions on the same community day or afternoon. Then there are the other types of meetings; life revision sessions, when each member of the community shares his personal views about a given subject or relations with the other members of the community; meetings that focus on the apostolate, studies or some other formation activity; meetings where the members of the community reflect together on a theme decided beforehand and commented upon or introduced by a brother, etc.

As we have seen, the community meeting plays an irreplaceable role in this non directive style of formation. Being forged therein is the community process that impacts each and every one of the young men in formation. Moreover, the formator may refer to these meetings in his individual conversations with each person in formation. For example, he could ask him what he thought about the contents of the meeting, ask him to comment on the subjects debated and their repercussion in his life, highlight the person's attitude during the meeting and bolster any positive impact it had on him, etc. The formator will

know how to fine tune his sensitivity and attention to make the most of this privileged moment of formation.

2.2.7. Periodical breaks in the community's ordinary activities

This style of formation places a great degree of responsibility on each young man as regards both his own process and that of the community, and at times has a “wear and tear” effect on those in formation. It is easier to be led with clear instructions than to gradually discover the journey and take steps decision by decision. Then again, this active formation system at times precludes the possibility to experience other dimensions of the religious and community life that it would be opportune to develop at one and the same time. This is why it has been deemed advisable for the community to take regular breaks from its ordinary life, taking advantage of holiday periods or weekends to engage in other types of formation activities that fall under the direct responsibility of the formators, and not those in formation. Such activities could be, for example, days of recollection, times of reflection, periods of discussion and relaxation, etc.

During these special times it is advisable to have a stable and clear program, with a preset timetable or schedule to be respected. Curiously enough, young men find it relaxing to have a program and a timetable. They have neither to discern nor decide what has to be done. They just go along with what has been decided by the formators and breathe that different air which places them in a somewhat different disposition to receive what is given. They adjust to what has been planned, thereby submitting their will to that of others for the common good; they learn this other dimension of life in community which is organized by virtue of an external norm; they submit their wills, minds and wishes to the will and good of the community as formally expressed in a program.

By way of preference held away from the house of formation itself, meetings or days like the ones above enable the formator to establish a different relationship with the young men in formation, know them in another way and propose to them the treatment of themes necessary for a knowledge of the religious life or the personal and spiritual processes being lived by each young man and the community at large. Examples could be the treatment of the vows, recollection-type reflection on the eve of a commitment, prayer and the retreat at the end of a one-year stage or the beginning of another, etc.

When subjects are dealt with in an objective manner during these special moments, and at times even under the form of a presentation, we are sending a clear signal to those in formation that no one can live their formation as a sort of subjectivism where what only counts is what a person has discovered or attained by virtue of personal endeavor alone. It is of fundamental importance to have the experience of objective knowledge that sheds light upon personal experience and opens us to the truth that is beyond us. In this sense it is most enriching for the formators to be the ones who work up formation themes for presentation to the community.

Thus far we have illustrated the way we understand the formative spiritual accompaniment or direction needed by our young men in formation today, as well as the formative context or pedagogical sense in which this takes place.

Before proceeding in our effort to analyze this same theme in the distinct stages of Initial formation, we think it would be interesting to delve into a few aspects regarding the overall theme of the spiritual life. In this manner we will add yet another piece to this mosaic of spiritual direction.

Chapter Two

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

DURING THE TIME OF INITIAL VOCATION DISCERNMENT

(José Vicente Odriozola Gurruchaga ss.cc.)

- 1. A few preliminary observations**
- 2. The goal of accompaniment/direction during this stage**
- 3. Elements worthy of attention in the process**
- 4. Possible steps in the accompaniment/direction process at this time**
- 5. The theme of trust: a fundamental interview**
- 6. Selection criteria**

Annex: Outline for an autobiography

1. A FEW PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

1.1. Spiritual direction/accompaniment during initial discernment is a highly complex spiritual experience

This first moment of the vocation ordinarily referred to as ‘vocational awakening’ is usually intertwined with a myriad of simultaneous experiences, which render accompaniment/spiritual direction complex as well. We are usually talking about an adolescent or a young adult who starts asking himself questions about the sense of his life as he tackles the issue of deciding on his future. Questions like the following: What do I want to do with my life? What does God will of me? What am I called to be? These and other questions are the ones crowding the minds and hearts of the young persons who turn in our direction.

We know we are faced with a situation embracing very distinct experiences at one and the same time, and not all of them are spiritual or vocational in a strictly religious sense. Present in the picture here are elements proper to the normal growth of an individual; others which constitute spiritual experiences as such, like a more personal experience of Jesus, His closeness and the friendship offered in Jesus; others stem from the spontaneous wish of a young person to imitate someone who projects an interesting ideal of life through witness or nearness. In order to be as complete as possible we could also come across elements that reflect evasion from life and its ensuing commitments. Lastly, what we need to now is that face to face with us is a young person who is living a complicated moment in his life and from us needs much broader attention than religious-focused attention alone.

Moreover, it should be pointed out that this is one of the most beautiful experiences a young person can live. Much akin to falling in love or friendship, and no matter how confusing, surprising or even frightful it may be, it is one of those experiences which abounds with an emotional and vital force that propels the individual in question to live a period or time of great intensity and happiness. The spiritual director will have to know how to help him acknowledge the great value of such a human and religious experience, helping him make this experience a truly spiritual experience in which he comes to know a personal God, a God close to him and with Whom he can establish a true friendship in the person of Jesus Christ.

1.2. This experience, just like all profound human experience, concerns the person as a whole, involves a young man in his wholeness

Therefore, more than speaking in terms of spiritual direction/accompaniment, we should talk about personal direction/accompaniment.

As pointed out above, a young person’s vocation is not located in one part or section of his person. Everything about this experience impacts the totality of life and influences each moment, each vital space, and each manifestation of personal behavior. Then again, everything physical, corporeal or material implicit in human growth will also mark this profoundly human experience being lived by a young person.

We could take this one step further and say that direction/accompaniment at this moment being lived by a young person involves helping him to know his life as a whole and recognize himself therein, helping to discover his personal vocation in the context of his whole person and his family, social and ecclesial life.

1.3. Such an experience presupposes a haste-free and serene process

This process should unfold over a prudently lengthy period of time before any decision or commitment. The director himself will see when the person in question has attained a degree of maturity sufficient for discernment. It would also be unadvisable to keep this process going on for all too long, because that could lead to the negative situation of no decision at all. Then too, it would be inappropriate for it to be too short, because that would hamper the necessary human and spiritual maturity required for a decision of this nature.

1.4. Also worthy of note is the fact that the strong friendship a young person begins to feel with his director can easily turn into a relationship of dependency making the task more difficult

Perhaps for the very first time the young person is experiencing the fact that there is someone listening to him, someone truly interested in who he is way down deep. It will therefore be necessary for the director to pace encounters in such a way that the young person will be able to know himself, project himself to others with great trustfulness, and at the same time exercise the sufficient degree of autonomy required by such a delicate decision.

2. THE GOAL OF ACCOMPANIMENT/DIRECTION DURING THIS STAGE

The main goal of accompaniment/direction during this stage in the life of a young person is none other than to help him discern his vocation. In other words, help him to see if this feeling of being called to follow Jesus in this particular form of religious life (and in the priestly ministry) is authentic or not, and accompany him in the steps implicit in this process of vocation discernment.

This is an endeavor to be undertaken with the young person himself. It will be necessary to tackle distinct facets of his vocation, his life and personality, as well as the needs and requirements of the Church, etc. All these are necessary elements for a vocational discernment as we will see later in this material.

2.1. Help him to know himself and project himself to others

Here we are in the realm of a young person's life history: e.g., his personality, the way he lives his current commitments in life, the distinct stages he has lived in his life of faith, his affective and sexual life, his life at home, at school or at work, his educational background, etc. Shared and analyzed in spiritual direction, all these elements will help the person in question to tackle a vocation decision later on with true knowledge of self, greater objectivity and hence a greater degree of liberty.

Then again, the unfolding of all these aspects in a young person's life will help the director to determine whether or not there are aspects of his life or personality which may constitute a clear obstacle for the vocation in question: e.g. serious interpersonal relationship difficulties, frustrations, conflicts yet to be overcome, childhood traumas, etc. Moreover, the director will be able to ascertain whether the individual does possess the positive conditions required for a life as demanding as the religious life and the priesthood. Therefore, it will not suffice to just dismiss grave conflicts. It is a question of the need to check whether the person has the maturity sufficient to embrace the vocation, the spirit of

resolve necessary to tackle personal growth, the spirit of service and out-reach ability inherent in this vocation, as well as the sufficient spiritual maturity demanded by it.

2.2. Help the person to live this experience as an authentic experience of faith

As far as the director is concerned, this will suppose clear-sightedness in order to detect and reveal those erroneous motivations which ordinarily come to the surface as the spiritual rationalization of apprehensions about life, needs to take flight from conflicts, an inability to assume normal commitments in life, or other personality problems.

The director will also help the individual to live this moment as a beautiful experience of God coming closer and closer as a friend and the encounter lived with Jesus; a unique and profound experience lived by a person with an intensity never experienced in life. This is an experience a young person has to enhance and preserve as a benchmark experience for the rest of his life. This is the experience of the first call, an experience the individual in question will be able to examine closely with the intimate assistance of his director, and which will impact the rest of his life.

2.3. Provide information about the objective elements inherent in this vocation

It pertains to the director to illustrate the vocation in its personal, social and ecclesial dimensions. He will also help the individual to acquire direct and objective knowledge of the vocation's constituent theological values, as well as the values proper to the religious life and the priesthood

2.4. Lastly, the director will attend to helping an individual to make a responsible and free decision

This is the ultimate goal of the entire process which began with an interest, a wish or vague vocational unrest, and which now, at the end of this process, must become a free decision. To that end, the young person in question will be able to count upon sufficient information as well as an awareness befitting his age as to what this commitment means.

3. ELEMENTS WORTHY OF ATTENTION IN THE PROCESS

We have already pointed out that the vocation to the religious life and the priesthood makes it necessary for a young person to possess certain characteristics and fulfill certain conditions, which can undoubtedly be identified with a high degree of objectivity. This is a good thing. Many times do young people, as well as some adults, identify the vocation with the mere interior sentiment of 'feeling the call' or experiencing the desire for the vocation in a very strong and vivid manner. The spiritual director will have to ascertain whether this feeling goes hand in hand with the objective conditions of a vocation in the Church of today and in a concrete community. We could conclude that constituent of the vocation will be the interior calling and the objective conditions set by the community, conditions which the director will present to the individual and assess with him.

As we go along we will be flagging some elements we deem absolutely necessary in the religious and/or priestly vocation. Moreover, each religious community as well as each historical period of the Church and the world may well present other and more specific requisites in harmony with the charism of a congregation or the concrete features of the community receiving a candidate.

3.1. Human maturity befitting one's age: affectivity, will power, ability to relate with others, normal intellectual abilities, family situation accepted as such, responsibility with respect to current commitments, etc.

3.2. Insertion in a youth environment with clear and healthy horizontal relations: an ability to establish and live friendships, a propensity not to be prone to conflicts, an ability to take on commitments with the group. Clearly ill suited from a vocational viewpoint would be a young person who lives in isolation and has no experience of group life. An equal cause for concern would be young people incapable of espousing the group's interests and always intent upon imposing their own.

3.3. A clear and fundamental concern for the Gospel in life. Spiritual unrest, social concern or humanitarianism alone do not suffice. An authentic vocation will have to be sustained by an intense experience of Jesus and His Gospel. Likewise insufficient will be an religious experience charged with emotions but bereft of roots on the authentic values of the Gospel.

3.4. The authenticity of the vocation wish grounded in a yearning to be of service and bolstered by the effective practice thereof. We often meet young people who live the inconsistency of an intense vocational wish with an unbeatable propensity to convenience, laziness, individualism or sheer apathy. An experience of generous and authentic service is the best evidence of a possible vocation.

3.5. Liberty in the face of a vocation expressed in a true desire to do God's will. The person who undertakes to search for this will does so because, while he does have other alternatives in life, he feels disposed to God's will and does not cling to it as the one and only option. Such a disposition will have to blend with the real ability and possibility to embrace this or another journey of commitment and personal fulfillment.

3.6. Ability of commitment and sacrifice. This ability becomes manifest in little things at this moment of discernment. Later on, however, it will have to be seen in the great sacrifices inherent in the vocation; e.g. foregoing matrimony, possessions, self-determination in life, etc.

It will be important to keep a close eye on the individual's life consistency, his ability to respond to commitments and expedite tasks, his strength of character and personal discipline. During the process of discernment it is customary for a young person to make marked progress in this area. The legitimate enthusiasm which awakens the vocation is often accompanied by a new ability to be self-demanding. If this begins to become manifest it will be a good sign with respect to the individual's character and the authenticity of his wish to enter the congregation.

3.7. Vocational enthusiasm as following of Jesus. A vocation experienced as a mere duty or the only option in life may lead to intense frustration and render impossibly any really participatory communion is a community together with other young people. On the other hand, a vocation marked by authentic enthusiasm forecasts a journey of true and free growth, including the possibility that God may ask for something else along the journey. Happiness and sound enthusiasm during the time of discernment are good signs in a young person.

3.8. The presence of the poor and those who suffer in the vocation intention as clear evangelical adhesion to them With the manifest awareness with which the Church today

has made this preferential option, this dimension may not be alien to the interests of a young person with a vocation: compassion and sorrow for those who suffer, a desire to be of service you them, a yearning for justice, etc. It will likewise be necessary to ascertain whether this desire to serve the poor and stand by them is accompanied by real detachment, austerity of life, true respect and esteem for social groups other than one's own. In the final analysis it is a matter of the existence of that sensitivity particular to the Gospel.

3.9. Lastly, the director must be familiar with and attend to the requisites and requirements issued by Episcopal Conferences and religious authorities regarding discernment for the religious life and the priesthood. This is delicate and important material which the director must know, and, as dictated by normal prudence, bring to the attention of those under his guidance.

4. POSSIBLE STEPS IN THE PROCESS OF ACCOMPANIMENT/DIRECTION AT THIS TIME

If we calculate a lengthy period of accompaniment/direction (more or less a year) during this time of vocation discernment before any decision to enter the community as a postulant, we can see it involves clearly distinct stages. These, however, are not preset timeframes, but rather distinct moments which each individual customarily lives in one way or another. The director may favor the pace of these stages in such a manner that an individual experiences a truly progressive process throughout this period of time. In this manner a task well proposed or an appropriate reflection at the right time may suggest the necessary pace from one stage to another in the process.

4.1. First stage: self-knowledge and vocation

The first stage in accompaniment/direction is characterized by the young person's introduction of self to his director. It is appropriate to plan on three or four conversations or interviews enabling the person in question to know more about himself, and the director to gain an appreciation of his past history, affective maturity, spiritual and ecclesial experience, etc. In this manner, over a period of time lasting more or less two months, the individual will have aired his vocational unrest, been invited to delve into his life as a whole in a process of dialogue with the director, and embarked upon this journey by letting the director know more about himself. What often develops is a progressive friendship with the director, as well as astonishment over the greater degree of self-knowledge.

We would also point out that the goals of accompaniment/direction during this stage are three in number: have the individual situate his vocation within the context of his history as a person and his personality, as well as within his family and the concrete Church where he lives; have the individual begin an integral process of growth and discernment; enable the director to form a global and adequate appreciation of the individual's maturity and the legitimacy of his vocation.

Most useful for this stage are some tools of self-knowledge such as an autobiography and life history. Provided in the annex to this chapter is an outline of the former.

4.2. Second stage: ordinary life and the vocation

This second stage is the time for reflection on the individual's ordinary life: his commitments (studies, work, pastoral endeavors, social activities, recreational pursuits, sports, etc.), his family life, his affective life (parents and siblings, relatives, male and

female friends, etc.), his spiritual life (prayer life, sacraments, etc.). Through conversations with the director it would seem important for the individual to enhance his day to day life and discover it as the place of his growth, his commitments, his encounter with God, his linkage with society, and the discovery of his own vocation.

It is important to point out that this is often the period of time when an individual discovers new possibilities of service in his life. Awareness of self, as well as his role to the degree that it becomes apparent, help him to acquire heightened self-confidence, greater awareness of his possibilities and, last but not least, greater spirit for a life of service. It therefore appears important to pay close attention to the growth experienced by the individual in this journey and help him become aware of this growth. In a young man whose vocational unrest is authentic, this period will make him enthusiastic about many things, enable him to appraise other alternatives, render his maturity and healthfulness manifest, and undoubtedly help his vocational unrest to acquire new, more resolute and more profound force. If the vocational unrest disappears, one must ask whether it was authentic or not; whether it might have been nothing more than an illusion, escapism or simply a lack of imagination in understanding other valid alternatives of Christian vocation and commitment.

4.3. Third stage: the religious life and the priesthood

This is the stage of reflection on the values proper to the commitment in the religious life and in the priesthood.

The previous stage should have lasted as long as the young person in question needed, and is ordinarily a long one because it has to be lived in depth and with due peace of mind. The spiritual director will be endowed with the patience to wait for as long as necessary. He will be prepared to have one, two, countless conversations without falling victim to exasperation because the issue of the vocation does not come to the surface. This may emerge spontaneously or the spiritual director may bring it up if he sees that the maturity of the young man so requires. It is likewise possible that during this process the individual may have been invited to take part in a vocation awareness day which brings the subject out into the open.

This new moment implies taking an additional step, which is to delve into objective reflection upon the values proper to the vocation which the individual has in mind for himself. This will involve discussion and conversations regarding the sense of fraternity, poverty, prayer, celibacy, obedience, the charism of the congregation, service in the Church, etc. In addition, the person in question should gradually discover and share what these values mean for his own life.

This stage therefore implies an objective reflection endeavor, and to this end it would appear useful to avail oneself of written materials dealing with the vocation, the vows, the following of Jesus, etc. In addition, this is the time to have the person in question read material illustrating the Congregation, its history and charism. During this time it is also important to offer an individual material helpful in his prayer life. In brief, this will be the suitable moment to help a young person identify with the most constituent elements of the vocation (cf. Module N°1, pg 109 and ff. "The Call in the Bible").

An important part of the journey during this stage must be an effort of constant prayer revised and supported by the spiritual director. It must also be recalled that this is the suitable time for an encounter with the individual's family. At the end of this stage of the beginning of the next one, the young person himself may feel it necessary for his director to

meet and know his family, especially when both or one of his parents are aware of the journey being traveled by their son.

4.4. Fourth stage: the vocation decision

This brings us to the final stage in this process, the stage of ultimate discernment and vocation decision by the young man in question.

We may assume that the young person who embarked upon the previous stage did so because deep down inside he had already made a vocation decision and knows he can count on the support of his director. Nonetheless, it is important for this young man to take it step by step in assuming this commitment, doing so in all consciousness and lucidity. It will likewise be important for him to be aware of and count on the explicit support of his spiritual director, and, later on, that of those who will accept and welcome him into the Congregation in an equally explicit manner.

It therefore seems important for the spiritual director to keep in mind certain fundamental elements regarding this time of decision:

- Each young man must reach his decision in an absolutely personal and free manner, with the best knowledge of the step he will be taking at this moment in his life;
- At the time of making the decision it is opportune for there be a moment when the young person does so explicitly in the presence of the director himself;
- When requesting admission to the Congregation a young person must count on the support of his director with respect to the decision made. It also seems important for the director to let a young person know in explicit terms that he can count on his support;
- A young person will have to be able to communicate this decision to his parents and relatives, and make a personal request to be accepted into the Congregation.

During this time it would be appropriate to contemplate one or more moments of more intimate and recollected prayer, much like a retreat. The young person in question must delve into his spiritual experience in such a manner that, with the degree of certainty possible in a mystery such as this, he recognizes his vocation as a call God is making personally to him.

We well understand the importance of this moment being lived by an individual. It constitutes an opportunity to cultivate those attitudes which are to accompany him all life long: complete readiness to embrace the will of God; awareness that the vocation is a gift of God; recognition of personal talents received as a gift of God; acknowledgment of his shortcomings and difficulties as an ongoing endeavor of purification; the wish to consecrate himself to God with no strings attached.

A young person has to know that arising on the fringes of such a decision are the apprehensions natural to any major commitment. If he is able to live them with a certain peace of mind and an undertone of authentic happiness, it will be a clear sign of the maturity bestowed by this final step in discernment. Quite naturally, prayer will help an individual to live this time in his life with serene joyfulness.

5. THE THEME OF TRUST: A FUNDAMENAL INTERVIEW

One of the most common experiences for young persons during this time of vocational discernment is the fact that they come face to face with themselves in such a manner that they establish a relationship of trust with the director that will enable them to delve deeply within themselves, even into some experiences never revealed to anyone. Opened for them is the possibility to savor sure and respectful trust, without the slightest risk of betrayal. This is why we venture to propose the use of a sort of interview, which may well be the only one of its nature for the rest of their lives.

In effect, the person in question has been daring to speak about himself with ever increasing trustfulness. He has been opening a pathway of friendship and trust, and opens himself with neither half measures nor vested interests. He has dared to open himself and in so doing is committing himself more and more with himself and with his director. He realizes that what is happening is going to commit his own life and therefore he cannot falsify his own truth.

This atmosphere created in a personal interview may well emerge in the course of the first encounter with an individual who comes to expose his vocational unrest. Other young persons may have had another director and as a result of an interview with another person for selection or other purposes may feel it possible to raise issues they had not broached with their regular director. We know that young people don't always dare to share very personal information with a friend-confidant. The fear of losing face, ruining a friendship, or allowing for potential betrayal of trust means that young people forever hold on to the secret of a disturbing experience, which may even cast a shadow over their lives.

During this time of vocational discernment, therefore, we propose facilitating the possibility for a young person to have this confidential or first interview that will touch upon the most guarded reaches of his intimacy.

Experience also tells us that this is ordinarily a traumatic experience touching upon a person's sex life, family life, relationship with money and honesty. The most difficult to share are perhaps those experiences that involve family members or reveal family situations being lived with shame and suffering.

Proposed below are a series of steps or modes for conducting this interview.

5.1. Create a receptive environment of trust and liberty

It is important to bring to the attention of the person in question that the vocational experience he is living is a unique experience, one of the most beautiful ones in his life; a delicate experience which is somehow defining the contours of his entire life. The mere fact of raising the possibility of the vocation is an event which leaves its traces in a person's life.

It is advisable to make it clear that our function is none other than to accompany his journey, helping him to discern what God wills of him.

It will also be necessary to make him realize that he himself will make any decision, but to that end has to open up and let himself be accompanied.

It is necessary to avoid being overly condescending, affable or fawning. We might thus project the erroneous image of wanting to win the individual over with flattery and he himself may feel uncomfortable.

5.2. Propose to the young person a conversation dealing with his life as a whole

It is important to point out that our interest is rooted in the personhood of the individual and not his vocation.

Then again, the individual must realize that the vocation is not just a religious or spiritual issue, but something which impacts his life at large.

This is why what we propose is a broad ranging conversation: tell me about yourself, introduce yourself. What things seem to be bothering you today? Illustrate the history of your vocation. Tell me more about you, your family, your childhood, your schooling. . . What has been your relationship with Jesus? What or who is Jesus for you?

5.3. Help the person become aware of the experience he is living at this moment

It may well be advisable at times to interrupt the dialogue so the individual may appreciate what he is actually doing, appreciate the conversation and the budding trustfulness: How did you feel as you spoke to me about yourself? Did it help to know yourself better? What did you like the most about what you shared with me? What cost you the most to talk about?

5.4. Make progress in depth and trust

If a good degree of empathy is being established with the individual, he may be asked to go even deeper into what he is talking about: now tell me something about your affective and sexual life, what you remember from your childhood; tell me more about your family (this is ordinarily an individual's most private realm).

5.5. Communication of what is most personal of all

If a good atmosphere of trustfulness has been established, offered to the individual may be the possibility to talk about something he has never shared with anyone.

Both young people and adults usually keep deep within themselves those experiences which may have been traumatic in their lives. At times they form part of the selfsame root of the vocation, either as a desire to redeem something lived with feelings of guilt or indebtedness with God, as a form of escapism, or as an attitude of disappointment with life in general.

This point could be raised with an individual in the following manner. . . I'd now like to ask you something very personal. Many young people. . . This is a very common fact. . . have lived experiences that have marked them in a negative manner. These are ordinarily difficult experiences to talk about; the mere fact of focusing on them may well inflate them out of proportion and cause a sense of malaise or even bitterness. Such experiences vary from one individual to another: at times there are family-related experiences or problems, while at other times they are sexual experiences, like playing around, cases of sexual abuse or other traumas; other experiences place a person's selfsame image on the line because they have to do with personal honesty in cases such as stealing, doing things without

permission, etc. Now, I'm saying all this to you because this could be an opportunity to share these things with someone who can help you come to terms with these problems.

5.6. Total and absolute respect for liberty

It is important not to rush things and for an individual to perceive quite clearly that our endeavor is in no way dictated by mere curiosity, but by an authentic desire to accompany him.

5.7. Reinforcing the experience lived in the interview

At the end of the interview it would be a good idea to undertake a sort of 'rerun' of what was discussed, and would be advisable for the individual to do this himself. What have you brought out into the open in this interview or conversation? It's also advisable for the individual in question to take stock of his feelings and thereby better gauge what he has shared and what this conversation has meant for his personal life. How did you feel? What particular feelings did you experience during this conversation?

We must realize that perhaps most important of all will be the moment lived by the person himself in the selfsame interview as an event for his life. This is why it will be necessary to highlight recognition of the feelings lived during it. What the individual will always remember may perhaps not be the actual substance of the interview, but what he experienced as relief, liberation and knowledge of self. If all that proved possible, it will be necessary to add the degree of growth attained in self-appreciation and esteem, as well as the progress made in the person's vocational discernment: all this as fruit of the experience of the trust placed in another person. This is why we can say that we are dealing with an experience we can well define as fundamental.

As far as the next step is concerned, it will be appropriate for the individual to draw some conclusions about himself and his vocational motivations. Once this has been done, the successive steps may be decided upon together with him: With whom will you discuss any outstanding issues? What these do you have to tackle in any case? What steps should be taken in the pursuit of this discernment?

5.8. The formator's impression and image of the young person

At the end of the interview the formator will not only have been able to help the individual in question, but will also have put together a very complete picture of him: his personal characteristics, his conditions for a possible vocation in the community; his deepest intentions and motivations; the real possibilities of an authentic vocation, the work to be done farther down the road, etc. Quite naturally, we can only affirm what resides in the realm of possibility or potential after a first interview with a person. Nonetheless, we can say that unveiled in an encounter like this is an important part of the mystery which each person represents.

At the end of the conversation it can be good for the individual himself if we offer a clear presentation of our opinion of him. This can prove to be a good tool offered to him for his own journey as time unfolds.

5.9. The next step in liberty

It would seem important to provide an individual with real space for the exercise of his liberty. Let him take the initiative and make the decision to return or not. Offered to

him, therefore, may be the possibility to continue the encounter experience as long as he deems it opportune and takes it upon himself to suggest the next conversation.

6. SELECTION CRITERIA

There is no doubt that one of the most serious challenges to be faced by a formator or a spiritual director during this time of vocation discernment is the selection of candidates. It is no more and no less of a matter than accepting or refusing a young man who wants to enter religious life and the priesthood. This is undoubtedly a task far beyond us, a task which must be performed in the context of the vocation as a call from God and not merely a personal desire or something dependent upon the needs of the Congregation or the Church herself.

Moreover, we are dealing with one of the most personal experiences a young person can live, one of the most binding and mysterious experiences. This is one of those experiences that fall within the mainstream of the faith and the ability of a human being to commit his life by virtue of an ideal. This is why we ourselves abound with respect and apprehension. Countless questions come to mind: How can we know if this is an authentic vocation? What can we do to make sure we are not being misled and possibly exposing an individual to lifelong failure? With what authority may I take a stand on this highly personal matter? Do I have any right to deny an individual a positive response to this call he feels with his whole heart?

This is precisely one of the reasons why our judgment must be imbedded in objective criteria, which can help us in taking sure steps. Placing our trust in sheer intuition of personal wisdom may lead us in the direction of ambiguous or doubtful decisions. How often has affection for an individual, recognition of his qualities, or other forms of appreciation made us reach a wrong conclusion! We have to look for objective criteria that help us discern God's will with the greatest possible degree of liberty and not our own will.

The Church has always paid very close attention to this issue. Referring to the priestly vocation, the Exhortation "Pastores dabo vobis" tells us "the vocation exists in the Church and for the Church, and is realized in her" Each candidate "receives the vocation from the Lord as a free gift". It is the task of the competent ecclesiastical authority "not only to examine the suitability and vocation of a candidate, but also to recognize it". Nowadays, thanks be to God, we have documents drawn up by Episcopal Conferences and conferences of religious in individual countries that provide us with the aforementioned criteria with utmost authority and judiciousness. In this sense we may not stray from these guidelines that are so urgent in our present day and age. We ourselves can also count on the documents of the Congregation in this area, such as the documents recently approved by our Chapter.

All these documents touch more or less upon the following topics: underlying motives the candidates ordinarily have (confusion, difficulties in facing life, evasion, etc.); family situation; experience of the faith and the Church; personal, intellectual, moral and affective maturity, etc. We already had an opportunity to refer to them in this chapter when we illustrated the aspects or features we must observe in an individual who approaches our community.

Annex: OUTLINE FOR AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The outline presented below is intended to be of assistance as you reflect on important aspects of your personal life, as well as a means of dialogue with the person accompanying you in your Christian and vocational maturation.

In order to answer the questions read through them a number of times and then reflect on each one of these aspects in a very personal and spontaneous manner, being guided in what you write down by what comes to mind, without worrying a great deal about the style or logic of what you write. Try to do this at a time when you feel at peace and can concentrate on the task at hand.

1. Your family

Your parents: who are they? What do they do? What are their interests, their opinions? How are they? (main characteristics or features of their way of being).

Your brothers and/or sisters? How many are they? Where do you come in among them? How do you get along with them? What are the most important problems you have with them?

The atmosphere in your home: how are your relations with your parents? How is the affective atmosphere at home? In your opinion, what are the main conflicts you live at home? How are relations between your home and your friends, relatives and neighbors? With whom do you get along best at home? Worse?

2. The history of your life

Childhood memories: Narrate what you consider to be your most important childhood memories, whether they be fears, fantasies, games, persons you admired, etc. Considering elements from your childhood, which ones do you feel mark your way of being?

Friendships: Are you outgoing and friendly, or withdrawn? How well do you become part of a group? Does it cost you great deal to talk about yourself? How do you see friendship? Are you satisfied with the way you relate with others? Do you depend very much on what others may say about you? Do you consider yourself very dependent or independent with respect to others?

Studies: Do you have good grades and study with profit? (What was your average last year?) Do you feel like you really belong to the student body? What are your main interests and hobbies? Have you occupied any offices (elected or otherwise) where you study? How do you get along with your teachers?

Major illnesses and accidents: ...

3. Affective life

Your emotions: do you feel loved and accepted by others (at home, among your friends, etc.)? Are you stable in your affections? Do you know how to love and commit yourself with those you love? Do you tend to be sad or happy? How do you react when you feel mad or bothered? Who makes you suffer the most here on earth?

Your affective relations: Have you had girlfriends? If so, what did you learn from them? How do you imagine your ideal companion? Have you had any negative experiences in this affective realm?

Sex education: Do you think you have sound sexual information? Do you have any doubts in this area? How did you get your education in this regard? Do you think you have any concerns or problems in the area of sexual maturity?

4. The image you have of yourself

Self-image: Are you satisfied with your way of being and doing? What would you like to change or correct? Do you feel able to attain that to which you aspire? What do you think about the way others see you, what they think about you? Are you very concerned about attending to your image in what you do?

Ideals and aspirations: Which goals would you like to reach over the next few (three) years? Which personal characteristics would you like to acquire? What are the main hurdles or problems you encounter in your self-fulfillment?

5. Participation in the Church

History of your personal faith: What helped you assume your faith in a personal way: facts, individuals, activities, events, etc.? How do you cultivate your faith? What formation have you received?

Your participation in the Church: Has it been active or passive? In which groups, activities or movements have you participated? What do you think about the Church in your country? What responsibilities have you assumed in this area?

Your personal vocation, the religious life and the priesthood: For how long has this unrest been simmering within you? What facts induce you to consider this possibility? What have you done to mature a decision in this regard? What is your ideal image of a religious, a priest? Why do you think the SS.CC. Congregation can respond to your aspirations? What do you know about the SS.CC. Congregation?

Third Chapter

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

DURING POSTULANCY

(José Vicente Odriozola Gurruchaga ss.cc.)

Introduction

- 1. Some characteristics of the stage of Postulancy**
- 2. The contents of spiritual accompaniment/direction during this stage**
- 3. Complementary observations**

INTRODUCTION

As soon as a young person concludes initial discernment and decides to enter the Congregation he will begin a long journey that implies traveling different stages. Part and parcel of an ongoing process, these stages are very distinct from one another. We can distinguish at least the three states of Postulancy, Novitiate and Juniorate or time of temporary profession.

The particularity specific to each stage will enable us to see that formation accompaniment/spiritual direction is required in a distinct manner in each one of them. The objectives of the stage as such and the needs of the person living it are distinct and imply an equally distinct type of accompaniment/direction. It is one thing to accompany a postulant, while it is a completely different thing to do so with a novice who has his Master of Novices, or a professed brother who has begun a phase of adult religious life with the profession of the vows, but is still in the process of formation and requires of his director a very different attitude in terms of formation accompaniment and spiritual direction.

A few suggestions regarding spiritual direction

Areas to focus upon: These are the distinct facets of the person which the director must keep ever in mind during the accompaniment process, even though they obviously don't have to be brought up at each encounter:

- Affectivity: personal relations with the community, the family, friends, in the apostolate or at school; assumption of sexuality in its genital, effective and emotional dimensions, etc.
- Work: personal responsibility, response to tasks assigned, personal preparation for commitments assumed, studies, attention to personal and spiritual development, development of a person's personal project, stewardship of money, roles, etc.;
- Ideals: personal nature of the experience of God, religious and spiritual motivations, deepest commitments and options, as well as their ensuing life consequences, living of the vows and fraternity, etc.;
- Prayer: adequate expression of the personal encounter with God, more intimate relationship with Him; prayer as ministerial exercise of the apostolate; reading of Sacred Scripture; adoration, etc.;
- Personhood: the vital center where all the aforementioned dimensions come together; physical and mental health, acceptance and appreciation of self, happiness and personal harmony, development of individual talents, relaxation and gratuitousness, etc.

The ultimate objective of all spiritual accompaniment/direction

We could define spiritual accompaniment/direction as support of or closeness to a young man who wishes to travel a journey in the discernment of God's will and fully adhere thereto as the fulfillment of his life.

At times it will be to accompany, at times to suggest, and at other times to stimulate an individual at difficult moments in his life or in critical situations, helping him to clarify the situation in question and adopt the means to resolve it from an outlook of faith.

It will always be a matter of helping an individual to embrace the Will of God for himself, together with all its requirements and consequences.

At this point we would like to introduce what Fr. Evelio Ferreras, spiritual director and psychologist, tells us about the aim of all spiritual accompaniment/direction:²

The objective of all accompaniment/direction

Accompaniment/direction will always be personal and personalizing. This is why it will always assume an original modality adapted to each concrete situation. Nonetheless, I do consider it a good idea to offer a few general indications applicable to all situations.

Any spiritual accompaniment/direction endeavor strives to attain *three general objectives in the person accompanied*:

- *That he sees and accepts his own personal situation.*
In other words, help the person see as clearly as possible where he is, why he is in this situation, and why in this way.
- *That he can assume responsibility for himself.*
That he may become aware of the share of responsibility pertaining to him in the situation he is living, as well as the share pertaining to God and to others. In consistency therewith, that he may decide to accept the changes requested of him by the situation he is living.
- *That he deploys the right means to bring about changes.*
This is the most difficult, courageous and demanding door. However, it is also the most necessary so the reality known and assumed may change for the better.

Diverse personal situations

The consecrated vocation is gift and grace, but likewise response. And not all responses are the same. We could say that within the great diversity of responses there are *three major modalities for living the response*.

- *Situation of maturity*
Proper to the individual who has surmounted the requirements in each one of the levels of his personality during the previous stages, and is today empowered to give a response befitting the stage he is living. The primordial task of accompaniment/direction with mature persons like this will be to confirm and consolidate what they are doing, with corrections and fine tuning limited to what is deemed opportune.
- *Situation of immaturity*
Proper to those individuals who have not properly surmounted the requirements of the previous stages and hence have facets of their personality which have not matured. Whether intellectual, affective or moral, these aspects of immaturity come across in the inappropriate manner of living and responding to the vocational requirements of this moment in time. It is a matter of visualizing, correcting and overcoming these shortcomings. Otherwise, the person's life and vocational response will be both inappropriate and unsatisfactory. If the crises giving rise to this immature way of living and behaving are not resolved, the

² "Los retos de la década de los 30" P. Evelio Ferreras. Testimonio N°174; Jul.-Ago.99; pag.18 and ff.

individual's process remains static and his spiritual fecundity is rent asunder. All this will have painful repercussions not only on a personal level, but also in the people of God (or the community).

- *Situations of infirmity*

Here it is a matter of those persons, who, for one reason or another, have suffered profound deterioration and reached the point of infirmity in both psychological and moral terms. Such persons need help and special treatment, without which they may not continue their journey. Their life and vocation will end up battered and sterile.”

End of the material cited from the book by Fr. Evelio Ferreras

1. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STAGE OF POSTULANCY

Before actually beginning our reflections on this stage we consider it advisable to recall that Postulancy for the sisters lasts for one year and the novitiate two, while Postulancy for the brothers lasts for two years and the novitiate one. Even though this separate modality does impress certain special characteristics in each case, we believe that in both cases there are fundamental and basic objectives that coincide in full. We shall make an effort to flag differences whenever we deem it opportune.

The Postulancy is usually an intense experience of ‘initiation’. An individual who has been pondering his vocation possibility and gone through a period of serious discernment, enters a community to be initiated, to live the Religious Life in the context proper to a community of persons following the Lord. He begins a new life with features totally different from the life lived thus far, since from the very outset he undertakes to live the values and commitments of the Religious Life in the Congregation. Beginning is a new stage of his life, which implies detachment from his family and his previous commitments. Likewise implied is the taking on of a new style of life, which, while not being in opposition to his life before and actually quite similar to it, is profoundly different insofar as sustained by the desire to consecrate oneself forever to the Lord and do so one day explicitly in the Congregation. Therefore, this is a time of substantial personal and affective development, together with the crises and stages corresponding to the affective development to be taken into consideration throughout the time of Postulancy (cf. The material studied in the Module on Affectivity)..

For many young people the time of Postulancy involves a cultural shock difficult to live. There are those who come from the countryside and have to come to terms with the new world of city life, those who come from cultural ethnies other than that of city dwellers, and, lastly, those who have not clearly come to grips with the cultural changes of our times and have to get along in a world they consider hostile, etc. At a certain point in the course it will be necessary to tackle this important theme of inter-cultural encounter within the Initial Formation of young persons, because this factor is heightened later on in the international formation communities.

In this specific context, Postulancy, or Pre-Novitiate as it is called in some places (especially when people want to highlight the period closest to Novitiate), is the stage where, on the basis of living in a community the values of religious life in the Congregation, it is possible for an individual to continue his discernment on the authenticity of his call with better knowledge of himself, the call received, and the Congregation which

has welcomed him. Moreover, it will be a time when the Congregation will have an opportunity to become more familiar with an individual, with his personal characteristics and the true motivations which led him to take this step of commitment with Jesus.

Knowledge of self, knowledge of the sense of the vocation as the following of Jesus in his style of life, and knowledge of the Congregation will be the subjects running throughout this period of time more as an experience lived and pondered in the community than as topics for study and reflection.

The major and fundamental experiences lived during this time will constitute the characteristics of this stage: the experience of one's growth and personal development, the experience of God in the following of Christ, and the experience of community in the life and mission of the Congregation. These also constitute the most relevant elements of the accompaniment/direction which an individual will need from his director.

Before delving into these elements or contents of spiritual accompaniment/direction, we consider it important to point out that the life context of our postulants is of fundamental importance for living the aforementioned experiences in a fitting manner. We may well be repeating what has been set forth in the Congregation's documents on Initial formation in the Congregation, but we would like to flag three basic characteristics we expect of our communities of postulants:

- that it be an experience of an authentic life of community based not on rules, but on intercommunication, openness to all, and the quality of relations;
- that it be an experience of vocational life and discernment in which personal and community life is assumed in an active and creative manner as an experience of faith, wherein errors and misunderstandings are sources of learning and growth, fruits of true conversion;
- that it be an experience of liberty and commitment, where each person's pace is respected and fraternal correction occupies an important place in the community's spiritual life.

2. THE CONTENTS OF SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT/DIRECTION DURING THIS STAGE

We know this spiritual accompaniment/direction involves the person as a whole. We cannot divide the person into watertight compartments that have no need to relate with one another. Nor could we tackle all the aspects which should be part of serious accompaniment. We would just like to touch upon some of the contents or elements we consider characteristic of this stage.

2.1. The experience of one's growth and personal development

It is quite possible that studying will be the main activity of our young postulants in the Congregation. In the case of brothers this ordinarily corresponds to the beginning of their studies of philosophy as part of the curriculum in preparation for the priestly ministry. Nonetheless, this usually isn't the activity which has the most striking impact upon them. New events in their lives such as detachment from their families for some of them, living subject to a community for others, personal exchange in community life, as well as the new ordering and style of prayer, etc., mean that an individual experiences an important

personal change that propels him to come face to face with himself in a different way and therefore also see himself in a different way in the presence of others.

The postulancy experience lived in a community of life with the aforementioned characteristics is undoubtedly a privileged ambit for personality development. Spiritual accompaniment/direction must not only recognize this fact, but also tend to integrate it in all its dimensions. In effect, and as we saw earlier, a young person's life undergoes a radical change when he enters the community. Beginning for him is a growth process we could characterize as an awakening of self-awareness, awareness of others from the viewpoint of the mystery of interpersonal relations, and awareness of each person's vocation project as the ideal to be realized in life.

What we would like to do is highlight the fact that it is a matter of a dynamic growth process embracing all the dimensions of an individual's personality, and we must see to it that this growth is both harmonious and fully integrated into an individual's spiritual journey. Therefore, analyzing certain aspects of an individual's personality will occupy much of the time dedicated to the spiritual accompaniment/direction of a postulant. We have already said something much along the same lines. It is not a matter of mere psychological work, but rather a basic understanding of who is the complete person involved in this spiritual process. Then again, this process is by no means alien to a person's profile and surroundings as member of a family, student or worker. Moreover, these surroundings somehow characterize the spiritual experience of a postulant.

Considering the fact that entering our communities as postulants are young men of different ages and backgrounds with different experiences in terms of studies, family life and work, we would like to highlight some features that call for special attention on the part of a formator, without expecting to exhaust all the elements or features implicit in this growth dimension.

2.1.1. Knowledge and appreciation of self

It is quite possible that an individual's initial behavior may be conditioned by the desire to "correspond" to the image of a postulant he himself has created or imagined. Spontaneously arising will be the wish to comply, gratify and adapt himself to the model projected by the group. This is a normal tendency to be lived in agreement with an "ought-to-be" that enables a person to feel good, feel sure of himself, and feel both accepted and integrated into the group.

An individual will soon begin to experience the inner tension between what "he is" and what he either believed or was led to believe "he should be". This marks the beginning of the journey to know oneself better; an individual begins to appreciate and give value to his life, his feelings and his own character. Moreover, this is the beginning of the journey of authenticity, self-appreciation, self-acceptance and self-control on the basis of values which do belong to him and form part of his life.

The formator will sustain this moment of encounter with self where mistakes and achievements, failures and successes are going to start coming to the surface. Born is the profound experience of love for self, knowing one is loved for what he is, and loving others for what they are. Without realizing it, an individual embarks upon a process of bestowing affection, receiving it from others, and becoming able to enter into the experience of self-donation for the Lord.

The outcome of this process will be the gradual attainment of sound personal harmony, where the affective sphere, the sexual dimension, emotions, relations with others, the experience of the faith and the religious commitment are being integrated and lived in all serenity in an experience of profound happiness.

Worthy of note at this point are some important caveats regarding those postulants of ours who come from sectors of society looked down upon, broken families, or families afflicted by alcoholism or problems of the like. In such cases it is not rare to encounter in phenomena of self-depreciation, self-contempt, inconformity and fear, as well as the propensity to put things off 'sine die'. These are issues which have to be tackled in a clear and profound manner during this stage of formation. Any delay or postponement in tackling them can cause complicated situations for such an individual in his community, and, in the future, this will hamper any authentic integration and full personal development on his part.

It is likewise common to deal with young people who have lived premature sexual experiences, some of which were traumatic. We believe this issue has to be tackled as early as possible, as soon as it comes to the surface, and always begin with an endeavor to liberate the individual from what has been traumatic or prejudicial for his own self-respect. It will then be necessary to accompany such a person towards a positive vision of sexuality and celibacy, while at the same time paying due attention to the traces left behind by such an experience.

A similar problem arises with individuals who enter the community at an older age. The Congregation's guidelines regarding brothers indicate that an individual older than 27 years of age requires different treatment in his formation process. In effect, it is not advisable to include individuals already well formed in their personality, as is the case of those over the age of 27, with young persons who are just entering that stage of young adulthood. In those who are already adults it is difficult to perceive an interior and effective readiness to embark upon a process of letting themselves be molded by new values, new requirements in personal relations, and new challenges in the face of life.

In the accompaniment/direction of these individuals the formator will have to make sure he focuses the same attention and care on integrating all the elements of the person in one and the same experience of faith and personal development, which must move in the direction of authentic harmony, making generous donation of self to the Lord and others possible.

A last point is one we will not deal with as a specific issue in this document, but it has to do with cultural differences among young postulants. Such differences are more acute in some countries than in others. We are becoming more and more aware of this issue with each passing day and must pay close attention to it. When these differences are readily evident, for example, between young people from rural areas and their peers from cities, or young people of indigenous origin and others who aren't, they can give rise to harsh personal and community conflicts which an individual doesn't always live with full awareness and may interpret in an erroneous manner.

2.1.2. Ability to take on commitments and respond to them

The personality of a postulant has yet had to face the need of freely embraced commitment. Practically everything has thus far been imposed upon him in one way or another. The formator will foster integral growth to the degree that he orients an individual

to the progressive assumption of personal and community commitments. Of great importance are the small or minor commitments an individual assumes, because they are part and parcel of his personal response to the Lord, who makes His will known in the little things of life. The spiritual director will stimulate an individual to undertake projects and tasks, and will help him assess his achievements and his shortcomings. The periodical revision and assessment of his performance by a young person himself will help him make those tasks and projects an integral part of his personal growth and spiritual development. Thereby playing an important role will be what we call the elaboration of a personal life project.

2.1.3. Relationship with authority

This is an important and characteristic element in a postulant's growth process. The relationship with authority will often be the expression of the experience a young person had in the relationship with his parents or others who exercised this role in his life. At this point it is normal for an individual to undergo a lengthy process of change in the journey towards autonomy.

We can't really delve that deeply into this issue, which very much pertains to the sphere of psychology. All we would like to point out is that the formator must assign utmost importance to it, and that the superior, the formator and the selfsame community (conceived as authority by the person in formation) channel all the experience of authority an individual brings with him into the community, and which he connects in a direct manner with his own experience of God as Father.

The formator must help an individual to bring out into the open any conflicts he may have with the 'father image', purify the image and relationship with God and the brothers, and stimulate true autonomy in the response to the Lord

Undoubtedly passing through moments of dependence, rebellion and liberal individualism, etc., the selfsame process of autonomy will reveal the growth or stagnation of an individual in his development. We consider it important for the formator to assume the position of a brother accompanying this process. In this manner he will make a substantial contribution to enriching a relationship with authority – and with God – as one of responsible and adult dialogue, not childish submission.

2.1.4. Development and intellectual maturation

The task of helping an individual grow entails the development of his intellectual abilities. Spiritual and formative accompaniment, together with the community, will help, among other things, to rouse critical judgment, interest in the truth, openness to new horizons, and the ability to relativize personal judgments.

Primordial in this development is the contribution made by regular academic studies and group reflection. It will nonetheless be necessary for the formator to accompany very closely this intimate experience of ideological change, which ordinarily takes place during the early stages of postulancy when an individual has received countless impacts in this area.

We also have to consider that recommended reading material, personal reflection with an individual and in community on contingent issues, as well as conversations dealing with

the sense of life and current events will be important sources for the organization of a mind frame that gives sense to life and the commitment with it.

2.1.5. Ability to relate with the surrounding environment in an appropriate manner

Very much present in the formation process of a young person is the social dimension. We cannot reduce spiritual accompaniment/direction to nothing more than what pertains to his inner self. His life unfolds and develops in relationship with brothers and sisters, in a student environment, in his country and his Church today. Formation accompaniment in this area will exercise a function of harmony regarding the tension and conflicts triggered by coming face to face with this reality. Strong external social pressure easily triggers in an individual a sort of submission, which prevents him from voicing his own opinion or leads him to do things with no conviction at all, thereby bringing about true interior breakdowns in the long run.

Once again we would like to call for special attention to be paid to those young men who come from places far distant from big cities and who, for their rural upbringing, ethnic origin or cultural background, find it difficult to adapt to modern urban culture. The formator's sensitivity in the face of such a problem will help him make this challenge a very valuable and positive instrument in an individual's process of appreciating what is his own in a relationship of real dialogue with what he has to live.

The religious vocation and the priesthood constitute authentic services for the world and can in no way disregard or leave aside these dimensions of life. Quite on the contrary, they must assign priority attention to them. The spiritual meaning of this personality dimension has a substantial repercussion in the present and future religious and priestly vocation of a young person. It comes down to the progressive discovery, development and integration of the requirements, challenges and stimuli of the surrounding environment, together with the development of the postulant's resoluteness, as well as his spiritual and human foundations.

2.2. The spiritual life

The task of discernment does not end with the attainment of human maturity or a well balanced personality. Nor is a guarantee of a vocation the fact that a person does not manifest indications contrary to such a style of life. Ever present in spiritual direction must be the theme of the Faith. That is what will bind together a person's existence as a whole and introduce him into the journey where the Spirit will reveal Jesus Christ to him as a person worthy to be loved, a person he will want to follow for the rest of his life.

In this section we would like to highlight four dimensions of the spiritual experience proper to this stage: the experience of God, the following of Christ, the journey of prayer, and consecration in the mission.

2.2.1. The experience of God

The experience of God as openness to being loved is for us an experience rooted in our own encounter with Jesus Christ. God has been revealed to us in full in Jesus Christ and His Spirit. This experience is a personal happening, and as such is determinant in nature for each and every one of us.

Each young man comes to us with his own experience and image of God discovered and nourished within his family, in his home town, and in his parish surroundings. In a short time it is quite possible that he may begin to feel a certain degree of tension mounting within him. There is no doubt that an experience of community life oriented by the desire to know Jesus better and follow Him much closer draws an individual nearer and nearer to an increasingly evangelical experience of Jesus. He may well no longer need what he used to do and say in order to relate to Him. Many of our young men bring along their traditional experiences of prayer and faith; others, especially those who come from the countryside, live a very simple and unlearned faith, which will soon collide with the faith discovered in scripture studies and theology. It may well be that familiar devotions and previous religious practices no longer respond to their new awakening to a new faith.

The formator will have to accompany the growth of an individual in this new encounter with God on the basis of his own previous experience. He will have to help him explore his own life's history in depth and therein discover the God who has loved him from the very beginning and is offering Himself to him. Therein will he be able to discover anew God, creator and merciful Father. If an individual harbors an image of God as a harsh judge, which is the vestige of deformed and moralizing religious formation, the formator will help him move from the letter of the law to the spirit and reason of the law, which is the love of God the Father.

The process lived by young people during this time is a true journey of conversion, which will then enable them to embark upon a journey of new life in the spirit of Jesus.

2.2.2. The following of Christ

The experience of God in Christ is the reason why a young man commits himself for God's cause. This commitment will involve his entire being because it stems from a personal and decisive response to Jesus Christ, who calls individuals to adhere first and foremost to His person. Here does an individual have the ultimate reason for his very existence.

It is very understandable that a young man comes to the community with unclear ideals and motivations. The experience each person has of Jesus will be the starting point for a journey of growth, through which he will refer constantly to the person and mission of Jesus in his life.

As a first step, it will be necessary for the young person in question to feel loved by Jesus and understand that the salvific initiative and the call are acts of personal love. Acknowledging and accepting this generates happiness and constitutes the seed of personal plenitude.

In the face of this encounter a young person begins to experience the downfall of previous idols and exchanges them for Jesus in His person. Quite often egocentric and self-assertive, his motivations will soon give way to ones that pursue the service of the Kingdom.

It pertains to the formator to accompany an individual's change and evolution, offering him input and elements to bolster this personal encounter with Christ: meditation on vocational texts, the living of the sacraments and the service of charity.

2.2.3. The journey of prayer

Prayer occupies a primordial position in the self-affirmation of a person, the experience of God and the following of Christ. And we are well aware that prayer is not just a set of formulas or readings. Prayer is encounter; prayer is always an encounter linked to one's life and everything around it.

The encounter between two persons is something to be lived and discovered, not taught or learned. The best way to grasp this is through encountering others by choice and by chance. Moreover, achieved along the way and as a result of knowing persons is a purification of prejudices and erroneous ideas about others. Thus is prayer: reciprocal encounter and dialogue between God and man.

In his hands the formator bears the task of teaching young people, much like Jesus Christ did, to embark upon the journey of recognizing God as Father through direct experience. This Christian prayer rests on two pillars: prayer which begins from that personal indigence in which we feel poor and in such need of God; and prayer where God takes the initiative and communicates Himself to us. It will also be necessary to learn how to listen within to what God is saying to us.

From the very outset an individual will recognize two instances of prayer: personal prayer and community prayer. Experience teaches us that we must not separate them, but insist that they are to be united and actually need one another. A good life of personal prayer leads us to the community celebration of the faith in praise and thanksgiving; good community prayer requires personal times of reflection and meditation.

Special attention in formation regarding community prayer will be focused on practical accompaniment in liturgical prayer in order to be able to celebrate the mysteries of salvation with the Church at large. Care for the celebration of the Eucharist in community and the introduction to adoration as the continuation of this celebration in the sacramental presence of Jesus are, for us in the Congregation, two fundamental dimensions of our way of living the following of Christ. In them do we express, live and celebrate our faith committed with the Risen Lord.

It behooves the formator to be side by side with an individual in this very personal experience in such a manner that prayer is always intimately united to his life and to the life of humankind. For this reason, progress in prayer will be closely linked with an individual's commitment with the community and those he wishes to serve.

2.2.4. Consecration in the mission

Present in accompaniment dialogue during this stage must be the subject of consecration as the concrete response we wish to give to the Lord.

When joining the community young persons are invited to already begin living religious consecration, even though they are not canonically obliged to do so. In fact, a young person begins living this new style of life upon entry into the community. This is most certainly a period of apprenticeship in this regard, but he will learn to live these fundamental options from the very outset.

Consecration and mission are two sides of one and the same coin. They cannot be separated.

Young people, especially males, nowadays enter our communities marked more by the mission and their pastoral experiences than by consecration, which does not strike them as gift and grace offered with a view to the Lord's exclusive service. Nonetheless, beginning with the mission and apostolic concerns, and with the assistance of both the formator and the community, they will gradually enter into this more oblativistic dimension of their vocation which endows the mission with sense and force

The public manifestation of our consecration takes place through the life of the evangelical counsels. It is most probable that few of our postulants will be able to give a good definition of the vows. They nonetheless come into the community with the desire to begin living a totally different life which involves certain sacrifices. Since these young men are taking their first steps in the living of the vows, we think it would be a good idea to highlight a few things about them. Later on in the Novitiate they will be studying their evangelical value and canonical import in depth. For the moment we would just like to underscore some very important motivational elements:

- The vows must be a form of living in liberty, in love and service to the Kingdom. The sensitivity of new generations to liberty is a factor fostering this perspective.
- Young people are ordinarily very sensitive to poverty, to the pain generated by out casting, and to forms of injustice. Such concerns have to be channeled when dealing with the vow of poverty. We feel that the most evident feature for this stage is to grasp poverty as donation-solidarity-selflessness-liberty, more so than as mere sacrifice or privation.
- At this age the vow of chastity is difficult to understand and assume in full. Habits created in their previous life continue to exercise intense pressure on young people. It will be the task of the formator to bring about in their hearts the rebirth of a new form of living oblativistic love in communion with their brothers, already embracing the sacrifices that make it necessary for them to forego certain affective dimensions of their past life.
- Excessive autonomy as well as the negative experience of authority previously lived at home constitute a negative disposition for religious obedience in many cases. During this stage it is necessary to strengthen the dimension of the brothers' responsiveness to the community so they may feel God's will is often rendered manifest through it. This is the time to tackle the conflicts lived with authority; the time for young people to open themselves to a new relationship of openness, transparency and trust with authority in the sense that authority is at the service of the community and the growth of each brother in fidelity to his vocation.

2.3. Life in community

2.3.1. The experience of community

We encounter this yearning to live in community in many young people nowadays, and it continues to be an attractive and desirable experience. Moreover, it may well be one of the most alluring features of religious life. People seek it in a very positive manner and place many of their hopes in it.

This yearning for community, however, does not always coincide with real community ability. Individual potential to become actively involved in the construction of the community is determined by certain experiences in a person's past, his life history

(family unity, number of siblings, exit from the family), as well as past experience in youth groups (e.g., integration, relations with others, receptiveness, exercise of leadership, etc.). Factors such as these are usually behind conflicts that emerge in postulancy communities. Here are some expressions or manifestations thereof:

- Young people who tend to isolate themselves and live in a self-sufficient manner. Most likely at the root of this attitude are affective problems which lead to solitude and isolation.
- There may be some individuals who tend to chatter away in a superficial manner without any ability to concentrate. They reveal symptoms of insecurity and fear of failure. They are important factors in communities that tend to be hyper-active, superficial and far from formative.
- Then there are others who want the community to be an ideal world and demand 100% at all times. From within they create tense communities with excessive self-criticism and limited fraternity. This attitude is most common in persons who enter the community at an older age (older than 25), and is particularly evident among women.
- There are also those who seek refuge, withdraw and flee from both difficulties and challenges. Many may be the causes in both personal and social terms. They give rise to communities which are uneventful, superficial, passive and far from creative.

As we can see, the way a person is within the community is one of the important elements in a person's growth process. Accompaniment/direction would not be complete if it did not tackle this fundamental aspect of present and future religious life in a serious manner.

2.3.2. The community in personal development

We could also point out that the community is the privileged place where all the potential of the individual is in the process of development.

- This is the most concrete place of his life, his roots, and his final 'connection'. In the community a young person begins to feel at 'home' with his brothers who support, correct and stimulate him. This is the new home where he will live moments of joy, as well as moments of sorrow. The community is the most immediate training grounds for interpersonal relations. The formator will see to it that the passage from initial idealism to subsequent realism is constructive and positive for each person.
- This is the gateway for knowing the Congregation and the Church. Through the small community an individual develops a realistic recognition and knowledge of the Congregation with its values and shortcomings, religious brothers and sisters, works and mission. He gradually begins to feel he belongs to a concrete family, which he is learning to love with all its limitations. The Church will also be discovered and perceived in a much more profound and critical way. In the community he will hear both praise and criticism of her pastors in a family setting. He will begin to develop his own ideas and voice both criticism and praise for this institution he is now learning how to love as his Mother. Discovering the reality of the Church and the Congregation without any adornments may generate discouragement, severe criticism and even a crisis of faith in some young people. It is up to the formator to attend very closely to this process so an individual may develop a correct appreciation of these realities.

- This is the ambit for the serene and normal expression of the faith. Shared prayer is a normal practice in the community and obliges a young person to share his faith, to discover his own way of prayer, while at times correcting things or seeking new ways to mature his faith together with his brothers. Even though this is nothing new for those who have been active in youth groups, it now assumes new and more demanding features. The formator will help his young charges to express their experience of faith in all simplicity and humility, as well as to accept the experience of others in a mature manner.
- This is the most appropriate place for the formation of habits. We feel that from the very outset the community should play a special role in the formation of those human virtues, ways of behavior and habits which enable a young person to have a good relationship with his surroundings. For example, habits regarding cleanliness, personal orderliness, good use of time, organization of schedules, etc. It will be the task of the formator to sit down with each individual and assess progress made in this learning process, spurring those who are lagging behind, dispelling unachievable expectations and proposing concrete pedagogical means.

2.3.3. The community process

Absorbing the entirety of the community experience described above involves an orderly and rugged journey which not all people live with spiritual serenity. This is where we see the need for the formator to be close to the community and to each of its members.

Evident during this stage of postulancy is an initial moment of joyful excitement over the community. Everything seems easy and interesting. This is a joyful yet naive moment. The formator is aware of this and accompanies this moment as something expected, but without giving it undue emphasis.

This initial experience usually comes to an end quite abruptly, and what appear are things like disenchantment, disappointment and the first community crisis. This is the right time for the formator and spiritual director to make all the members of the community feel and realize that the community itself is constructed with the input of each member.

A third moment has to do with the ‘objectification’ and realism of the community. Each young person has already experienced the need for the others and is making his contribution to the group, which needs it too. Everyone in the community feels at ease and strives to stay in line. This may therefore generate a certain degree of passivity in both the community and each member.

The last moment will be one of synthesis. Each young member of the community is coming to the end of a process that inevitably leads to the primary vocational question as to whether or not the Lord is calling him to this vocation. This is the time of final discernment before moving on to the next stage, to the Novitiate.

2.4. Vocation discernment

The journey traveled during postulancy will have revealed to an individual the signs of his vocation, as well as the difficulties inherent in this way of life. As we have been pointing out all along, the spiritual director will have endeavored to foster the search for the will of God.

Specifically proper to this period of postulancy is vocation discernment. We believe that blended in this endeavor will have to be theoretical and experiential knowledge of religious life in the Congregation on one hand, and, on the other hand, the personal conditions for this consecrated life as a vocational pathway in the following of Jesus.

Guided by the formators, the community will have been ascertaining the authenticity of each young man's vocation. The spiritual director will be familiar with the profound sense of an individual's motivations and support him in the decisions he makes.

We consider it useful to flag signs of the vocation that a person should manifest in his search and process during postulancy. Considered one by one, these signs may not be definitive signs of a vocation, but their absence could constitute an adverse situation or at least be a warning.

We think that by the end of postulancy an individual will have to have shown a progressive development of his personality, life of faith and participation in the community. The fact of not having experienced substantial development in these areas denotes vocational fragility.

Together with normal development of his person and the faith, an individual will have to have attained a readiness and willingness to comply with the will of God above all. This openness to God's will and readiness to embrace it will have to be the summit, the apex of a person's attitude of discernment; an attitude that has generated and bolstered this desire to consecrate himself completely to God through the charism and concrete spirituality of the Congregation which has received him. At the end of postulancy a young man must have a sufficient degree of confidence or certainty that what he has lived during this time expresses and realizes his person, is his, and is the concrete response what God is asking of him.

Moreover, an individual will have to have manifested an ability to become part of this religious family in such a manner that he may contribute to the realization of the Congregation's religious and apostolic project with and on the basis of his own life.

Lastly, an individual must show signs of a clear inclination for pastoral dedication, this being understood as the intention and ability to serve in the evangelical endeavors of the Church through the works of the Congregation and in its style.

The final period of postulancy will necessarily be an intense time of discernment. It will therefore be advisable to have special times of recollection, both personal and as a community. The spiritual director will play a decisive role during this time by guiding the reflection and prayer of his postulants.

3. COMPLEMENTARY OBSERVATIONS

Presented below are some observations we consider important on the basis of our experience.

3.1. During postulancy we consider it advisable for an individual's spiritual director to be one of his formators in the community. Experience tells us that the process lived by an individual is so intimately connected with the process lived by the community that it would

be difficult for someone living outside the community to adequately accompany him with complete knowledge of what he is living in the community and the impact of community events upon his life. This does not mean a postulant may not turn in all liberty to another priest for purposes of confession or to seek counsel on what he is living during this process.

3.2. Within the ambit of everything we have discussed in this chapter, we believe that at the end of postulancy the formators and directors will have to be sure each postulant has basically come to grips and resolved any personal problems he may have. Otherwise, those problems will constitute a serious and at times insurmountable obstacle in the way of living the subsequent stages of the formation process in a suitable manner. If such problems are not resolved in due time, they ordinarily hamper the process of the individual in question during the next stage, as well as that of the formation community at large.

3.3. We would also venture to cite below some of the criteria mentioned at the meeting of the CIAL of the Brothers with respect to this theme:

“For admission to the Novitiate it will be necessary for a person to have:

1. made a clear vocation decision for the religious life in our community;
2. resolved personal conflicts; to this end, he will have discussed his main areas of conflict and his personal family history with his formators;
3. assumed his own affectivity and sexuality in a conscious manner, together with the conflicts and challenges implicit therein, and the active willingness to mature in those areas;
4. attained a level of knowledge of conflicts with authority (roles of authority, paternal figures and rules) and the solution thereof.
5. established a good relationship with the formator, where, in an atmosphere of openness and trust, he has been able to expand knowledge of self and his vocational journey.

If clarity proves difficult regarding these criteria it could be advisable to request assistance on the part of a skilled and trusted psychologist. When deemed necessary, the collaboration of such a professional will be an important complement to the work we can do in the area of accompaniment/direction. Recourse to a psychologist is a tool the formator may suggest to an individual, and any action on his part will always have to take place with the full cognizance and approval of the individual in question.

Fourth Chapter

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

DURING THE NOVITIATE

(José Vicente Odriozola Gurruchaga ss.cc.)

- 1. Some features of the Novitiate**
- 2. Some challenges for the Master of Novices and the Novitiate**
- 3. Spiritual direction in this stage of the Novitiate**
- 4. Practical suggestions for accompaniment/direction**

1. SOME FEATURES OF THE NOVITIATE

Just as we referred to Postulancy as a stage of initiation, today we should say that the Novitiate is a time of interior deepening. In effect, for some time now very few people enter the Novitiate without having had a sufficiently lengthy and serious time of preparation for it. Among ourselves, this is what we call Postulancy or Pre-Novitiate. We already pointed out that the novitiate lasts two years for the sisters and one year, the canonical year, for the brothers.

The Novitiate itself is a time of separation. It is a matter of offering the novices a sufficiently sheltered space, suspending current activities they may have such as academic studies, jobs, family or social commitments, etc. Without taking flight from the world, and with attention to a certain insertion in a poor or simple environment, an effort is made to stimulate withdrawal, separation and tranquility, as well as an ordering of time with a program and a schedule that help organize life around what is most important of all during this stage: spiritual discernment of the vocation in the Congregation. The best image depicting this period of time would be that of a prolonged retreat.

This period of time is lengthy and continuous. The Church has taken pains to regulate this matter in a manner done with no other stage or time in the formation of religious and priests. The “canonical year”, a precise and continuous timeframe, must enable each young novice to live and develop a spiritual process that demands time, depth and a horizon. Only in this way may he attain the personal maturity required to take upon himself a commitment as important as that of professing the religious vows.

The other feature proper to the Novitiate is the presence of a Master of Novices. Even though there usually are other formators in the community, the Church assigns responsibility for both accompaniment and final decision on the vocation of a person to one person alone: the Master of Novices. This is the only profile of its kind in religious life.

Understood in this sense, the Novitiate will ordinarily bring a novice, accompanied by the Novice Master, to define his religious vocation by professing the vows in the Congregation at the end of this special time of Initial Formation.

In keeping with these characteristics, great care will be devoted to making sure this time of formation has the means necessary so the aforementioned spiritual experience may be lived in depth. The house, the place, pastoral activities, studies and visits, etc., will all be with a view to this final objective. Then again, counting on the earlier process lived by the young men in Postulancy, the Novitiate may construct a new process on the basis of the discernment conducted beforehand and on the premise that they have come to grips with their most important conflicts.

It is nonetheless necessary to take into consideration the fact that the selfsame new structure of this stage, as well as its own style, can trigger new ways the novices look upon themselves or bring to the surface conflicts which had thus far remained below the surface. Silence, separation from normal surroundings and the indepth treatment of certain issues, etc., usually have substantial repercussions on the novices, and this leads them to revisit the great challenges of life and the vocation at a different level. A fairly new element for consideration the experienced lived by foreigners who have to do the Novitiate outside their own country. This mere fact of physical distance provokes a sort of interior liberty making

it possible for them to tackle problems either not resolved or consciously unknown beforehand.

We also think that the Novitiate structure, its times and schedules, the courses offered and other endeavors should be planned with the clarity and imposition suited to this stage. The role of the Novice Master will be of great importance, even though all the features and the setting as a whole will provide the novices with the means necessary so the Lord, the one and only Master, may do His work on them.

Lastly, we should point out that these features and characteristics of the Novitiate make the attitude of a novice more receptive – not in the sense of passive – than in other stages where the person in formation plays a more active role. In the Novitiate it is necessary to provide objective information about the vows, the Constitutions of the Congregation, the Rule of Life, Religious Life in the Church, etc., all of which constitute important material the Novice Master must transmit to the novices. It is necessary to make sure this exercise or endeavor does not turn into a sort of childishness, which, albeit present in a certain degree, does not impede the process of personal maturity and responsible assumption of the commitments.

2. SOME CHALLENGES FOR THE NOVITIATE AND FOR THE NOVICE MASTER

Much akin to special objectives of the Novitiate which pertain to the sphere of the Novice Master's charge, we would like to offer a brief overview of what appear to be fundamental challenges during this stage of formation.

2.1. Help the novice become enthusiastic about his life of faith so he may desire holiness as a permanent attraction for his whole life and devote himself to it with utmost generosity. This is an attitude of the heart which opens us to the Gift of God and makes us holy by virtue of grace, by virtue of a free gift He gives to us.

2.2. Accompany the novice in a spiritual and personal process in all liberty, stimulating in him his own spiritual search. As we know, this is the great challenge of respecting each person's originality, his rhythms and pace, while also transmitting one's own experience as "spiritual father". There is no doubt that the Novice Master exercises a sort of 'fatherhood' with a novice, and in some case this will last forever. The challenge resides in this fatherhood being a liberating presence, with the Novice Master resisting the temptation of domination and the novice that of dependence.

2.3. Suitably transmit the values of the Religious Life in the Church and the Congregation in an attractive and updated manner. This is one of the great challenges of our time. Nowadays it isn't that easy to understand, and therefore demonstrate, that the following of Jesus in one's style of life is not only attractive in terms of its originality, but also the wellspring of liberty, plenitude and happiness.

2.4. Achieve a profound and authentic living of fraternity, prayer and poverty. Just like in architecture, the novitiate can be an occasion to live a "workshop of religious life", where the fraternal, prayerful and poor community to which we aspire as Congregation and Church becomes possible and desirable. Moreover, the community's witness can be a source of stimulus for the novices themselves and for those who visit the community.

2.5. Transmit not only knowledge of the Congregation, but also its missionary experience. While attending to the main objective illustrated above, which does set certain limitations, the novitiate can be a place of both transitory missionary endeavors and deepening of the Congregation's history and missionary experience. Pastoral service in the novitiate house, relations with neighbors, and other more specifically missionary activities can be of such a nature as to somehow imbue the life of the community with this spirit and outlook.

2.6. Instill profound and enduring habits of prayer, community life, study of the Word and service. We realize it is not a matter of learning forms of behavior to be repeated in a mechanical fashion or by way of sheer rote. What we want the novice to do is learn certain basis attitudes that will guide his behavior for the rest of his life in full liberty, subject as always to intrinsic values and criteria. We know these habits or personal and community rituals give form to the life of man in liberty and happiness. By virtue of the fact that they reflect profound values of evangelical life, they bring coherence into the lives of persons, especially those we feel are called to consecration of self to the service of the Lord and their fellowmen. This is a difficult challenge for the Novice Master. Everything in his behavior, attitudes, ways of living, opinions and moments of silence will be most meaningful for his novices. Only the Novice Master's humble coherence may contribute to this dimension.

3. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN THIS STAGE OF THE NOVITIATE

Spiritual accompaniment/direction in the Novitiate is much along the same lines we discussed earlier; for example, it will have to take into consideration the same elements and contents we mentioned for postulancy. However, in addition to the fact that these selfsame themes reflect new connotations due to the situation being lived in the novitiate, some of them will call for special attention on the part of the spiritual director, who is none other than the novice master in this case.

3.1. What we have just mentioned is something that determines an absolutely new relationship in spiritual accompaniment/direction during Initial Formation. In the novitiate the novice master is the person entrusted with this mission. We alluded to this role in various ways in what we wrote about the novitiate as such. The novice master is the embodiment of ever-present accompaniment/direction, and this is one of the features that makes this relationship new and challenging. The novice master lives with each novice all day long, sharing meals, work, prayer, reflection and everything else about life with him. The novice master also accompanies a novice in his innermost depths. Only in this manner may he truly accompany him, and may the novice be able to count most trustfully on the support of someone who really knows him at this time when he strives to render his life concrete through the profession of religious vows.

Nonetheless, it has always been deemed necessary for the confessor to be a different priest, and for the novices to enjoy the real possibility of free access to the sacrament of reconciliation.

3.2. Customarily speaking, spiritual accompaniment/direction in the novitiate is closely linked to the program and process of this time as a whole. The distinct periods of reflection, experiences, steps to be taken, etc., are naturally going to be channeled and paced by the novice master's talks with an individual novice. It is therefore quite possible that the themes tackled in conferences or experiences lived as a community will be the

themes guiding the trajectory of spiritual and formative accompaniment/direction. This does not mean the novice master may refrain from taking into consideration the personal process of each novice as he travels towards the commitments he will assume at the end of the novitiate in all consciousness, willingness and liberty.

3.3. In this context, during the novitiate the novice master will have to help the novice live a personal experience of God in an intimate and profound relationship with the Lord Jesus. Working on the basis of the experience lived as a postulant, the novice will have to continue making progress in this process of change at the very core of his life, coming more and more out of himself in order to place Jesus at the center of his life.

3.4. The novice master will help the novices grow in the life of prayer, teaching new ways of prayer to both the community and each novice in particular. This is a task he can delegate to no one, and the best place for it is in the framework of spiritual and formative accompaniment/direction. Impacted there is the heart of the faith from which prayer springs forth. That is where it is possible to gauge the true sense of prayer and study the most suitable forms, moments, times and methods for each person. Each novice will have to travel his own journey of prayer, and, together with Jesus, his companion along that journey will be his novice master.

3.5. The novice master will accompany each novice to a new encounter with himself. By its very nature the novitiate is tantamount to entry into a new life, to profound conversion. In a gradual manner the novice master will invite each novice to open up about himself with trust, to acknowledge and resolve his conflicts, to recognize his values and attain self-appreciation in a new dynamic process of knowledge. The novitiate offers a new situation enabling a young person to look upon his life in a way quite distinct from the experience during postulancy. This experience of the novitiate as a new life will enable him to revisit himself on the basis of trustful faith in friendship with Jesus and God's loving outreach for his life, grasping his life in a different manner in both liberty and real growth. This possible re-reading of himself and his life will inevitably be accompanied by a re-reading of the vocation process lived thus far, with its obvious crises or questions. The outcome of all this is customarily a better and more mature acceptance of God's will.

3.6. The novitiate is the best moment to delve into the theme of **discernment**. The novice master will help each novice make discernment the style with which he searches for his decisions about life and makes them, both in ordinary moments and at times of decisions and commitments.

This issue calls for more indepth consideration. What we are talking about is the development of a spiritual attitude whereby a person is always disposed to seek God's Will above all. This implies fostering an ongoing and authentic encounter with God; feeling God loves us and making this feeling an authentic personal experience that marks life as such, bestows stability and confidence upon it, and projects a horizon of hope and happiness for us.

Spiritual discernment as an experience opens us to the mysterious dimension of man in the face of his possibility to take action and commit himself. Each time a person has to decide what to do he comes face to face with the difficulty of establishing complete clarity with respect to his options. Since he has to decide, he will always have to allow for a certain degree of risk or insecurity. Then again, the very fact of taking action or making a decision will entail something irrevocable, something that will impact his life without being able to backtrack. Ever present in all human action is a degree of dissatisfaction. While a

person does aspire to total clarity and full success, his actions nonetheless entail a limitation that turns into uneasiness, and, in some cases, discouragement. This is the risk, the limitation of our commitments. In the final analysis, there always has to be a degree of irresponsibility in a personal decision, a serene disposition to insecurity and failure.

The Christian spiritual experience is the only one which enables us to live this limitation with the serenity and joyfulness proper to the security we receive from the Love of God. We are well aware that with respect to our limited human actions as well, fullness comes to us as a gift of God, as a completely free gift in Jesus Christ. In this manner the personal vocation and the hope placed in each one of our commitments are opened to this possibility of an underserved gift, the possibility of that irruption into our lives on the part of God that fully satisfies the expectation of infiniteness we harbor in our hearts, and which becomes manifest in everything we do.

The spiritual experience of discernment therefore implies building up and developing trust in God, to whom we have over ourselves in full, while allowing for this degree of uncertainty or doubt. It also implies sincere readiness and openness to want to do God's will, knowing it always the best for us.

It is not possible to live such a fundamental attitude without a sound knowledge of self, a sound awareness of personal limitations and values. Embodied in this self-esteem and trust in God will be the ability to make a commitment and persevere.

Lastly, any and all discernment ends up with a decision. In order for this decision to be both well-chosen and in the mainstream of authentic discernment, it must be made on the basis of utmost knowledge and awareness of the commitment being assumed and the ensuing consequences. Only thusly may it be made with true personal responsibility. This is why the novice master can propose concrete steps that will help a novice live this spiritual experience in a manner befitting him: a time of self-analysis with respect to the commitment he wants to make; a moment dedicated to an objective study of the commitment and its consequences for and in his life; a prudently appropriate space of time to verify whether the decision made is the right one; lastly, the manifestation of sincere support for the novice's decision, albeit with the risk of making a mistake.

It goes without saying that spiritual discernment must always conclude in a free and personal decision. The ultimate fruit of discernment will be the gift of the Spirit manifest in charity, joyfulness, peace, compliance, affability, goodness faith, meekness, and moderation. This is why a good decision is endorsed by the feeling of joy and peace.

3.7. There are also other dimensions inherent in the novice master's work of accompaniment/direction with a novice. One of them involves tackling the issue of a person being demanding with himself, which constitutes an ascetical dimension of spiritual life as a whole: demanding in his work, in the life of fraternity, in studies and in prayer, etc. Moreover, the novice master will be able to introduce the novice to a series of new experiences characteristic of life in the novitiate, helping him to discover their lasting value in life: for example, manual labor, care for the infirm and visits to them, working the land, silence, etc. When the novice master chooses some of these experiences together with a novice, and then evaluates and assesses them together with him afterwards, the novice lives a learning process that can impact his life for ever.

3.8. By way of conclusion to this section, we would note that in spiritual direction the novice master will be able to help each novice grasp the personal effect that the living of each one of the commitments and religious vows will have in his life. Spiritual and formative accompaniment/direction is the privileged place where the commitments the

novice will later profess before the community will be personalized. Therefore, this more personal dimension will bond with the novice's awareness of the religious community that will accept him, the Congregation and the active position he will occupy in it as a brother.

4. PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR ACCOMPANIMENT/DIRECTION

Presented below are suggestions made by some novice masters during meetings on these matters. These are proposals which can be of help in this most delicate sphere.

- Establish a schedule of periodical encounters agreed upon beforehand with each novice. It is advisable for them to be more frequent at the beginning of the novitiate and then less so as time passes, but without more than 20 days between one encounter/interview and another.
- Gradually favor initiative being taken by a novice himself with respect to scheduling these interviews. This will help him become more spontaneous and increasingly trustful. It will also be good for the novice to suggest the topics or issues for discussion and bring them into the conversation.
- It can also be appropriate to always begin the encounter with general questions that help "take the pulse" of a novice, or else questions that help bring his conflicts to the surface: for example, how are you feeling? What's on your mind today? You strike me as being . . . ¿What do you feel or think about . . .?
- Systematically discuss everything that has to do with the religious life: vows, fraternity, prayer, mission, etc. It may also be useful to propose some specific tasks in these areas: themes, progress, reversals, achievements, difficulties, etc....
- Use things that sustain and support spiritual direction: for example, revisit previous reports of the formation team, or parts of them, together with a novice; character analysis studies; ask a novice to express himself in writing (letters to the novice master on specific issues) on themes he may find it more difficult to discuss;
- Invite a novice to analyze problems or areas he finds it most difficult to live or to talk about, making an effort to get down to the underlying causes of such problems or difficulties, In this same sense it will always be better to concentrate on a person's energies in tackling and resolving his conflicts than to focus on the weaknesses that hold him back.
- Pay close attention to those who always have nice things to say about life or topics of formation. Such individuals are usually experiencing difficulties as regards projecting full truth about themselves or knowing themselves in depth.
- Recommending the reading of works written by masters of spirituality also provides sound support for accompaniment/direction. To this end it is advisable to have easy access to such books.
- Pay attention to the additional difficulties ordinarily experienced by novices from other countries. They have problems of adaptation, language, culture and customs which invade their lives and hamper their ability to tackle issues proper to the novitiate with liberty and in a deep way. The novice master can assist them in becoming aware of this factor and help them adapt with greater ease and speed. The understanding of this problem will help situate those elements of tension, difficulty and crisis which are usually erroneously identified in such cases, with the effect of creating more than normal repercussions.

Fifth Chapter

SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT/DIRECTION DURING THE JUNIORATE OR STAGE OF TEMPORARY PROFESSION

(José Vicente Odriozola Gurruchaga ss.cc.)

Introduction

- 1. Some features of this Juniorate stage**
- 2. Some consequences lived by a newly professed brother**
- 3. Some contents and forms of accompaniment/direction during this stage**
- 4. Note: accompaniment/direction of the community of professed or the juniorate**

INTRODUCTION

When dealing with this topic in the section on postulancy we referred to that as a time of initiation, and then referred to the novitiate as a time of indepth learning.. During this stage covering the first years of profession we can talk about a time for the consolidation of the life choice made at the end of the novitiate with the profession of the vows. Many of the documents of the Church refer to this as a ‘trial’ period: a time when a newly professed religious puts the authenticity of his previous vocational discernment to the test. By living the ordinary life of community, prayer and the vows he can now verify whether this really was the place where the Lord called him to live his life and commitment of faith.

This stage usually lasts three or four years for brothers, including the year of pastoral experience outside the Juniorate community. For the sisters it usually includes the first years of temporary profession lived in community and the other years lived in apostolic communities for a total of nine years.

We have to realize that this is a difficult stage. In plans of formation it may well be the least structured phase of all, or quite simply the one receiving the least attention. The shortage of formators, as well as the overload in the Congregation’s works and services mean that quite often the newly professed brothers are counted on for the active apostolate without considering the need for a sufficiently long period of preparation for it and for becoming established in the new style of life they have to live without the formative structures of the previous stages. Then again, this stage must integrate brothers who belong to at least three different groups, corresponding to the first, second or third year of community.

The selfsame passage from the novitiate to this stage usually triggers a feeling or sensation in the newly professed that their formation came to an end with the two previous stages. It is necessary to realize that the process has not ended and that needed quite rightly is a lengthy time of formation to conclude the endeavor only recently begun. The time of passage from one stage to another is already critical in its own right, but becomes more difficult during this stage for the aforementioned reason. It will always be necessary to take into consideration the dimension of closure and continuity which exists between one stage and another.

What distinguishes spiritual accompaniment/direction during this stage is that each newly professed brother usually chooses as his spiritual director a brother priest who does not necessarily live in the same community. As in the case of the juniorate communities of some of the sisters’ provinces, the formator responsible for this stage may become the spiritual director, while the confessor attends to matters of conscience.

The role of the formator or formators in the community is also different compared with the previous stages of formation. We can assume that in exercising his formation responsibility the formator must monitor the journey of both the community and each brother in this new context created by the vows, and which contemplates a greater degree of maturity and autonomy on the part of the brothers. What you have is a situation of greater horizontal outreach on the part of the formator and greater autonomy on the part of the newly professed brothers in formation.

In the community of newly professed brothers the formator must attend to and monitor the living of this stage's objectives, as well as what the community has proposed for itself in its community project. It is likewise his responsibility to hold encounters with each brother in order to attend to him, support him and also correct him in his personal response to both the community's objectives and those of the personal life project he pursues during each period of this stage.

In this way the formator is active in what has been called the external sphere, exercising a role of accompaniment that leaves to the spiritual director as such everything which has to do with the most private aspects of a person's life.

The spiritual director will be the person who will assess a newly professed brother's adaptation and response to this new time and its challenges in a very personal way with him. He will hold periodical conversations with him and together they will "check the pulse" of the journey traveled, opening up to the new personal challenges raised by this new time of personal maturation. The spiritual director will thereby see to it that the newly professed brother makes an authentic spiritual and personal maturity journey in the living of the vows during this new time of his life and formation.

The existence of this spiritual director implies that the brothers exercising this service for their brothers in formation are aware of what is being lived during this stage in terms of community structure and objectives, as well as the values or objectives which the community has proposed for itself at a given time. It would be advisable to note that the existence of the spiritual director does not exempt a brother from the obligation to share with both formators and the community the processes he as a person is living, especially when they have an effect on his life in the community or on the community itself. Required must always be the greatest degree of trust and transparency with both the community and the formators.

The material provided below is intended to shed light especially on the accompaniment service provided by those we have called spiritual directors. This does not mean it may not be useful as well for formators during this stage of formation.

1. SOME FEATURES OF THIS JUNIORATE STAGE

Presented below are some characteristics ever present in some way or to some degree. They may come across as something ideal, but they are all constituent features of a new, more mature and adult moment when the newly professed embark upon the stage of living life without much of anything new and without the enthusiasm of the initial search. In any case, a listing like this can help us set the contours of the place and the ideal in which taking place must be the process of the newly professed we must accompany during this period of Initial Formation.

1.1. The Juniorate must be an adult community. The vows recently professed, the return to normal activities like studying, the new style of the community and the active apostate, etc., place the newly professed brother in a context where he will have to get along as an adult. He already knows what his life options are, as well as how to establish relations in a community where pride of place belongs to respect and concern for both others and the community itself, in which he creates the horizontal bond proper to fraternity with all. This is above all a time of being demanding with self, a time when the spiritual

director must help him adjust to a community style much more demanding and very different compared with that of the novitiate.

1.2. A period of formation ordinarily focused as study as the main activity. This means having to live an experience where newness in life will not be a matter of events or experiences as new as the ones lived during previous stages of formation, as well as in the more receptive learning posture characteristic of academic studies, even though students do make an effort to be as active as possible. Hence, this is a more routine period of time; a time without astounding elements of newness; a time calling for the maturity necessary to live academic studies with the responsibility implicit in performing any demanding task. This is also a time when, albeit unexpressed at times, the demands of the community are more imperative, since a newly brother has become part of it with a different yearning to live what he had hoped and prepared for during the previous stages of his formation.

1.3. During this stage a young person exercises more autonomy in tackling personal responsibilities such as academic studies, tasks in the community, apostolic duties, etc. He has to deal with decisions individually and in a more direct manner before bringing them to the community. No longer is he acting in a group-line manner or dependent upon a group to a great extent. A mature attitude such as this implies bring matters before the community so it may help him in the discernment of a decision to be made.

1.4. Religious profession and belonging to the community of the professed brothers, or the Juniorate, confers upon each brother clearer belonging to and greater responsibility in both the Congregation and the major community to which he belongs.

From the very moment of his first vows a professed brother takes part in the meetings, consultations and elections of the major community. He becomes an integral part of it and begins to be part of the mission, sharing in its challenges and concerns. His condition as a professed brother, his age and the greater degree of confidence in his participation enable him to experience the fact that people listen to his opinions and that he does have a weight in the group, not only in the provincial or regional community, but also in the ambits of the apostolate and studies. This is the experience of feeling like an adult.

1.5. The community is more realistic with respect to the ideals and demands of the Religious Life. It's normal in a community for people to learn how to be expectant of each member according to his conditions and the moment being lived by the community itself. This means that the community retains its enthusiasm not as a result of new things, but rather the concern to constantly seek its own religious identity and therefore its authentic fidelity. Each newly professed brother learns there from to discover his journey of a more personal response to the Lord.

1.6. During this stage each brother will be conducting his personal synthesis of life. It will assimilate work, studies, prayer, the vows, the community, service in the apostolate, and relations with both family and friends. This is the stage when each newly professed brother develops his personal project of life.

2. SOME CONSEQUENCES LIVED BY A NEWLY PROFESSED BROTHER

2.1. Initially there is usually a sensation of a lack of both external and interior organization, and this is why people live a certain degree of feeling out of place in the

community which has received them. Needed is a more or less lengthy period of time, ordinarily a full six months, to adapt to the new life and the way it is organized.

2.2. At times people begin to live an innovative and interesting experience of liberty. They find it surprising that the community isn't always on top of them and that they are directly responsible in all things.

2.3. We know this experience entails an intense feeling of solitude. They again, nothing is lived or experienced any more with the same sensitivity as before or with the same affective enthusiasm of the past. People begin to enter more clearly into the profound experience of solitude proper to an adult.

2.4. Together with being a time of personal synthesis as indicated above, this is also a time of strong repercussions stemming from personal crises. These may be the aforementioned crises of growth, the need to project anew one's ideals in a more mature form, or the lack of close support on the part of the community and the formators, etc. It is a difficult time which a newly professed brother must tackle without ungrounded apprehensions, while considering that not all crises are vocational ones. Otherwise the time of living the temporal vows may strike an individual as an indication that his vocation lies elsewhere, but this has to be considered an exception.

2.5. With a much more dynamic outlook an individual begins to experience a much clearer projection of himself in the search for a better personal identity. Study, work and even the selfsame community begin to reveal new pathways of creativity and more personal expression to an individual, while at the same time striking new interior chords which are to be heeded with wisdom.

2.6. An inevitable change takes place in the affective sphere, with new challenges as well as elements of tension and conflict. The entire area of personal relations undergoes a substantial change. We already mentioned the new needs experienced in the community setting: the need for more horizontal relations, greater participation, greater integration, more independence and more liberty, etc. The same phenomenon occurs in relations outside the community, especially with persons of the opposite sex. An individual begins to experience a greater degree of liberty, better relations of friendship and companionship, more experience of being celibate. This likewise applies to the realm of relations with his family: more distant, more mature, more instances of collaboration in the development of family life, etc. The entire sphere of affections begins to be subject to new experiences of greater maturity, and these too have to be attended to with care and utmost awareness.

2.7. This is likewise the usual time for beginning or pursuing the study of theology, with its more vital character, its questioning and challenging nature regarding the faith. Therefore, theological studies can very well bolster both the vocation and the faith, but also entail one or more uncertainty that makes an individual suffer.

2.8. The global experience of encounter with society and service in the apostolate usually awakens a more critical and more realistic attitude towards the world in a newly professed brother, while opening him at one and the same time to the different ministerial possibilities in the Church.

3. SOME CONTENTS AND FORMS OF ACCOMPANIMENT/DIRECTION DURING THIS STAGE

3.1. It must be pointed out that spiritual accompaniment/direction is fundamental during this period of Initial Formation. This isn't always understood, and people neglectfully leave the initiative up to whatever a newly professed brother sees fit. It would appear absolutely necessary for the formators responsible for this stage to require each brother to choose a spiritual director for the concrete exercise of this accompaniment/direction, whose ongoing and periodical practice must be an obligation of the community.

3.2. Accompaniment/direction during this period in the life of a newly professed brother is necessarily more horizontal. The director is there more as an older brother than a father. He will therefore see to it that the newly professed brother in question exercises a greater sense of ownership in taking the initiative to have encounters/conversations, as well as in taking the lead during them, while not neglecting to perform his role as a director whenever that appears necessary.

3.3. Accompaniment/direction will have to go beyond the revision of life and daily experiences of transient situations. The director must help in the formulation of an accompaniment process integrating topics to be revisited, experiences to deepen and steps to take and live. Quite common, especially among women, is the need felt to tell the director about individual or community situations lived beforehand. Without overlooking the value this may have in order to garner a better understanding of what a person in formation is living, it is necessary to help him objectivize all that, delve deeply into its meaning, relate it with his life of faith and situate it in his own process of personal and religious development.

3.4. Within the space of what is deemed a prudent space of time it is necessary to make sure that important areas of life are tackled as well; for example, prayer, the community, affective and sexual life, the living of the vows, studies, pastoral activities, relations with the family. It is necessary to attend to the development of a special sensitivity to the world of the poor and their needs, together with the consequences thereof in our lives at large.

3.5. Insofar as the living of a new stage of life, this can be an opportunity to re-read one's personal history from a more adult point of view. Moreover, it can help to better understand the different stages of life a person has lived in the past and will have to live in the future.

3.6. We think this is a privileged time of formation whereby, through spiritual accompaniment/direction, a young man makes progress in discovering his own religious identity. What we have in mind are those personal characteristics which identify him and will always be fundamental features in his life. It will be necessary to help an individual discover these aspects by himself and develop them in an ongoing manner as forms of his personal vocational response to the Lord. We are also thinking about the world of faith and personal prayer, community skills and the contribution to both the community and the Congregation, as well as more personal expressions of self in study endeavors, work and the apostolate. In this way the spiritual director will help an individual to become more aware and knowledgeable about himself, his identity and personal projection, and foster within him feelings of happiness in living the religious vows, understanding and accepting

the sacrifices and solitude they entail. An individual will thereby develop authentic bountifulness as a religious in this concrete family.

3.7. We must also note the constant need for spiritual accompaniment/direction to include an analysis of the challenges faced by a newly professed brother and the community as a result of the new development we see in our midst with the international nature of our communities in novitiates, juniorates and the mission. It is also necessary to focus on the issue of the relationship started up over the last few years between the brothers and the sisters along the lines of communicating not only in the same spirituality, but also in the same mission.

3.8. Among the means the director may use in this stage we would venture to mention the following:

- * Draw up of a personal life plan or project taking into account the aforementioned elements, with the possibility of periodic revision of life. This strikes us as an element of vital importance during this stage.
- * Promote personal retreats that are complementary to the ones held by and for the community. Foster intense moments of prayer, the day of the desert, the time of conversion guided by the Liturgy, and other practices of this nature.
- * Stimulate regular spiritual reading by offering books suited to the journey of each professed brother.
- * Take into consideration at all times the important role exercised by the community over a newly professed brother. It will be necessary to make sure an individual registers and analyses the community's input on both a personal and common level: note down what is discussed during community meetings, retreats or days of recollection, as well at sessions of revision of life and fraternal correction, etc.
- * Promote the use of the Book of Hours in personal prayer, thereby introducing an individual to the Prayer of the Church.
- * Help incorporate the practice of adoration in a serious and stable manner as a personal responsibility in the Congregation.

4. NOTE: ACCOMPANIMENT/DIRECTION OF THE COMMUNITY OF PROFESSED OR THE JUNIORATE

Incumbent upon the formator in charge and the formators at large during this stage is the important role of accompanying the community itself. In addition to paying due attention to each member of the community, the formators are to attend to and monitor the steps to be taken by the community in the search for and construction of its objectives. Therefore, the selfsame model of personal accompaniment/direction holds true for the accompaniment/direction of the community: facilitate processes, assess achievements, recall values as present and orient the group as such.

The community pedagogy has always been a core element in Initial Formation for the Congregation. Care for the group, the quality of relations among its members, and the selfsame pedagogy of the vows, etc., call for special attention on the part of these older brothers who exercise the service of formators. They are the ones who must ensure the

development of a community pedagogy of the vows, fraternity, prayer, the spiritual life, the charism of the Congregation, adhesion to the local and universal Church, etc.

When the formators make up a small team of two or three it is both indispensable and most valuable for them to meet periodically to “check the community’s pulse”, detecting needs as well as opportunities for tackling one theme or another, or else launching one or another activity with a view to formation.

Moreover, it is necessary to recall that groups are living beings, just like persons, with their history, identity, crises and specific personality. The formators will always have to look upon and listen to this ‘being’ who needs attention and has to be accompanied. Each year the group is a new one, with brothers who depart and others who arrive. The community returns to its history in order to integrate newcomers, just as it expresses corresponding sorrow when sending off someone who departs. The community also has to express its myths, feasts, celebrations and events, etc. The values of a community are the ones which have been incarnated in it.

We have already described the means for this accompaniment/direction in the section dealing with the level of each person: the community project of life, the community meeting or afternoon (day), celebrations of the faith, celebrations of anniversaries and birthdays, etc. The revision of life, fraternal correction conducted in community and the distribution of roles within the community are other enriching elements for the community’s development process.

Without releasing the community from its responsibilities of self-control and self-growth, the formators are the ones who must monitor and accompany its process of growth and development.

Sixth Chapter

SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT/DIRECTION:

A PLACE FOR THE WORD and/or A PLACE TO LIVE?

(Camille Sapu Malangu ss.cc.)

Introduction

- 1. Interest in the subject**
- 2. A question**
- 3. Division and method of work**
 - 3.1 The word in the life of the human person**
 - 3.2 Spiritual Direction**
- 4. Conclusion**

INTRODUCTION

Religious life in Africa attracts many young people. Certain religious communities are occasionally at a loss because they do not know what to say to the young people who knock at their door. Notwithstanding such a hurried conclusion, if we consider these people as sometimes running away from misery or looking for a safe place, (which could be the case), we must also be open to the fact that their arrival could equally be the work of the Spirit. For this it is necessary to know what Spirit is at work, hence the importance of accompaniment or direction*. (*‘Director’, ‘directee’ and ‘spiritual direction’ will be used in this document from this point forward. Translator)

Such direction should be set up carefully in terms of place and time. We have to learn to listen to the young person with all his historical connections and lead him to open himself to the world and the mission that Christ confides to him. In other words, spiritual direction in Africa should be “clothed” in an African way, no matter where the material has come from. What is essential is that the cut and the size are made according to African “measurements”. For Mgr. Adriano Langa, auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Maputo, “the African at times feels like someone who is dressed in a shirt which is not totally his size, because it was made according to the measurements of another person: a little big here, a bit tight there”³.

1. INTEREST IN THE SUBJECT

My effort, my concern, is to conceive of a spiritual direction that helps the young to avoid experiencing the " fate" of the bat. What happened to the bat?

“One day the bat said, “I will go and visit my brothers and sisters the birds and take part in their annual festival. When she arrived at the festival there was no problem in entering as the condition was to have wings. However, once the bat entered, the crow remarked that there was a guest present not just with wings, but also with teeth and teats. Following the advice of the wise birds, the decision was taken to expel the bat on the grounds of her double-identity. The bat said, “It doesn’t matter. I’ll go to the mammals. Once she arrived at the place she was able to go in as she had teats. But during the festival the horse commented that there was a guest present with wings. Following the advice of the elders the bat was rejected for her double membership.”

I dream of young people capable of answering Christ’s call and maintaining their identity, of young people who can live internationality as a value and a richness, an internationality which is not limited only to a “living together” of people who come from different directions, but a “living together” as brothers (John 13:35)

2. A QUESTION

All throughout the year of F.R.F. (Formation for Religious Formators), one question has concerned me, that of knowing how to accompany young people in formation. It is the place where, in my view, the young people “un-dress”, “un-veil” themselves and are better

³ This is an extract taken from the conference on inculturation in religious life. This Conference took place in Boane – Maputo between 3 – 4 Dec. 2001. I translate : “the African sometimes has the sense of that of an individual dressed in a shirt which is not his size, because it was made for another, a little big here, somewhat tight there”.

prepared (equipped) to serve God and his People in the Church. This place demands of the two actors (director and directee) an effort to get to know each other and mutual confidence. I am anxious to point out that what is in the text concerns more the Postulants, sometimes called Pre-novices. (There are three years in this stage). The three years also correspond to the philosophical studies).

I am aware that the primary director, par excellence, is Christ himself. The episode of the disciples of Emmaus makes this clear. Like the disciples, the young people pose questions on life, on “truth” on their call, even on the “how” and the “where”, so as to fulfill the call.

If Christ has opened the eyes of the Emmaus disciples and they have overcome their fears so as to announce that Christ is truly risen, the director is also called to be “another Christ” close to the young people. He does not take the place of Christ, and yet at the same time he has this mission: to discern and discover together God’s will.

3. DIVISION AND METHOD OF WORK

In this work I try to reply to the question at the heart of this work: spiritual direction, a place for the Word and/or a place to live? To this end I have divided my ‘talk’ in three parts:

1. The word in the life of the human person
2. What is ‘spiritual direction?’
3. Young Africans and spiritual direction

I know that I am not the first to treat the theme of spiritual direction. This is why I refer to certain documents that already treat the subject and I will not fail to examine those that cover this ground. My personal contribution also has its place in this research.

3.1. The word in the life of the human person

The word, whether divine or human, has been and continues to be the subject of a lot of studies. I do not claim, in any way, to count myself among these eminent researchers, though I modestly believe that the word has a distinguished place in spiritual direction. This is why I wanted to begin my talk on a point concerning the Word.

I am anxious to stress that I also understand the concept of ‘word’ as meaning the faculty by which the human person speaks – even without uttering a word – and that which is spoken by God. Although these two words, the human word and that of God, are of different degrees, I do think, however, that God’s Word has an immeasurable importance in the life of all disciples of Christ. On this basis, let us see what that means for a Christian.

It is important to recall that the God of Jesus Christ is a God who self-reveals. Through his word he created everything and through the word he also saved the world. The book of Genesis, in speaking of creation, never tires of repeating this small phrase, “God said”.

God is a God who speaks and creates through his Word. On the other hand, God is wholly Other since he is not to be confused with neither his creatures nor his creation. God

allows himself to be discovered through creation but he is not to be identified with his creation. God is transcendent.

However, so that he might become one of us, he took flesh to take on our condition. This “kenosis” is the place of our redemption, our salvation. The Word of God has become flesh in order to ‘humanize’ and ‘divinize’ us, or help us better participate in the reign of the Son of God (a thought which I attribute to St. Irenaeus). This is why the Church believes that the human person must listen to the Word of God, a word that speaks to the depth of his heart through conscience, nature, and that which the Holy Scriptures relates to us. God wants the human person to be a ‘profoundly-listening-being’.

The human person is not only someone who listens. S/He is also someone of the word. As a person of the word, the human person respects promises and identifies himself or allows himself to be characterized by his word. We often hear said, “He is a man of his word”, or again, “I give you my word”. The word seems to create the person, or better the word seems to be the person. Denis Vasse expresses it in the following way: “for a human subject to exist, it is not enough to call him, it is necessary that he is able to call in return”.⁴ This is to say that the human person is a subject: of the received and the given word.

The word has another role to play, that of establishing relationships in society. I do not ignore the fact that the same word can be a source of conflict or misunderstanding. What does matter is to recognize that the word is indispensable. Africa is a continent known for its oral tradition, and has much experience of discussions under the Baobab tree. (I will return to this in the third part). I support the idea of Jeannine MARRONCLE who says; “it is the word that establishes relationships, since to speak is to address oneself to the other, to say to the other”⁵. And again I cite VASSE when he says that there is a double relation existing between the human person and the word. On the one hand, through the word, the person is called by name to take his place in the world of representations; on the other hand, in speaking, the person names those things and persons that he meets in his representative world.⁶

Denis Vasse goes on to say that through the word, the person is reborn. For Vasse, the human person does not become human without being reborn. This rebirth is possible thanks to the word since it separates him from his fellow human beings.⁷

Without the word there is no this or that more than there is a before or an after... It is in the word that the human person is renewed.⁸ This series of quotes show how important the word is in the life of the human person.

In short, God wanted to communicate himself to people through his Word, the word through which everything has been created and without which nothing could exist. The human person – on the strongest grounds – is invited to be a being of the word. This facility allows him to “become human”, to open himself to others and to the Other. Based on the category of Denis Vasse, “I say that the word makes possible the becoming “other than the

⁴ Denis VASSE, *Le temps du désir*, Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1969, p. 148

⁵ Jeannine Marroncle, *Illusions et vérité de la relation conjugale dans Affectivité et vie spirituelle*, in *Christus* n°168, nov. 1995, p. 93

⁶ Denis VASSE, *idem*, p. 148

⁷ Denis VASSE, *idem*, p. 150

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 159

other”.⁹ For this reason, spiritual direction as the place of the opening to the Other, is not possible without the word, the true word.

It is through the word that the director can discern along with the directee the will of God, albeit that the risk of error is not excluded.

3.2. Spiritual Direction

A. Spiritual direction

Spiritual direction is for the Church (our Mother) a grace and a need to the extent that it aids the directee to open himself to God in order to “read” his will. The practice of direction goes back a long time.

In the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, for example, spiritual direction was a means of sharing thoughts. The debutants – understood as the young people who sought to embrace religious life – were encouraged to open themselves to an “elder” in order to avoid delusions of generosity and the ambushes of the malicious. Opening up to another was also a sign of humility and a way to flee the demon. “Nothing pleases the enemy” it was said, “as much as those who do not wish to reveal their thoughts.”¹⁰ Such communication took place in a climate of confidence or trust. Confidence was considered as a first step in renouncing one’s own will and opening oneself to obey God

For this to happen, the “elder” was expected to be a person of trust who could create a setting in which God’s grace could be recognized.

The work of direction also helps young people to become conscious of their experience of God and to articulate it. It is also a way helping the other to become the author of his experience of God, of his word and subject of his own story.

A good example of direction is to be found in the passage from Acts of the Apostles where Philip the deacon meets with the Ethiopian eunuch who is returning from his pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Acts 8 :26-40). The response of the eunuch “How can I ... unless someone explains it to me?” to the deacon’s question “Do you understand what you are reading?” is an example of spiritual accompaniment. It brings to the surface that which is deepest in the person and which the person only partially understands. The whole issue is with the directee who must agree to open up.

I am conscious that not everything has been said regarding spiritual direction, though our reflection will be extended as I speak on what is expected of a director.

B. What is required of a spiritual director

If the directee is expected to open himself up so as to avoid trusting solely in his own illusion; if he is firmly discouraged from making himself “master and student” in the spiritual life – then this assumes a good dose of humility, self-acceptance, and an openness to being guided by another ... it is equally true that a series of demands can be recommended to the director, the essential of which follow:.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 150

¹⁰ Claude FLIPO, L’accompagnement spirituel, un enjeu ecclésial, in Christus n°153, 1992, p. 6

- The director is a person of prayer. Prayer is one of the important aids which is needed in all spiritual direction for the exercise of its service.
- The world of today believes more in the miracles of “examples” than well put together discourses so let it be said that the director is not a supporter of the slogan, “do what I say and not what I do”
- He is called to know the person he is directing, as it is not possible to speak of a person without prior knowledge of him. Fr. Jean DANIÉLOU thinks that a director must be a teacher, both demanding and indulgent and neither hard nor complicit as regards weaknesses¹¹.
- Joseph STIERLI goes further in saying that the spiritual director is an instrument of God’s Holy Spirit ‘marked’ within the Church: who must live and act wholly under the Holy Spirit, if he wants to fulfill his role as the Spirit wishes¹².
- The director is a “teacher”, an “animator”, a person of faith who is able to encourage in difficult times and correct in moments of failure. These verbs are very important: guide, prepare, stimulate, counsel, correct, direct if possible... If he has had this role in the Church, his attitude is that shown by Christ in John 13 (the washing of the feet).
- Fr. Jean LAPLACE believes that the director should exercise restraint when faced with the affective reactions that emerge from the directee, in their varied senses.¹³
- If it is necessary to bring to the surface something negative the director should refrain from being the conscience of the other, as his constant effort should be one of helping him in taking initiatives and making decisions.
- He should not give the impression of knowing everything (a “know all”, as the young people of Congo say). When one knows all, one does not know how to listen. The experience of “incompleteness” is important for a director. The experience of “incompleteness” places the director in a formation that is always ongoing.
- Submissiveness to the Holy Spirit, a life of prayer, the virtue of patience, discretion and a big heart are among the many “spices” that the director would be wise to have in order to season his “dish”. His great work is to help the directee to know himself and to discover in himself God’s will. As with all human endeavors, there is a risk of error, but it must be said as Jacques LECLERQ states in his article “*Even if his heart condemns him “a false step for God is a step”*”, in other words, he must have confidence in God because in Him nothing is impossible.
- One is not born a formator (director), one becomes one. The director must, therefore, be inhabited by a desire “to be a director”, an availability and interest to be formed, and an awareness of being no more than a useful instrument in the hands of our “unique Teacher”.¹⁴
- To close this section on direction, it seems important to underline certain elements in our documents. I refer to the Constitutions, the General Plan of Formation and the Formation Plan for the Province of Africa.

C. What do the members of the Sacred Hearts (Picpus) say on direction?

The Formation documents state that the fundamental objective of formation is to ensure that the candidates discern God’s call so that they may respond in a way that is both

¹¹ Jean Daniélou, La direction spirituelle dans la tradition ancienne, in *Christus* n° 153, p. 21

¹² Joseph Stierli, L’art de la direction spirituelle, in *Christus* 153, p. 41

¹³ Jean Laplace, la formation du directeur spirituel, *Idem*, p. 61 - 72

¹⁴ Josu Mirena ALDAY, extract from the report of the l’Association des Membres des Curies Générales on 16 February 2002 in Rome

personal and ongoing and that they are introduced to the living Tradition of the Congregation. And in all stages of formation, the processes should take into account all aspects of the personality: spiritual, intellectual, affective...

To help orientate the process of discernment, certain elements are important: fidelity to the Gospel, fidelity to the SS.CC. charism, fidelity to the Church and to the places where we are in mission.

In view of the complexity of things, our Constitutions state that “thanks to the initiative and the action of the Holy Spirit, each candidate is primarily responsible for his own vocation, and so is to be open to the formators designated as such by the Congregation” Art. 72

It is required that the director (formator):

1. profoundly respect the person and the liberty of the candidate;
2. maintain a dialogue that is open and respectful;
3. see to it that the growth of each candidate is integral, balanced, according to his own rhythm and the demands of each stage;
4. take into account that community life is an important factor for discernment and formation of candidates.

The Congregation considers that spiritual direction is one of the suitable places where candidates can be called to speak openly, be listened to and also come out of themselves so as to say “Yes” to God’s call. If the person primary responsible is the candidate himself, the presence of the director is of no less importance. This is why I want to finish with a short reflection on the way that spiritual direction is perceived by the young African. I have to point out that this is a reflection more imaginary than making total sense. For the young African I look to those in the Congregation in Congo-Kinshasa and Mozambique).

4. CONCLUSION

If the animal world condemned the bat (cf. the African tale), it is because it never thought to consult with each other in order to tell the bat what she really was. I do not consider our young people in formation as bats, and yet the mistake of the bat could be a lesson for all. In religious formation, spiritual direction is one of the important places where the young people are called to know the “secret” of their call and the truth of their vocation.

This “initiation period” (spiritual direction) is important; it is where the young people learn and become conscious of their experience of God and to give account of it. It allows them to emerge from that which they have lived most deeply and which they only sometimes understand in a vague way. It is a time where one always emerges “grandi”. After this “time of initiation”, they leave with part of the answer to Christ’s question, “but you, who do you say that I am?”

This is why I have made such an effort in this reflection to show the importance of spiritual direction.

To this end, it seems important to say something on the place of the word in this “initiation period” that is equivalent to direction. The word is important for the weaving of social relations, for communication and for turning a person into a “public being”, a

political being. It is through the true word - received or given - that a person exists, or takes his or her place in the “human” concert.

To give more substance to this view, I refer to the “qualities”, if they can be called that, of a director. Among them, the director is a person of prayer and trust. He or she is able to stimulate, to advise, to guide, to encourage in difficult moments and correct times of failure. Such a person is qualified to help young people live the Gospel in the highs and the lows of today’s world. He/she is also someone who questions and allows himself to be questioned by the cultural specifics of young people in order to better live the Gospel of Christ. He is a great brother (sister) whose “mouth stinks” but it is a mouth full of wisdom.

These same qualities, in one way or another, feature in the documents of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts (SS.CC.) of Picpus.

All these elements allow me to ‘touch down’ in Africa with the big question: what does a young African think of spiritual direction, or better still, what can be expected of an “African” director? In short, an African director is an older brother (Yaya) whose only concern is the common pursuit of the good of his young brother (Leki). The “Yaya” works together with his Leki, so as to avoid the earlier error of the bat, the arrogance of the “river or flood” and the imprudence of the “kid”. As for the “Leki”, he is required to be himself, to be true, to be open and to see in his Yaya an “instrument” for his good.

I end with these words of Pope John Paul II spoken during an audience in Rome granted to the Bishops of Zimbabwe on the 18th June, 1982. He said, “I encourage you to do everything so that the divine message of the Gospel incarnates itself into the customs and culture of your people. At the same time, this will demand of you a great capacity for discernment, prudence and patience.”¹⁵

I am conscious that not everything has been said and has not always been said well. But I allow myself to dream. I hope that this dream will help me and those who share my view to help our young people to say “Yes” to Christ’s call. Whatever is missing from this reflection can be an opening for other thinkers.

¹⁵ Extract from the book of Léon Marcel, ‘The wise African, openings to the Gospels’, Ed. Saint Paul, Paris, 1983

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