

REDEMPTORIST FORMATION



Witnesses of the Redeemer: In Solidarity for Mission, to a Wounded World

Tools for formation

Rome 2022

7



REDEMPTORIST FORMATION

VOLUME 7



CONGREGATION
OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER
General Government

Witnesses of the Redeemer: In Solidarity for Mission, to a Wounded World

Tools for formation

General Secretariat of Formation
Rome 2022

REDEMPTORIST FORMATION • VOLUME 7

Witnesses of the Redeemer: In Solidarity for Mission, to a Wounded World

General Secretariat of Formation, Rome 2022

The original text is English

Table of Contents

Presentation (<i>Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.</i>).....	7
Introduction (<i>General Secretariate of Formation</i>).....	9
SANTO M. ARRIGO, C.Ss.R. Vocation Ministry and the Youth Synod	11
ROGÉRIO GOMES, C.Ss.R. Vocations of Mature Persons	31
BRENDAN KELLY, C.Ss.R. One missionary body: The Challenge of Witnessing through Interculturality	47
CRISTIAN BUENO, C.Ss.R. Solidarity for the Mission, Solidarity with the Poor	65
CECILIO ALBERTO ESEVERRI, C.Ss.R. Resilience in the Consecrated Life.....	79
ROGÉRIO GOMES, C.Ss.R. Liquid Perseverance in a Fragmented World.....	93

FORMATION IN A SECULARIZED WORLD

DENNIS BILLY, C.Ss.R. Consecrated Life and Formation Today in a Secularized World The North American context	111
LORENZO KEARNS, C.Ss.R. Secularization and the need for Spirituality in our Initial Formation as Redemptorists	127
KARL M. GASPAR, C.Ss.R. Consecrated Life and Formation in today's Secularized World	143

APPENDICES

1. Decisions on Formation of the 25th General Chapter,
Pattaya 2016 163
2. Formation website 167

PRESENTATION

Very Rev. Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R., Superior General

Dear Confreres and Partners in Mission,

It is my privilege to greet you as I present Volume 7 of the series on REDEMPTORIST FORMATION. First of all, I express my gratitude to the General Secretariat for Formation for their animation of both initial and ongoing formation in the Congregation. Coordinating and publishing material such as this volume is an important service to the whole Congregation. We are grateful for their dedication and professional service.

Volume 7 offers articles with important tools for Formators to assist them today in their ministry of accompaniment of Redemptorist Missionaries. However, these articles also offer very helpful and thought-provoking reflections to candidates in Initial Formation, to confreres, and communities as they grow in our missionary charism, and also to our lay partners in mission who share our call to mission in the wider Redemptorist Family.

The subjects addressed in this volume touch the Apostolic Life of all of us. Inspired by the leadership of Pope Francis, our Congregation seeks to participate wholeheartedly in the promotion of a culture of vocation and ministry to youth and young people. This is a missionary priority in every Conference and on every continent.

For Redemptorist Missionaries and our Lay Partners, “Interculturality” and “Solidarity” are much more than ‘nice words’. They are expressions of our life and experience in our Apostolic Communities around the world. More and more, we are living and serving in intercultural communities, in solidarity

with the abandoned poor, with one another, with our Lay Partners. For this reason, we need to reflect prayerfully and thoughtfully on both Interculturality and Solidarity as fundamental dimensions of our missionary vocation.

The same is true for “resilience” and “perseverance”. In a wounded world, experiencing a dynamic change of epoch, all of us need formation in these important qualities. May these articles help us engage in fruitful dialogue and sharing on both of these qualities. This will also help us grow in solidarity and apostolic community. In this way, we can support one another to grow in resilience and persevere with joy in our missionary vocation.

The 25th General Chapter and the Apostolic Plans of the Conferences challenge us to address and dialogue with the phenomenon of our ‘secularized world’. Recognizing that secularization is an evolving process that affects all of us, three articles will help formators, formandi, lay partners, and all confreres to engage in a more fruitful reflection. This will prepare us for more effective and open dialogue with our wounded world.

The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of all formation in Christ. May the Spirit animate all of our formation programs, and every one of us, so that we grow more and more into that ‘one missionary body’, which follows Jesus Christ our Redeemer today as he brings Good News to our wounded world.

Your brother in Christ our Redeemer,

Rome, June 27, 2022

Feast of Our Mother of Perpetual Help


MICHAEL BREHL, C.Ss.R.
Superior General

INTRODUCTION

The theme for the sexennium 2016-2022, “*Witnesses of the Redeemer: In Solidarity for Mission to a Wounded World*”, was preceded by an abundance of reflections on our Mission and formation, as Redemptorists, to a wounded world.

As a resource for ongoing reflection and formation, especially for formators, the General Secretariat of Formation (GSF) presents this seventh volume of the Redemptorist Formation series, an anthology of contemporary and vital themes and their relation to initial and ongoing formation.

The articles indicated in the index of this volume relate to different themes dialogued before and during the celebration of the 25th General Chapter, celebrated in Pattaya, Thailand, in 2016. Therefore, the GSF requested from highly qualified confreres from the five Congregation Conferences reflective presentations on these themes.

Each article is presented with a short biography of the corresponding author, a short abstract about its content and objective, and *keywords* reference.

Volume seven concludes with two appendices: the decisions on formation made by the 25th General Chapter and information on the formation website.

Besides expressing our heartfelt gratitude to our author confreres, the GSF hopes that these articles motivate further reflections and action processes in the areas treated, and will be instrumental for the more effective, evangelical, and charismatic formation for the Mission of our beloved Congregation, especially to the most abandoned and wounded of our world.

General Secretariat of Formation

MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF FORMATION

Fr. Cecilio Alberto Eseverri Laspalas, C.Ss.R. (*Vicar General*)

Fr. Rogério Gomes, C.Ss.R. (*General Consultor*)

Fr. Manuel Rodríguez Delgado, C.Ss.R. (*Executive Secretary*)

Fr. Václav Hypius, C.Ss.R. (*Europe*)

Br. Larry Luján, C.Ss.R. (*North America*)

Fr. Edilberto Cepe, C.Ss.R. (*Asia and Oceania*)

Fr. Joseph Musendami, C.Ss.R. (*Africa and Madagascar*)

Vocation Ministry and the Youth Synod

❖ SANTO M. ARRIGO, C.Ss.R

Author • Having met the Redemptorists through youth and vocation initiatives in Canada, Santo M. Arrigo has always had a keen sense of mission among young people through various ministries and programs. He has a professional background as a crisis youth worker and certification in youth ministry, and continues to teach professional development and training for youth and young adult ministers. Since ordination in 2001, he has always been involved with leadership and professional development for youth, young adult, and vocation ministry through appointments such as Pastor, Associate Pastor, Youth and Vocation Coordinator, and Formation Director. He brings to youth ministry his experiences of working among the abandoned in the Church and society, pastoral care for the marginalized and poor, and working for justice and evangelization rooted in Jesus the Redeemer. Santo currently represents North America on the General Commission for Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry. He is serving as Coordinator of Ignite – Youth and Vocation Ministry for the Province of Canada (www.ignite-canada.ca).

Abstract • The contribution of Fr. Santo M. Arrigo, C.Ss.R., is a presentation of six topics for reflection with summary information from the Redemptorist General Guidelines as presentation points, as well as discussion questions and activities so that the formandi reflect upon their current realities of Redemptorist ministry with and for young people, and their gifts and abilities to be a part of that Mission within their Unit. Decision # 29 of the General Chapter, “Vocation Pastoral Ministry,” is enriched and presented as an Authentic Priority. The Congregation has a 30-year history of programming and ministries directed to the pastoral needs of young people throughout the world. Fr. Santo clarifies that traditionally Redemptorist Youth Vocation Ministry had been viewed as a program and only identified

with the efforts of vocation recruitment. The word “vocation”, as seen from the emerging theological thought of Pope Francis and the *General Guidelines for Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry* (2020) reflect on the signs of the times and the realities of young people today, especially in the light of a diminishment of faith practice among young people today. Using Matthew 18: 12-14, the parable of the lost sheep, Fr. Santos reflects on youth pastoral and the Alphonsian legacy as genuine, open, compassionate, and enculturated evangelizers to being present in the lives of young people. The six topics treated are 1. Why Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry (RYVM), 2. To preach the Gospel Anew: Understanding the Call Before Us, 3. A Charism that Inspires, 4. Putting the Ideal into Practice, 5. Elements of a Well-Balanced Ministry to Young People, and 6. Inviting the next generation: Vocation Ministry.

Keywords • Vocation Ministry, Youth Pastoral, Mission, pastoral needs, Vocation, Guidelines, the reality of young people, faith practice, Alphonsian legacy, preach, Gospel, Charism, Ideal, next generation.

Vocation Ministry and the Youth Synod

Introduction

The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer continues the rich tradition of structured ministry with young people in our world today through the leadership of the General Secretariat of Evangelization and the General Commission for Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry. This tradition spans over 30 years of visioning, programming, and ministries directed to the pastoral needs of young people throughout the world.

The work of RYVM has been traditionally viewed as a program that is only identified with the efforts of vocation recruitment. However, though the word “vocation” is in the title of this program, emerging theological thought based on Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (2019) and the *General Guidelines for Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry* (2020) have prompted the Commission for RYVM and the Secretariat for Evangelization to reflect on the signs of the times and the realities of young people today, especially in light of a diminishment of faith practice among young people today.

We read in Matthew 18:12-14 how the shepherd risks the lives of 99 sheep to go and search for the one lost sheep. This honorable and risky mission has often been referred to in the task of evangelization to those who have “lost their way”, like the lone sheep. Upon reflection of the signs of our times, it seems that the shepherd only has one sheep left, while the 99 seemed to have gone astray. As this is also an honorable and risky mission, it is a mission that is undertaken with a new set of parameters, as the mission field is much different to go after 99 than to go after 1. Often the response of a shepherd, in that case, is to become over-protective with the one that remains and fears moving out to be among the 99.

Ministry with young people today is often like leaving one lone sheep to go after 99. Our ministry cannot just be about the one who remains. If it is to be modeled after the life and ministry of Christ the Redeemer and the commission of the disciples, it is to encompass the signs of the times and be about the one who remains and the 99 to whom we are sent. It requires a renewed vision and varied approaches to bring the Good News of Plentiful Redemption to the lives of young people today. Many young people have turned away from the Church and abandoned their faith life and religious practice for various reasons, several of which are legitimately tied to recent events and circumstances of the Church.

In renewing our mission through restructuring, many units in the Congregation have identified young people among the abandoned of our time. In doing so, Units and Conferences have developed bold initiatives to be present to the lives of young people in the spirit of our charism and legacy of St. Alphonsus, being true to evangelization while being open, compassionate, and present to the people to truly enculturate the Good News of Plentiful Redemption among young people amid troubled times and the variety of situations within our wounded world.

About this Resource

This resource provides formation communities a tool to reflect on the realities of young people today, both within the Church and outside the Church, and to identify how our charism still calls us into mission today as part of the rich heritage of the Redemptorists in mission for not only the last 30 years of RYVM but since 1732. Students in formation are asked to prepare for this series of sessions by reading *Christus Vivit* (Pope Francis, 2019) and the *General Guidelines for Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry* (2020).

There are six topics for reflection with summary information from the Redemptorist General Guidelines to be used as presentation points, as well as discussion questions and

activities for the students to engage with the topic, reflect upon their current realities of Redemptorist ministry with and for young people, as well as reflect on their gifts and abilities to be a part of that mission within their unit.

The suggested time frame for these topics is one hour each. They can be conducted over six 1-hour sessions or three 2-hour sessions, depending on how the program of formation schedules time for formation sessions.

Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry Prayer

(General Guidelines for RYVM, 2020, p. 7)

Father of Mercy,
You call Redemptorists and young people together
to encounter Your Son and receive Your Spirit.
You invite us to share a journey of discipleship rooted
in our baptism.

Help us to walk faithfully together.
Lead us in Your way of communion, love, and justice.
Grant that we may listen to one another and to You
and that we may hear the cry of the most abandoned,
especially the poor.

Most Holy Redeemer,
You call us to be Your witnesses.
May we know the power of Your saving life,
death, and resurrection
so that in solidarity for mission,
with the guidance of Our Mother of Perpetual Help,
we may joyfully proclaim to our wounded world
the good news of Your abundant life. Amen.

Decision 29: Vocation Ministry as an authentic priority (XXV General Chapter)

Vocation Ministry must be a priority in the pastoral planning of all Units and local communities, ensuring that the necessary personnel and material resources are made available to realize this ministry's objectives.

Every Unit, by itself or in collaboration with other Units, will appoint full-time Vocation Promoters who will work together as a team to promote the Redemptorist missionary vocation.

In the promotion of the Redemptorist missionary vocation, special attention is to be given to the promotion of the vocation of the Redemptorist Brother.

TOPIC ONE

Why Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry (RYVM)?

Preparatory Reading: *General Guidelines (GG.) for RYVM*, 2020, pp. 1-20

Suggested Session Time: (1 hour)

Summary Points for Presentation and Review (15 minutes)

- General Guidelines for RYVM (2020) build on the tradition and experience of the Redemptorists and Lay Partners over the last 30 years, as well as the experience of the Synod on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment (2018), as well as the Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit* (March 2019)
- “Youth and Vocation Ministry are intrinsically linked in understanding the basic sense of a “Call” as a gift from God, and guided by the Holy Spirit.” (GG. #5a)
- “Our mission as Redemptorists still has meaning, especially for young people who are among the abandoned and poor in our Church and our wounded world.” (GG. #5b)

- “Youth and Vocation Ministry must not be reduced to the creation of mere programs, but must center around relationship and encounter, besides fostering openness for our young people to grow with Christ the Redeemer through mission, prayer, and service.” (GG. #5c)
- “Our Missionary Charism (Constitution 20) can inspire men and women to consider a life in Christ through the discernment of their vocation and life plan.” (GG. #5d)
- “Redemptorists and Partners in Mission are strong witnesses and examples of leadership, prayer, and service, whose work with young people builds the kingdom of God.” (GG. #5e)
- In concert with the Church’s wisdom and the world’s experience, the age of “young people” today as the subject of our mission efforts depends on local and life circumstances. However, for the General Guidelines for RYVM, “youth” is understood as young people between the ages of 16-29. (cf. GG. #8)
- With the rich history throughout the Congregation in the work of Redemptorists and young people and the work of the previous General Secretariats and Commissions for RYVM, the Congregation has reaffirmed young people among our pastoral and mission priorities through the task of Evangelization.
- It is important to recognize that RYVM – Redemptorist YOUTH and VOCATION Ministry is currently viewed through the work of EVANGELIZATION. This emphasizes the current pastoral and personal needs of young people throughout our world today, who vary in a wide range of religious experiences throughout the world. The cultures where the Redemptorists find themselves in mission continue to challenge the religious experience and religious culture of our young people. This reality has prompted our response to not only the diminishment of a religious culture but to understand how young people can hear the Word of God proclaimed in their lives and for them to make a personal commitment to a life of faith. (cf. GG. #20-26)

Group Discussion: TO WHOM ARE WE SENT? (45 minutes)

(The format used to facilitate this exercise may vary due to time frame, group size, and if the exercise is done in one group or divided among smaller groups).

Instructions

In your groups, prepare notes to the following questions. If the session was conducted in small groups, allow time for large group feedback. Please save the notes to these questions, as they will be referred to in future sessions.

1. What are some of the key realities of young people today?
2. Where is our Redemptorist mission addressing their realities?
3. How are their realities not addressed by our Redemptorist mission?
4. In what ways are Redemptorists called to reflect further upon the mission when it comes to these realities?
5. When you read the history of RYVM, what did you find inspiring? What did you find challenging?
6. What experience have you had in the work of RYVM as a young person in the Church and in discernment?

TOPIC TWO**To Preach the Gospel anew: Understanding the call before us**

Preparatory Reading: *General Guidelines for RYVM*, 2020, pp. 20-25

Suggested Session Time: (1 hour)

Summary Points for Presentation and Review (15 minutes)

- The work of RYVM has sought to build and foster the connection between the work we do with young people and vocation ministry understood as recruitment towards our life and mission as Redemptorists. (cf. GG. #28)

- The relationship between Youth Ministry and Vocation Ministry has found different expressions throughout the Congregation due to divergent visions of personnel and mandates for ministry, resulting in two-streamed approaches, with a priority often given to Youth Ministry as Vocation Recruitment. (cf. GG. #28)
- Pope Francis reaffirms the intrinsic relationship between youth and vocation ministry that has shaped our Redemptorist heritage. For Pope Francis, “vocation” is seen in the broad sense as simply “a calling from God – the call to life, the call to friendship with God, the call to holiness”. (*Christus Vivit* #248) (cf. GG. # 29)
- The call for us Redemptorists is to walk with young people in their culture and life experience as Jesus did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (cf. Luke 24:13-35) (cf. GG. #30)
- We build a culture of vocations where young people in our Christian communities build on the grace of baptism to live a life committed to Christ. (cf. GG. #31)
- Vocation is a gift and a journey of faith that all the faithful are invited to discern and discover. Jesus the Redeemer is the model of vocation for us: through His life, teaching, compassion, and mercy. Our basic vocation is to follow in His footsteps. Without the basic sense of “vocation”, young people today lack the spiritual and religious awareness to discern a call to religious life or priesthood. (cf. GG. #34-39)
- It is vital to the mission of the Church and to our way of life that we help young people hear their particular calling. However, ministry with young people must never be reduced solely to recruiting vocations to religious life or the Redemptorists. Vocation is not just for professional ministers, but for everyone through their professional life, family, consecrated life, single life, or ordained ministry. (cf. GG. #41)
- “A challenge today is that many young people do not have a sense of their fundamental, baptismal vocation – their calling to give their life in mission as a response to Christ. This situation diminishes the possibility of them considering a life rooted in God through a religious vocation” (cf. GG. #42)

Group Discussion: HEARING THE CALL? (45 minutes)

(The format used to facilitate this exercise may vary due to time frame, size of the group, and if the exercise is done in one group or divided among smaller groups).

Instructions

In your groups, prepare notes to the following questions. If the session was conducted in small groups, allow time for large group feedback. Please save the notes to these questions, as they will be referred to in future sessions.

1. How have you individually experienced Redemptorists in mission with young people?
2. What methods or approaches have you seen as effective?
3. How do young people today discover and foster a sense of “vocation”: their call by God to enter into a life that is connected to their Baptismal call?
4. How do young people today discover and foster a sense of a “religious vocation” that is deepened by discernment?
5. What attracts a young man to consider our way of life?

TOPIC THREE**A Charism that Inspires**

Preparatory Reading: *General Guidelines for RYVM*, 2020, pp. 26-34

Suggested Session Time: (1 hour)

Summary Points for Presentation and Review (15 minutes)

- As Redemptorists, we draw on our Charism, rooted both in our foundation and history, as well as in the missionary dynamism as called forth by our customs and work over the last 30 years of RYVM. “To preach the Gospel Anew” as called us to find new ways to allow our charism to shape the method of proclamation and the Word of God calling forth life and hope in the midst of a wounded world.

- St. Alphonsus revealed in his writings and preaching this “Crazy love of God” for us and how our God wants to be present to young people today. (cf. GG. # 45)
- The encounters that we are called to facilitate in our work with young people may take many forms: through evangelization, service experiences, catechesis, or pastoral moments. Yet each moment should nourish the joy of hope and the zeal of prayer while deepening young people’s relationship with Christ the Redeemer and the community of His disciples. (cf. GG. #46)
- The gifts we bring in our world allow the Spirit of God to continually shape the method of proclamation and hearing the Word impacted by our Redemptorist Charism. (cf. GG. #47-49)
- Our Redemptorist Saints and Blessed provide for us a tremendous example of the movement of God in the lives of our young people today. (cf. GG. #50)
- A few key concepts and phrases from our Redemptorist Charism, General Chapters, and inspiration of St. Alphonsus that continue to impact the world of RYVM today. (cf. GG. #51-61)
 - Wounded World
 - Abandoned, especially the Poor
 - Inviting young people into Mission
 - Living Memory (*Viva Memoria*)
 - Moral Theology
 - Formation of Conscience
 - Reconciliation
 - Prayer
 - Eucharist
 - Mary

Group Discussion: A CHARISM THAT CALLS (45 minutes)

(The format used to facilitate this exercise may vary due to time frame, size of group, and if the exercise is done in one group, or divided among smaller groups).

Instructions

In your groups, prepare notes to the following questions. If the session was conducted in small groups, allow time for large group feedback. Please save the notes to these questions, as they will be referred to in future sessions.

1. On a piece of paper, divide the page and write the headings: “Churched”, “Un-Churched”. *Knowing that in different cultural contexts, you may have other words that speak better to the realities of these two groups. For example: “Religious” or “Spiritual”, “Practicing”, “Not Practicing”. Write headings that best speak to the extremes in the experience of faith for young people today.*

Question: What elements of our Charism outlined in the reading (GG. #44-61) speak to the experience of young people today? Why? *In your discussion, you might want to refer to your notes from the first session (TO WHOM ARE WE SENT).*

2. What is your Conference and Province(s) commitment to RYVM or Ministry to and with young people at the current time? Is there a Conference Commitment? Is there a Provincial commitment? How is it organized and supported by the members of the Conference or Unit? Where is there opportunity and need for growth in the Redemptorist mission to young people or the work of RYVM?

TOPIC FOUR

Putting the Ideal into Practice

Preparatory Reading: *General Guidelines for RYVM*, 2020, pp. 35-37

Suggested Session Time: (1 hour)

Journey to Emmaus with Young People

1. Lectio Divina: The Story of Emmaus (30 minutes)

Read Luke 24:13-25 in a style of Lectio Divina, allowing time for participants to reflect, make note and share faith where appropriate.

Key points to emphasize from the Emmaus story: (GG. #70)

- The disciples come from Jerusalem, a place of confusion, fear, and doubt.
- Jesus meets them on the road
- They recount the story of all that had taken place.
- Jesus interprets the scriptures for them.
- The disciples invite Jesus to stay with them.
- The disciples encounter Christ present in the breaking of the bread.
- The disciples return to Jerusalem as proclaimers of Good News.

2. Conclude the Lectio Divina with the following points

Relating the Emmaus Experience with our work in Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry

The work of RYVM seeks to follow the basic movement of the encounter at Emmaus in the following ways: (GG. #71)

- **Encounter:** RYVM takes the initiative to provide opportunities for young people to encounter Jesus (cf. Cons. 1).
- **Recognize:** RYVM listens to young people, appreciates their experience, and builds authentic community (cf. Cons. 12, 24).

- **Interpret:** RYVM uses the lenses of scripture and tradition to see how and where we grow in the midst of life's blessings and challenges (cf. Cons. 19).
- **Decide:** RYVM helps young people use the gift of discernment to discover and renew their relationship with Christ. RYVM also assists young people with opportunities to live out their decision for Christ and the Gospel through service and evangelization (cf. Cons. 51-55).

3. Questions for large group discussion (30 Minutes)

(The format used to facilitate this exercise may vary due to time frame, group size, and if the exercise is done in one group or divided among smaller groups).

1. Recalling the lists that you created in previous sessions outlining the realities of young people today, the “Churched” and “Un-Churched”, how can both groups be called to encounter Christ, and become “missionary disciples”, who, set aflame by their encounter, proclaim the Good News of Plentiful Redemption?
2. What would the work of RYVM look like if it was to be relevant and address the real pastoral, spiritual, and developmental needs of both groups?
3. What qualities do you see in yourself as someone who might be called to service the Congregation in Ministry with Young People and RYVM?

TOPIC FIVE**Elements of a well-balanced Ministry to Young People**

Preparatory Reading: *General Guidelines for RYVM*, 2020, pp. 37-43

Suggested Session Time: (1 hour)

Summary Points for Presentation and Review (15 minutes)

- The lives of young people today are multifaceted and are shaped by the physical, mental or emotional, and spiritual components of life.
- God is present in the midst of all of these components.
- Our approach to ministry must encompass elements that reach into the various levels of the life of young people today.
- A well-balanced approach to Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry is essential to the Church's ability to be present in the whole life of young people today.
- Review the description of the Elements of a Well-Balanced Ministry to Young People. Perhaps these points can be read in rotation with participants. (GG. # 75-85) (15 min)
 - Evangelization
 - Catechesis
 - Community Life
 - Liturgy, Prayer and Worship
 - Justice and Service
 - Missionary Formation
 - Intentional Relationships
 - Advocacy
 - Leadership Development
 - Pastoral Care
 - Discernment and Vocation
- Review the traits of a well-balanced, integral ministry for and with young people at a local level. (GG. #86) (5 min)
- Review section XIII. Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults (GG. #87-89) (5 min)

Group Discussion: HOW WELL BALANCED IS OUR APPROACH TO MINISTRY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE? (30 minutes)

(The format used to facilitate this exercise may vary due to time frame, group size, and if the exercise is done in one group or divided among smaller groups).

Instructions

On an enlarged version of the following grid, identify events, programs, and activities that are taking place in RYVM in your local and provincial context, according to:

1. The elements of a well-balanced approach (listed on the left)
2. Where does ministry to young people in general take place (listed at the top)

Note that some events, programs, activities may fall into more than one box.

The GOAL of this exercise is not to fill the grid, but to celebrate initiatives that are currently being undertaken, identify where some areas are missing, and envision possible initiatives that can be taken in the future.

If the session was conducted in small groups, allow time for large group feedback. Please save the notes to these questions, as they will be referred to in future sessions.

TOPIC SIX**Inviting the Next Generation: Vocation Ministry**

Preparatory Reading: *General Guidelines for RYVM*, 2020, pp. 24-25

Suggested Session Time: (1 hour)

Summary Points for Presentation and Review (30 minutes)

- The experience of Vocation Ministry as “recruitment” is not the same throughout the world in the Congregation.
- Over the last couple of decades, there has been a shift in the efforts needed to work with young people, particularly with young men, to consider a vocation to religious life, particularly with Redemptorist life and ministry.
- As shifts in society with respect to religion and faith, the prevalence of scandal in the Church, decrease in church attendance, and a growing interest in spirituality outside of organized religion, there is a diminished sense that a vocation to religious life and priesthood is a viable option for a young man today.
- Though this reality is different throughout the world, areas which have recently continued to experience a relatively steady number of vocations, are beginning to see the effects of shifts in the society and culture that are impacting the sense of “vocation” among young people today, as defined and understood by Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* (2019) and the General Guidelines for RYVM (2020).
- In some areas of the Congregation, it is clear that we cannot simply expect young people with some experience of the Church to consider our way of life and mission as a life choice for them.
- Our ministry with young people needs to build a religious culture that allows for a life choice towards the Gospel and mission, even if they do not see themselves in religious life or as a Redemptorist. This is vital to today’s Church, as vocations to our way of life and mission can only come

through exposure to the possibility of a life choice directed towards Christ. A life choice directed towards Christ can only come through the presence of the Church in a real, relevant, and dynamic way in the life of young people, whether they are “Churched” or “un-Churched”.

Group Discussion: SHARING THE INVITATION (30 minutes)

(The format used to facilitate this exercise may vary due to time frame, size of group, and if the exercise is done in one group or divided among smaller groups).

Instructions

In your groups prepare notes to the following questions.

If the session was conducted in small groups, allow ample group feedback.

1. When you consider Vocation Ministry in your (V) Province or the local area, what efforts do you think are most effective?
2. What efforts need to be improved?
3. What qualities do you see in yourself as someone who might be called to work and serve the Congregation in Vocation Ministry?

Vocations of mature persons

❖ ROGÉRIO GOMES, C.Ss.R.¹

Author • Besides Doctorate and Licentiate degrees in Moral Theology from the Alphonsian Academy of Rome, Rogério Gomes also has Degrees in Theology from the *Instituto São Paulo de Estudos Superiores*, in Philosophy from the *Pontificia Universidade Católica de Campinas*, and in Spirituality from the Center of Teresian Spirituality (Carmelites). He has and continues to teach at different institutes of higher learning and is a member of several prestigious academic societies. He was Provincial Superior of the São Paulo Province, is currently a General Councilor of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (2016...), and a member of several Congregation commissions, among them, the General Secretariat for Formation, and the Commission for the Redemptorist Brothers.

Abstract • In this article Fr. Rogério Gomes, C.Ss.R., addresses the subject of the vocation of mature persons. This reality, already known in the Church, has manifested itself more strongly in recent years and tends to grow in the future, due to the social context in which we live with its characteristics: low birth rate, aging of the population, extended/prolonged adolescence, less admission to formation houses, postponement of one's vocation, etc. In the past, the seminaries were full of children and adolescents. After Vatican II, this reality has changed, and part of the studies are carried out outside the seminaries, in the Universities. We reflect on how to work with these people and help them give a sincere response to God, to themselves in the Congregation, since these vocations escape our traditional approach. To open this dialogue, it is clarified what is understood by the vocation of mature persons, the orientations of

¹ <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3342824164751325>.

the Magisterium of the Church about them, the process of accompaniment from the *Ratio Formationis Generalis* with its dimensions: human, spiritual, community, academic, and missionary pastoral and the principles of Redemptorist formation: gradualness, progressiveness, flexibility, and continuity so that the subject has an adequate and holistic formation. However, due to the special character of these vocations, without neglecting any other dimension, since they must be worked together, the author underlines some points: the two dimensions, the human and the communitarian, the principle of flexibility and the cultivation of the spiritual life and the mysticism of daily life.

Keywords • Vocation of mature persons, Magisterium, formation, discernment, spiritual life.

Vocations of mature persons

The aim of formation for both candidates and members is to lead them to such a degree of human and Christian maturity that, with the help of God's grace, they will be able to dedicate themselves intelligently, willingly and wholeheartedly to the service of the missionary Church in Redemptorist community life, to preach the Gospel the poor (Cons. 78).

Introduction

This article aims to initiate a discussion on a well-known topic to the Church that has recently grown and knocked on our doors: the vocations of mature persons. This reality tends, in the future, to increase more and more due to the context of the society in which we live: low birth rate, aging population, expanded/prolonged adolescence², less entry into houses of

² Cf. A. DOS SANTOS OLIVEIRA, *Adolescencia prolongada: una mirada a la nueva generación* (Psicologia.com.pt: el portal de los psicólogos, agosto de 2006). Available at: <https://www.psicologia.pt/artigos/textos/A0293.pdf>. Accessed on Nov. 5, 2019; M. DE MAGALHAES CAMARA; A. ROSELLI CRUZ, *Adolescencia prolongada: el tiempo que uno no quiere dejar pasar* (Curitiba: *Educar em Revista*, diciembre de 1999), p. 17-25, # 15. Available at: <https://revistas.ufpr.br/educar/issue/view/238/showToc> or http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0104-40601999000100005&lng=pt&nrm=iso. Accessed on: Nov. 5, 2019. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0104-4060.190>. According to DE MAGALHAES CAMARA and ROSELLI CRUZ: "The expression 'extended adolescence' was introduced by Bernfeld in 1923 and his object of investigation at the time was the extended male adolescence as a social phenomenon observed in European youth movements after the first war. There was in these groups a predilection for intellectualization and sexual repression, thus delaying the consolidation of adolescent conflict. This term with time began to have a broader connotation being today a descriptive and collective term that comprises conditions of heterogeneous dynamic constellations. The

formation³, postponement of one's vocation, etc. The seminaries were crowded with children and adolescents in the past, and the formation was totally internal. Since Vatican II, this reality has changed, and part of the studies have been carried out outside the seminaries in the Universities. With the vocations of mature persons, one faces another reality: from those who have postponed their vocation and do not have an academic formation but have a professional one, to those who have academic qualifications in various areas of knowledge. In our Redemptorist context, it is something relatively recent. We can have two attitudes before this reality: prejudice, rejection, and non-acceptance or the possibility of building something new in our formation processes and accepting them as a gift from God in today's times. Whether we like it or not, this is a concrete reality, and it will become ever more evident in our formative context. They are vocations and should not be treated as inferior to those of the young persons who come to us.

Thus, the method we will use for this text is to reflect on how we, as a Congregation, can work with these persons who come to us and help them to give a sincere response to themselves, to God, and to accompany them on this journey which, in a way, is outside the traditional conception of vocation in the Church or with which we are used to dealing. This is an essay that aims

term refers to a perseverance in the adolescent position, which, under normal circumstances, has a limited time and a transitory nature. A phase of maturation, which should be left behind after the completion of its task, becomes a means of life. The adolescent struggles to circumvent the purpose of the choices that are made at the end of adolescence; the process of adolescence is not abandoned but kept open. [...] today a descriptive and collective term that comprises conditions of heterogeneous dynamic constellations" (*Ibid.*).

³ *Presentation of the Pontifical Yearly Report 2018* (PRESS OFFICE HEADQUARTERS OF THE HOLY SEE), and ("*Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae*", 2016). Available at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/es/bollettino/pubblico/2018/06/13/pres.html>. Accessed on: March 26, 2020.

to open up a dialogue on the theme and to offer some guidelines on how to operate in the formative process.

1. What is meant by the vocation of mature persons

Defining the vocation of persons of mature age is not an easy task and without risks of prejudice or prejudice. Several related terminologies are: “late vocations,” “advanced age vocations,” etc. The most appropriate term in English is the vocation of mature persons to define a person who has already consolidated his personality and in part experienced different realities of life: social, affective, economic, and faith, and in the course of this diversity of experiences, discovers or rediscovers the vocational call to join a formative community to become a brother or priest.

Postponing a vocation is not always a sign of immaturity. Often a young person, from a very early age, cultivates this desire to follow the Lord in his heart in Consecrated Life, however, for different reasons: to help maintain his family or to take care of a family member, lack of support from his own family, late conversion or passage from his religion to Catholicism, illness, work, or studies that do not respond to his call on that particular occasion. The motivations are many⁴, and this young man has always been “forgetting himself” to respond to other demands that were momentary to him. His vocation goes through a process of numbness, latency. At a particular moment in life, he awakens as a constitutive factor of his existence, as a response to himself as a way of realizing himself in the world and seeking happiness.

There are other situations where the process of maturation of the personality is slower due to the modern social context itself

⁴ E. DUQUE, C. R. PEREIRA, *El Sacerdocio como vocación: razones para entrar en el Seminario* (Theologica, 2015) 2nd grade, 50, 1, pp. 63-83. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281108309_O_Sacerdocio_como_vocacao_motivos_de_entrada_no_Seminario. Accessed on: March 26, 2020.

and other factors that touch directly on the formation of the person's personality, from the family, its capacity to relate to the person and to the world itself.

2. Some orientations of the magisterium

The Decree on priestly formation, *Optatum Totius* (1965), # 3, when speaking about minor seminaries and particular Institutes, alludes to mature vocations when it says: "Promote diligently Institutes and other Centers for those who, at a more advanced age, follow the divine vocation."⁵

In 1976, the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education sent a circular letter to all the presidents of the Episcopal Conferences dealing with the topic.⁶ The text is divided into two parts: the situation of mature vocations and seminars, the practice of the Sacred Congregation, and the indications coming from the deliberations of the plenary assembly. The text makes the following observation: "Mature vocations [...] in recent years have been very numerous throughout the Church. They should be considered positively as a sign of a consoling spiritual renewal in the assemblies of mature men and as a remedy to satisfy at least in part the present shortage of priestly vocations".⁷

The document highlights the positivity of mature vocations, which are numerous throughout the Church, are signs of spiri-

⁵ *Optatum totius* (VATICAN II, 1965), # 3.

⁶ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION (Circular Letter, *Vocationes Adultorum*, to the presidents of the Episcopal Conferences on the care and formation of mature vocations, July 14, 1976): (*Enchiridiom vaticanum* 5, 2000), #s 2097-2108.

⁷ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION (Circular Letter, *Vocationes Adultorum*), # 2098.1 – "Adult vocations [...] in recent years have been very numerous throughout the Church. They are to be considered in a truly positive way as a sign of consoling spiritual renewal in the assemblies of mature men and women and a remedy to alleviate at least in part today's shortage of priestly vocations".

tual renewal, and such experiences have been valid. It warns of the need for prudence in their selection and a pedagogy adapted to them; to avoid arbitrary reduction of the course of philosophy and theology without due dispensation and that dioceses that have opted for the classical model, because they have many vocations, must consider the value of mature vocations not only for themselves but also for the universal Church; to avoid their exaltation and the need to treat them with realism and balance, and the need for institutions and structures adapted to favor any type of vocation. Avoiding many pedagogical formulas of a popular nature is recommended when trying to replace the classic formative model. Finally, the need to consider solid spiritual, theological, and doctrinal formation. “In the formation of mature vocations of any kind and cultural level, a solid spiritual and theological formation should be given fundamental importance.”⁸

The Congregation for Catholic Education recommends the need for a major seminary and its importance in forming them. The increase in mature vocations should not be a motivation to eliminate them. Theological and philosophical formation of these vocations should be considered in a typical major seminary, making the necessary adaptations in each case. The document notes that the lack of humanistic and philosophical formation is a problem of mature vocations at all levels. The approach taken by the text is positive and aims to guarantee the best way to form and accompany them.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), # 64 affirms:

We should also mention the phenomenon of priestly vocations arising among people of adult age after some years of experience of lay life and professional involvement. While not new in the Church's history, this phenomenon appears with some novel features and a certain frequency. It is not always

⁸ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION (Circular Letter, *Vocatio- nes Adultorum*), # 2102.12.

*possible, and often it is not even convenient to invite adults to follow the educative itinerary of the major seminary. Instead, after a careful discernment of the genuineness of such vocations, what needs to be provided is some specific program to accompany them with formation to ensure, bearing in mind all the suitable adaptations, that such persons receive the spiritual and intellectual formation they require. A suitable relationship with other candidates to the priesthood and periods spent in the community of the major seminary can be a way of guaranteeing that these vocations are fully inserted in the one presbyterate and are in intimate and heartfelt communion with it.*⁹

The Directory for Bishops, *Apostolorum Successores* (2004), # 87, states: “Just as the Bishop should take care of the seeds of the vocation of adolescents and young person, so he should also provide for the formation of mature vocations, having for this purpose suitable institutes or a program of formation suited to the age and condition of life of the candidate for the priesthood.”¹⁰ The same goes for Major Superiors with the necessary adaptations.

In 2016, the Congregation for the Clergy, in the new *Ratio Fundamentalís Sacerdotalis*, dedicates a topic on this theme and states that the vocations of mature persons arrive in the seminary with a more structured personality and with different experiences; their reception should be preceded by a spiritual journey so that a serious discernment can be made in their vocational motivations; the need to evaluate the time that has elapsed between baptism, Christian conversion, and entry into the seminary to avoid confusion between following Christ and

⁹ POPE JOHN PAUL II, Post Synod Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (AAS 84, 1992), # 64.

¹⁰ CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, *Apostolorum Successores* (Directory for Pastoral Ministry of Bishops, 2004), # 87. Available at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cbishops/documents/rc_con_cbishops_doc_20040222_apostolorum-successores_po.html. Accessed on: March 26, 2020.

being called to the priestly ministry. The accompaniment of these candidates, as of other vocations, must be done through a serious and complete process, which foresees, in the area of community life, a solid spiritual and theological formation, through a suitable pedagogical and educational method, which takes into consideration the personal profile of each one.¹¹

Faced with this new reality, the *Ratio* recognizes and reaffirms this reality and recommends that pastoral work for vocations accompany them. “In this sense, vocation promotion is aimed at men belonging to various age groups of different ages, although today, given the growing number of mature candidates who have one or more professional experiences behind them, there is a need to pay particular attention to this precise age group.”¹²

¹¹ “Those who discover the call to the ministerial priesthood at a later age arrive at the Seminary with a more structured personality and after a life journey characterized by diverse experiences. The initial reception of these persons in the Seminary requires a previous spiritual and ecclesial journey, during which a serious discernment of their vocational motivations can be made. It is necessary to evaluate carefully the time that has passed between Baptism, or Christian conversion, and entry into the Seminary, avoiding possible confusion between the following of Christ and the call to the priestly ministry. In the same way as is done with other seminarians, care should be taken to accompany these candidates through a serious and complete process, which provides, in the area of community life, for a solid spiritual and theological formation, by means of an appropriate pedagogical and didactic method, which takes into account one’s personal profile. It will be the competence of the Episcopal Conferences to give specific norms in accordance with the situation of the nation, evaluating the convenience of establishing an age limit for the admission of such vocations and considering the possibility of establishing a Seminary for this purpose”. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (Vatican City: L’OSSERVATORE ROMANO, December 8, 2016), *The Vocations of mature persons*, # 24.

¹² CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, # 14.

3. The process of accompagnement

If we start from the principle that vocation is a gift of the Spirit and called to a mission, then a person, regardless of age, can be called at a particular stage of his life because the Spirit blows wherever he wants (cf. Jn 3:8). An age group does not determine vocation as grace and mystery; it permeates the whole of human life (fundamental vocation) and manifests itself throughout it in how the subject responds to his existential reality (specific vocation). Thus, the fundamental question of the subject is: how do I respond to my fundamental vocation to realize myself as a person? Faced with the complexity of the phenomenon of life, social relationships, and the process of becoming aware, of growth and the humanization of the person, one can respond vocationally at different times in one's life.

It is important to consider that every human being is contextualized, intuitive, and discerns his vocation within him. The context is not decisive; however, it offers the elements that facilitate or hinder human fulfillment. Before him and his conscience occur, the response can overcome his contextual conditioning since the human being can use adversities to his advantage through his creativity and capacity for discernment and conversion. Here the focus and decisive factor must not be age. However, it must be considered from the point of view of the institutional charism, but from a profound discernment, in such a way as to reach the deepest possible concrete motivations of the person, always remembering that the human being is a mystery and can always surprise us.

In general terms, these candidates are formed within the same dimensions that the *Ratio Formationis* points out: human, spiritual, community, academic, and pastoral-missionary¹³ and the same principles of Redemptorist formation: graduality,

¹³ Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Post Synod Apostolic Exhortation), # 43-59; CONGREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER (*General Statutes*), #s 055-058.

progressiveness, flexibility, and continuity so that the subject may have an adequate and holistic formation. However, due to the special character of these vocations, without neglecting any other dimension, since they must be worked on together, two dimensions must be stressed: the human and the communitarian dimensions and the principle of flexibility.

3.1 The human dimension

This dimension is important to every human being. Humanization is a daily process that involves resilience, self-knowledge, and self-perception, self-control, self-esteem, being integrated into one's sexuality, being aware of personal gifts and weaknesses, being open to dialogue and relating to persons, especially those with different world views, developing empathy and solidarity, especially with the poorest and most abandoned, interacting with information and culture, learning to deal with new technologies, cultivating spaces for creative leisure and playfulness in life and the desire to grow humanly.

It is assumed that those who take care of others, animating them, humanly and spiritually, have previously taken part in this journey to acquire the keys to approach the other in a serene way. Evangelization is not an external process. It begins internally, from the subject himself, who recognizes himself with limits of virtues and makes himself available to share a personal life journey with other persons and the Christian community.

3.2 Community life

Unlike the “traditional Seminary” that welcomes the young person to make his long journey of discernment and formation, mature persons already come to us with a consolidated personality and a history of experiences in various fields. In this sense, it is important to welcome and value them since they can enrich the group itself and work more intensely in the community setting.

One of the foundations of our Consecrated life is community life. It is an excellent richness on the affective, spiritual, and

pastoral levels. Still, it also generates conflicts that range from an individualistic attitude to not having the necessary resilience for conflicts and work in common. For example, suppose a candidate is not able to move freely and creatively through community life, where significant experiences of apostolic life occur. In that case, it will be difficult for him or her and the other members of the community to have a qualitative community experience. In this sense, it is important to help the subject to discern: Is this the lifestyle he seeks and wants for his life, with its riches and limitations, with its joys and sorrows? Are you willing to assume this lifestyle and be creative to energize community life?

Therefore, it is fundamental in the formative process of mature vocations to intensify two important aspects: a) to work on the individual level, helping them to develop the skills for a healthy community life; b) to work in groups: group therapy and networking, group sports, academic, formative, pastoral activities and prayer life. A great resource is to share life experiences with others: family history, vocation, social vision, the Congregation, the Church, etc. It is not a matter of reducing everything to communitarianism and suffocating the subject, who needs individual spaces, as a response to personal and group demands, but of providing him with possibilities of interaction and also to confirm his vocation and demonstrate that he is capable of embracing this lifestyle in the future.

In this sense, it is worth pointing out that formators have a significant role in provoking (calling to) the different activities and helping the group develop conflict resolution strategies since this is a very fragile point in the formation Consecrated and Priestly life.

3.3 Academic life

Many who wish to enter the Consecrated life already have a completed university education, masters, and doctorates. In some situations, much more technical and human preparation than the formators themselves. This can be a zone of conflict

since these subjects tend to ask more critical questions, to be more confrontational. In this sense, the capacity for dialogue of the formators is fundamental. They should seek, to the maximum, to integrate the capacity of studies, research, and knowledge in the formative process. Academic knowledge is not put forward as a status, but as an instrument of the openings of thought and horizons before the world and of humanization. It can be very enriching to use the knowledge of the different members of the group and promote an interdisciplinary formation. This way values the subjects and the group itself by making it possible to reflect on different points of view on specific formative themes.

3.4 The principle of flexibility

The *Ratio Formationis*, # 46, comprises one of the pillars of Redemptorist formation, flexibility, and adaptation. Because of the changing demands of the world and ministry, everyone must have the capacity to change and adapt when necessary. Rigidity should not be confused with the strength of will required, just as blind adherence to a single way of doing things should not be confused with loyalty to tradition. On the contrary, loyalty and willpower must be encouraged to be open to change based on pastoral urgencies. This includes the willingness to go where necessary (cf. Cons. 15).

This principle presents itself as the possibility of providing the formandi with the best instruments to adapt to the different contexts and works and have the capacity to exercise their apostolate creatively, responding to the current demands. It is worth remembering that in this sense, the principle aims at the subject being free and autonomous, and formation is not a “straitjacket” founded on realities that no longer respond to the real challenges of society.

Therefore, in the case of mature vocation formation, the application of this principle is important for the following reasons: 1) they are persons who already have a certain degree of experience and instruction; 2) the needs of formation, the

questions are different from those of a group of adolescents and young person; 3) they have work experience, and this must be incorporated in some way into the program of study as a way of valuing skills and so that the formator can apply his learning in some Redemptorist pastoral project. For example, if he is a psychologist, a lawyer, a journalist, he may collaborate with some kind of Redemptorist social work or into a justice and peace group; 4) the program should focus and be intense in those areas most out of touch with the formandi (catechesis, community life, etc.). In this sense, each group will have different requirements. This does not mean to deform, at any moment, the formative program proposed by the *Ratio* or to make it an exception. It means to make it efficient and applicable to this reality.

In the same way as the *Ratio Fundamentalis Sacerdotalis*: “As with the other seminarians, care should be taken that the accompaniment of these candidates is carried out through a serious and complete process which provides, in the area of community life, a solid spiritual and theological formation through an adequate pedagogical and didactic method which takes into account one’s profile.”¹⁴ Therefore, it is a program that requires greater freedom and, at the same time, autonomy and openness to do so without improvisation. Each group must have its reality verified. The formative instances must answer the question: how are we going to apply the contents of the *Ratio* to this group since it has its peculiarities different from the previous one? This requires serious study so that the program responds, in the best possible way, to the demands of Redemptorist formation and requires revision and adaptation each year, without losing the central axis of the *Ratio*.

Here it is important to consider the team of formators. In turn, they should be flexible, have a holistic vision of Redemptorist formation, openness to the new, and the ability to propose the changes born of the group’s demands and accompany it

¹⁴ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation, Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, # 24.

responsibly. Fraternal dialogues should be open, marked by attentive listening and positive discernment. A team of formators that make the formation program a straitjacket is not responding to the demands coming from this community.

4. To cultivate the spiritual life and the mystique of daily life

One of the essential apprenticeships in the formation house is to help the formandi find the path to cultivating the spiritual and mystical life. Spiritual and mystical life does not mean filling the program with endless prayers and liturgical practices. A formation house can have an excellent program of spiritual activities and absolutely no cultivation of spirituality and mysticism. Why do many religious, after leaving the formation house, have an aversion to prayer and everything that refers to the spiritual life? Or why the search for other spiritualities and not that proposed by the Congregation? Do formation programs help the young person find his spiritual grounding so that he nourishes his interior life independent of structures and schedules?

Sometimes the formation house has a standard model in which the whole group is submitted to a uniform manner of praying. The formation process has to provide a structure that facilitates prayer and encounters with God. However, it cannot remain at this level alone. It is necessary to work at the individual level of each trainee. What is the reason for this? It is to help each one to discover his method of prayer. Not everyone, although they do, adapts to the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, the established formulas, etc. Everyone has his way of experiencing God and must discover it. This discovery will make the individual cultivate his interiority not from an obligation imposed on him by canonical laws but as a vital necessity.

Conclusion

After this reflection on this reality that is beginning to become more prevalent in our Redemptorist formation, it is worth remembering that for the vocations of mature persons,

the same principles of the *Ratio Formationis* apply. Some of them, in our opinion, should be more accentuated due to the characteristic of the group itself. It is a phenomenon that challenges us, but it should be read not as a problem but as grace and as a theological category, as Aquilino Bocos reminds us: “the term challenge has a theological character. It is a sign from God asking for our fidelity. In this perspective, we must discover and welcome the presence of the Spirit who, while showing us his gifts, encourages us to continue growing”.¹⁵ Indeed, the Spirit shows us this new alternative through the latest social transformations we are experiencing.

It is fundamental that we begin to prepare ourselves better for this reality. From now on, adolescents and young people will be more and more scarce. Therefore, the mature group that enters must be given the treatment due to them treating them with maturity and as adult persons. To do this, the formator responsible with the formation team, should have the capacity to accompany and dialogue with the formandi and have an overall vision formation, be able to perceive the group’s own formative need, its deficiencies and try to remedy them and make recommendations for the subsequent phases of aspects on which to be worked.

Indeed, part of the hesitation to these generations of mature persons that seek us out is because added to their age and the stage of formation that they must receive, chronologically the time of living the Consecrated life or priestly ministry will be shorter. This is a concrete fact. However, formation must help this individual so that they, in a shorter time of performing their apostolic life, have a *kairological* achievement, with intensity, maturity, awareness, and experience of their vocation and dedication to the poorest most abandoned, according to our Constitutions.

¹⁵ A. BOCOS, *Repensar la Reestructuración. Las Estructuras Provinciales y comunitarias* (Bogotá, Colombia: Servicio Redentorista de Espiritualidad, abril 2018), # 01, pp. 4-5.

One Missionary Body: The challenge of witnessing through interculturality

❖ BRENDAN KELLY, C.Ss.R.

Author • Brendan J. Kelly, C.Ss.R., is the current General Secretary of the Congregation. He was born in Northern Ireland and grew up in that state during the 1960s and 1970s, a state marked by conflict, division, and violence. He joined the Dublin Province of the Congregation in 1978. He was assigned to the Cebu Province (Philippines) of the Congregation in 1984. He worked in the Philippines as an itinerant missionary, as a member of the Provincial Leadership Team, and as a teacher in the St. Alphonsus Theological and Mission Institute (SATMI), an international Formation Centre for the Congregation in South-East Asia. He is currently a member of the Community of the Most Holy Redeemer, the community of the General Curia in Rome.

Abstract • Fr. Kelly introduces this article on “Interculturality” with a particular emphasis on community life and its centrality for the Redemptorist *Vita Apostolica*. He then goes into the importance of language, pointing out the less familiar term “inter-cultural”, its use in the different social sciences and its particular understanding in our theological context when “intercultural community members come together from diverse cultural backgrounds but they share an intentional commitment to fellowship, motivated...by a shared religious conviction and common mission”. Father Kelly then presents an understanding and definitions of culture with its Theological implications since culture provides the context for lived faith. Four important areas for consideration in inter/cultural living are highlighted: Social Location, Body tolerance, Health and sickness, and Time and Space. Clarification of the Challenge (“creating a new culture by integrating the constituent cultures of each member”) and the Prospects (a faith-based commitment to the vision of Jesús) are then considered. The ar-

ticle contains a “Conclusion” entitled, “From Invitation to radical witness”, with three principles that might help as we move forward. Finally, the article presents three cultural awareness activities to help a community encounter and live cultural differences thoughtfully and respectfully. The article ends with references for continued reading and studying this most important topic for Intercultural Religious Community and Missionary Life.

Keywords • Interculturality, culture, reality, witnesses, signs, community life, language, challenge, intention commitment, joint Mission, radical witness, prospects.

One Missionary Body: The challenge of witnessing through interculturality

Introduction

In carrying out its mission in the Church, the Congregation unites members who live together and form one missionary body” (Cons. 2). And so, all Redemptorists know themselves to be members of a common project shared by all in the Congregation. We encourage all to nurture this sense of belonging and thus cultivate a true community life. The community we long for is a place where all confreres, old and young, with their gifts and wounds, are included and where co-responsibility becomes a reality (Message of the 25th General Chapter to the Congregation, 11).

Central to many of the discussions during the 25th General Chapter was the subject of community life. There was a general recognition that community life and its centrality to our *Vita Apostolic* is experiencing many different challenges. These challenges are further highlighted as we face a future where the Congregation will undergo a radical change as the process of Restructuring and Reconfiguration begins to take effect. Already, in certain parts of the Congregation, and certainly within the next ten years, the composition of many of our communities will have altered dramatically. We will undoubtedly move from a situation where most of us live in mono-cultural communities to a situation where a majority of us will probably live in international or multicultural communities. As we move towards this new reality, we clearly need to prepare ourselves accordingly. Living this new reality will not come easily. A strong temptation is that we replace our current experience of mono-cultural living with that of multi-cultural living, that is,

multi-cultural communities that can be appropriately characterized as merely “people living together, separately, under the same roof.” We are all aware that such communities already exist. But if a Congregation like ourselves is to survive and if we are to be a meaningful presence and witness in an increasingly pluralistic world, we must become increasingly and intentionally “inter-cultural.” For this to happen, we need a fundamental shift in our mentality from understanding ourselves as an international Congregation, which we have been for almost three centuries, to understanding ourselves as an inter-cultural Congregation.

Language

Over the course of the last century, our understanding and experience of community and personal identity have changed significantly. Geographical and social mobility have reshaped local and international relations. The words “international” and “multi-cultural” are now common in our vocabulary. But the term “inter-cultural” is less familiar. Our understanding of these terms is largely derived from the social sciences of cultural anthropology, sociology, and psychology. These disciplines have helped us greatly. However, social science is unconcerned with religious faith, with God. So, when theology “adopts” sociological language, it also “adapts” it, with the result that the theologian and the sociologist no longer speak quite the same language. For example, sociology uses the terms multi-cultural and intercultural as more or less relating to the same reality, or else inter-cultural focuses more on the social dynamics of international relations, while multi-cultural simply identifies a social fact within neighbourhoods or voluntary associations. However, theologically, the term “inter-cultural” relates explicitly to God and to interpersonal relationships shaped and motivated by the faith commitment of the participants. In other words, theologically speaking, inter-cultural community members come together from diverse cultural backgrounds, but they share an intentional commitment to fellowship, motivated not

simply by pragmatic or commercial reasons but by a shared religious conviction and common mission. We must keep this distinction in mind as we look to the future as a reconfigured Congregation. While it may be true that there are pragmatic reasons for us coming together in international communities, the primary reasons for doing so must be our faith and our mission to preach the Gospel to the poor and the most abandoned, and “become signs and witnesses before people of the power of his resurrection, proclaiming the new and eternal life” (Cons. 51). To be a reality, we must move from being merely international communities to being intercultural communities.

Inter-cultural living then is a faith-based and life-long process of conversion, emerging as a requirement of members of intentional, international religious communities. Healthy inter-cultural living depends very much on the members’ level of commitment and support. Individuals vary in adaptability and learning levels, but each one generates positive or negative energy, and a small, resistant group can generate enough negative energy to undermine the efforts of the others.

Understanding culture

Our vision for a reconfigured Congregation is one where inter-cultural living will become more and more the norm for the purpose of mission and its witness value. Preparation for such living is essential. A starting point for such preparation would be to look once again at how we understand culture, particularly one’s own culture.

Culture provides the context for lived faith. None of us are without culture, and faith can only be lived culturally. We do not live our faith outside a specific cultural context. Inter-cultural living is multi-cultural rather than mono-cultural, and none of us can be expected to live our faith through an entirely alien culture or the dominant culture of the majority.

We readily assume that we understand the culture, which is actually subtle and elusive. Anyone who has spent significant time living and working in a cultural context different to his

culture of origin will soon realize this! Culture is constitutive of every human person raised in a social world. Yet none of us is actually “born” with a culture. Family, environment, and socialization are critically important, and everyone has a particular culture or a collection of cultural traits. But since faith can only be expressed culturally it is therefore necessary that in an inter-cultural community context, the community values each member’s cultural identity as a gift. It is important to recognize that each member’s “lived” faith constitutes an alternative and legitimate way of being. At the same time, everyone’s different perspectives, habits, and characteristics present challenges to harmonious living. The ability to live with, and not simply despite, cultural differences is the hallmark of a true inter-cultural community!

So, what is culture? Some simple definitions:

- The [hu]man-made part of the environment: what social groups do to the worlds they inhabit. It is:
 - Material – artifacts, buildings.
 - Institutional – law an order, kinship/family, economic systems, religion.
 - Symbolic – orality, perhaps writing, and words-objects-gestures that ‘say the unsayable’.
 - Moral – values and virtues and their opposites.
- Culture is ‘the form of social life’ – the way a social group normally behaves, including rule-breaking behaviour.
- Culture is ‘a meaning-making system’ – supported by standards and rules. It makes intelligible communication possible.
- Culture is ‘an enduring reality’. Cultures rise and fall, flourish and die, and none is static or immortal – implications for intercultural living should be obvious. Culture is transmitted gradually over time, through the generations – it is an ongoing process rather than a simple social fact. Every culture is in the process of change.

Reality (what people consider real) is socially constructed – people are born into a community that has already interpreted the world and determined the meaning of things, events, and

relationships. Socialization or enculturation extends through the first decades of life, as a person is aggregated to the pre-existing world of meaning. Once adequately socialized, it is increasingly difficult to think our own thoughts or ways are wrong. This is perhaps one of the greatest factors that needs to be taken into consideration when we talk about inter-cultural living as religious.

Theological implications

Because every mature person is a person of culture, spirituality (or “lived faith”) can only flourish in a cultural context. This raises an important question – how do faith and culture exist together? In our Christian tradition, the word “spirituality” is often attributed to St. Jerome who originally coined the word “spirituality” in the fifth century. He defined it explicitly as life in the Holy Spirit given at baptism to guide our faith journey. It might be described as “a way of being in the world with God,” where every variable (“way”, “being”, “world”, “God”) is shaped by each person’s individual and unique experience. During one’s lifetime, a person may embrace several possible “ways” (single, married, widowed, celibate, etc.), experience different states of “being” (child, youth, old-age, sick, healthy, citizen, refugee, migrant), live in several different “worlds” (rural, urban, tropical, arctic, peaceful, violent), and relate in different ways to “God” (Creator, Father, Mother, Spirit, Jesus of the manger, Jesus of the Cross, Jesus of the resurrection).

As we know, spirituality is not a set of fundamental beliefs, but shapes and is shaped by how we relate to God and creation, pray and express ourselves, respond to suffering, and make life choices. From different cultural environments and experiences, people have generated countless legitimate expressions of Christian spirituality. People in a multi-cultural community, attempting, not just to live their faith, but to do so in an explicitly inter-cultural way, will encounter many opportunities and challenges, similarities and differences, with respect to liturgy, prayer, ritual, music, silence, privacy, and so on. Each person

must discover a new way of living in the midst of cultural differences, learned behaviours, and personal preferences.

Important areas for consideration in inter-cultural living

In what follows, I highlight just four areas that are important for consideration when it comes to multi-cultural living. There are others, but these four were particularly relevant for me in striving to live in an inter-cultural way in international communities.

Social Location

Social location describes our enduring world and our place in it – from an island in the Pacific Ocean to a mountain forest, from isolated settlement to crowded high-rise living, from tightknit extended family system to free-wheeling independent citizen – each of these locations play a significant role in how we experience our world. Coming from a small, rural, close-knit, farming community in the north of Ireland shaped my understanding of the world in ways that I was not conscious of until living in a large international community in a large city in the southern Philippines with 52 confreres from 10 different nations and ranging in age from 22 to 75! Adapting to such a reality was an extremely difficult process. But we did manage to achieve a level of harmonious living that enabled each confrere to find his place in the community. Central to this harmonious living was the serious consideration given to the formative power of each person's social location and how much individual variety and preference are compatible with the demands of the broader community and its mission. In achieving this, dedication to the Plan of Community life was a major factor. Understanding one another's social geography, socialization, and social mobility is a prerequisite to appropriate responses. Unfortunately, members in some of our communities know less about their confreres, despite living with them for decades, than they do about celebrities and politicians and their Facebook "friends"!

Body tolerance

Body tolerance describes the culturally diverse ways people treat and display their bodies and interact with others. This is very interesting! It contrasts different people's comfort levels. Culturally diverse people in an intentional community must become mutually sensitive to what is appropriate dress or demeanour, interaction, and affection. Touching a person's head, displaying the soles of one's feet can be sources of great tension in an international community striving to be intercultural! Strange as it may seem, this idea of body tolerance is also an important consideration when it comes to the celebration of liturgy and prayer. Coming from a cold, northern climate (Ireland) where liturgy is celebrated in a fairly short space of time behind closed doors (more often than not with little singing!), joining in the celebration of liturgy in a tropical climate, often celebrated outdoors under the sun for an extended period of time and where body movement plays an important role was very often an endurance test for me, and my "Irish" liturgical celebrations were occasions of frustration for those with whom I lived! In matters of common prayer, liturgy, music or silence, movement and stillness, different comfort levels and tolerance, will constitute significant points of concern within an intercultural community.

Health and sickness

Health and sickness are culturally coded. Many people from a contemporary northern hemisphere with highly developed health systems, like myself, rarely see a dead body, and severe sickness is understood as a matter of hospital isolation for a medical or surgical solution before a rapid return to the community. But in many parts of the world, death and dying are constant visitors, sickness is attended domestically, and medical/surgical solutions are rare. Rather than sickness isolating a patient from the family, it integrates them, and when death nears, family solidarity is critical, whatever the expense

and distance involved. But many members of conventional religious communities have had to make a real break with their families, have had no further involvement with sick or dying relatives, and were prevented by distance, finances, or rules from attending funerals or assisting with family needs. This can result in an experience of great hurt on the part of many confreres. Intercultural living demands a radical rethinking of what is appropriate or demanded in justice, relative to each member personally and their respective families.

Time and Space

Attitudes to time and space are so culturally variable that any group of diverse people will need to address them explicitly. We have all heard pejorative references – people enslaved by a clock or watch – to Filipino time or Mexican time, but clock-watching can also produce hypertension, frustration, and intolerance. Think again of those open-ended timeless Sunday liturgies of African communities, compared to the clock-ruled, time-starved, and rushed liturgies in other places. In many cultures, time is a gift, to be used freely without reference to chronology. In contrast, it is a scarce resource in others, treated as a commodity and with the same vocabulary as we use for commercial transactions: we say that time can be saved or spent, gained or lost, and even wasted. When the clock structures daily life, there is little time left over for spontaneity, creativity or simple availability. Intercultural living calls us to address time's use (and abuse). And as with time, so with space: attitudes to space – personal space, open-space, private space, common space, sacred space – are not simply whimsical but culturally shaped. In Davao City, Philippines, this was often an issue in the formation community. In an intercultural community, space must be carefully negotiated, and not without some discomfort or pain, and certainly requiring compromise.

Clarifying the Challenge

Ethnocentrism is a fact of life – we cannot deny it – it is part of us: we see and interpret through culturally-conditioned eyes. It is immoral only when we inflict our own perspective on others as the only true perspective. We are all ethnocentric, but we can identify this and act accordingly with maturity and training. Ethnocentric bias judges other peoples and worlds to be inferior reflections of one's own. The 'other' then becomes the problem – to be avoided, demeaned, attacked or even converted. Intercultural living challenges our ethnocentrism – which should gradually erode through our exposure to other ways of living. The challenge is to create a new culture by integrating the constituent cultures of each member (and here I refer to the culture of a person's country of origin and the culture of the Redemptorist Unit of origin), so that there is no longer and 'us'/'them' opposition. But in practice, this is often undermined – how?

From the mythical Genesis story to the historical community of the first disciples, and down to our own day, God's idea of community is one of radical inclusion and radical equality, made explicit by Jesus. But while God wants to unite, every culture is limited by a perverse tendency to stratify, separate, diminish and exclude; no human society is in fact radically inclusive or egalitarian. Every attempt to form an inclusive community of 'we' – in Eden and in the numerous subsequent Utopian communities – very soon results in alienation or the creation of hierarchy, or drives a wedge between people: every original inclusive community of WE becomes polarized into US and THEM. This was the situation Jesus encountered. The Letter to the Ephesians describes humanity's self-inflicted wound and the Jesus solution. The author describes the polarized world of Jews (us) and Gentiles (them), and God's plan to reconcile humanity to itself and to God as an ALL-INCLUSIVE 'WE'.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He is the peace between us, and He has made the two into one and broken

down the barrier that used to keep them apart, actually destroying the hostility between us in his own person (Ephesians 2:13-14).

This is a wonderful articulation of Jesus' radical plan for humanity. Pauline writings also declare three times that there is henceforth no moral distinction or political division erected on the obvious differences between men and women, Jew and Greek, slave and free (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; I Cor 12:13). This is the very vision that must be the foundation and justification for every attempt to build intercultural communities. Jesus chose to become a person of the margins, a sociological and biblical 'stranger' rather than a person of power and influence. Influential people occupy central positions where power and authority lie. But Jesus chose the most effective way to encounter the people marginalized by circumstance and by society – society's 'them' and 'other'. Since the primary purpose of intercultural communities is greater commitment to the mission of Jesus, every member is called to kenotic living – self-emptying service of, and among, the least or the other. Given the strong cultural pressures we face today (and as religious, we are no exception) to achievement, advancement, and social recognition, intercultural living stands as a bold invitation to a faith-based countercultural lifestyle.

Good will alone, however, is not enough. As we know, some would-be disciples of Jesus have been stumbling blocks rather than honest witnesses; goodwill must be complemented and shaped by ongoing conversion.

An 'intercultural project' is not just a rational game-plan but a faith-driven and life-long undertaking. Faith may or may not motivate multinational companies or groups of volunteers, but it is the foundation of the life-project of every Christian disciple. As such, without mature faith-sharing, appropriate correction, reconciliation, and mutual encouragement, the project will inevitably fail, as Pope Francis made explicit when talking to the Curia in 2014. We all know the corrosive effects of gossip and slander, or the basic lack of encouragement from peers and leaders.

And yet: even personal faith is insufficient unless supported by the actual fruit of people's good intentions: the ongoing commitment to acquiring appropriate skills and virtue. Not that everyone must become super-efficient, but everyone must persevere in the effort – in learning the art of intercultural living, perseverance may be a better witness than expertise.

The Prospects

Intercultural living is not the mobilization of an international work-force but a faith-based commitment to the vision of Jesus. It is an opportunity and a grace. Not everyone need be young and active – the moral support of those who are less active is of incalculable value; but a polarized group is self-defeating. Intercultural living is not a 'natural' arrangement, though it is possible in a *supernatural* context. Diplomacy, compromise, and a common vision must inspire a common effort and provide appropriate means to sustain it. This is where the Plan of Community Life, called for by the 25th General Chapter for every community, plays a vital role. Even for members of established international communities such as the community of St. Alphonsus in Rome, it is something new: most of us remain rather mono-cultural even in multi-cultural or international environments. Intercultural living is necessary but costly for viable international religious life today and into the future, but obligatory if dry bones are to live. If successful, it will revolutionize our lives and the Christian mission. Not everyone will accept the challenge to mission in intercultural communities, though it is open to everyone.

As membership of our Congregation continues to decline and age in the northern hemisphere, communities that do survive with integrity in the coming decades will do so through their international, culturally diverse, membership. They will be characterized by 'fusion' of the integration of culturally diverse personnel. The opposite of fusion is 'fission': the fragmentation of international congregations so that they become no more than loose aggregations of culturally diverse groups. They

would remain international entities, but at the cost of their intercultural witness to the Gospel. This happens through individualism, tribalism, factionalism, provincialism, or the loss of the founding charism. The future of international religious life – and collaborative ministries – depends significantly on the ability of each community (local and institutionally) to think and act interculturally. Failure to do so in a global church will lead to terminal decline. It is precisely for this reason that our Congregation has set itself on the path of Restructuring and Reconfiguration.

Conclusion: From Invitation to radical witness

Intercultural living is a much more persuasive force than talk about loving one's neighbour. But new wine cannot be put into old wineskins, and we cannot build such communities by recycling old material or uncritically employing obsolete ideas. In the past, the model used by ourselves and most other religious Congregations was 'come join us and share our ways and religious tradition.' This cost us very little – life could go on while potential newcomers were being formed, assessed, and then accepted or not. Candidates who differed from the norm were either marginalized or rejected by a leadership that held the initiative in all matters.

Since Vatican II and the increase of religious from the global church, this model has given way to a more inclusive approach by some long-established congregations. Now the message is clearer – 'come join our community and help us diversify internally and internationally.' This is a significant advance, indicating a desire not only to speak and teach but to listen and learn. But the inclusion of the 'other' simply does not go far enough. Unless customary behaviour is changed, a marginal outsider just becomes a marginal insider. Many cultural 'others' still feel ineffective and invisible in the communities to which they belong. Without a careful power-analysis and self-analysis of the established community structures, there will be no radical inclusion. Such analysis would show whether the traditional

decision-makers and privileged personnel have remained as before or whether incoming members are treated as equals. (I venture to suggest that this is a major challenge to Units of the Congregation that seek assistance from other Units with greater personnel. Are the confreres from these Units truly appreciated as equals, or are they seen as “an extra pair of hands” to do as they are told?) Intercultural communities must reject ‘assimilation’ and token ‘inclusion’, and develop an attitude of ‘radical welcome.’ Then the message is ‘bring your cultural and religious values, your voice and autonomous self, and help us together to build a new community.’ This facilitates the authentic incarnation of each member, which means that everyone will be affected by the cultural diversity, and called to an on-going conversion to God, to each other, and to the cultural values which shape each life. No longer will people be able to hide behind their own cultural conventions and play the ‘culture card’. Rather, each will need to examine cultural habits, bad and good, and learn to compromise some comfort for the sake of the ‘new’ community. The cost will be spread vertically and laterally and not only borne by new or incoming members. But an authentic faith-based undertaking will survive.

Three principles might help us move forward:

1. We are called to build a home: a home away from home it will be, since ‘we have here no abiding city,’ but not a proliferation of mere ‘houses’ where different individuals subsist under the same roof, that is, ‘living together separately,’ – this is not intercultural living.
2. Integrated communities evolve gradually, organically, and not without pain. Therefore, we must truly value difference, because God created difference and saw that it was good. Unfortunately, the ‘cultural flaw’ uses difference to justify discrimination and disrespect. That is sinful.
3. We must rethink the way we think. It is sometimes said that ‘you repent, not by feeling bad but by thinking (and acting) ‘differently.’ This is the cost of conversion, and it is much more difficult to think differently than to feel bad and do nothing.

SOME HELPFUL ACTIVITIES IN DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES

The following are some possible cultural awareness activities that can help your community prepare to encounter and to live cultural differences thoughtfully and respectfully. They may seem rather simplistic (childish?) but they can be learning experiences.

ACTIVITY 1: Examine the Room

With a partner, take a close look at the room where you are gathered. Notice where people are sitting. What spaces are left empty? How close are people to each other? Who sits next to whom? What things did people bring with them? Who is wearing what?

Write down all the things you observe on the left side of a piece of paper. Then, on the right side of the paper, write down your interpretations of these observations. (Examples: *Alberto brought paper with him today so he could take notes. Pedro wore jeans, so it must be cold outside.*)

Compare and reflect as a group on your observations and interpretations. Point out that the left column includes straightforward facts while the statements in the right column are assumptions and are much more subjective in nature. How many of your interpretations were incorrect?

Takeaway: Even when we are comfortable with our surroundings, our interpretations can still be subject to error. It is even easier to make mistakes and incorrect assumptions in a different culture.

ACTIVITY 2: The Universal Circle

Gather everyone in a circle. Go around the circle and have each person say something about their home or church background, starting with “When I was growing up...”

Examples: *When I was growing up...*

... my parents taught me to respect my elders.

... if I got in a fight with my sibling, my parents taught us to talk out the problem.

... I learned at church that God would punish me for my sins.

... I had to be quiet during church services.

Ask participants to take a step toward the center of the circle each time a statement applies to them. If everyone or almost everyone steps toward the center of the circle after a statement, the statement might be universal. That means it may not be specific to a certain culture. If only a few people step forward, the statement may apply only to a particular culture. A facilitator should record whether each statement is cultural or universal.

Afterward, discuss what makes some statements universal and others cultural. Based on the exercise, talk about what cultures may be represented in your community. For example, you may have some group confreres from a Catholic school background and some from a public school background.

Explore how the different cultures to which the confreres in your community belong could influence how you will experience the current reality of the community. Keep the cultural differences within your community in mind as you explore the culture you aspire to. This will enrich your discussions and improve your awareness of your own cultural biases.

Takeaway: Some experiences, beliefs, and values tend to be shared by many people across cultural boundaries, while others are very specific to an individual culture. Knowing the difference between these two categories can help you develop a new inclusive and respectful culture.

ACTIVITY 3: Cultural difference questions:

Here are some questions to think about as you explore intercultural living!

- How do people greet each other in your culture?
- Are there any gestures that are considered offensive in your culture?

- What type of clothing do people wear in your culture? Do we need to be careful about what we wear in the community?
- How does “time” work in your culture? What does it mean to be “late” or “early”?
- Are there any cultural practices to know about when entering someone’s home?
- What cultural practices are involved with food?
- What do families look like? What about gender roles?
- How does the culture react to tattoos? Jewelry?
- Is it a good idea to wear clothing that features U.S. or British or political symbols and wording?
- Are there any other aspects of your culture worth knowing? What sets it apart from other cultures with which you are familiar?

References

Intercultural competence for all: Preparation for living in a heterogeneous world (Council of Europe Publishing, Council of Europe Pestalozzi Series, 2012), n. 2.

Intercultural Living (Vol. 1), edited by L. T. STANISLAUS, SVD, and M. UEFFING, SVD, (Sankt Augustin: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut, 2015).

Intercultural Living (Vol. 2), edited by L. T. STANISLAUS, SVD, and M. UEFFING, SVD, (Sankt Augustin: Steyler Missionswissenschaftliches Institut, 2015).

Stories of Our Inter-cultural Living and Mission (SVD Publications, 2017).

A. GITTINS, C.S.Sp., *Beyond International and Multicultural: Intercultural Community Living* (Spiritan Horizons, Fall of 2017), Vol. 12 / Issue 12.

Workshop for Leaders and Formation Personnel, *Interculturality in Religious Congregations: Challenges and Promise* (Toronto: October 21, 2015).

Solidarity for the Mission, solidarity with the Poor

❖ CRISTIAN BUENO, C.Ss.R.

Author • Cristian Bueno Fonseca is currently serving the Congregation within the General Secretariat for Evangelization. He was born in Rionegro, Santander (Colombia). He grew up in Bucaramanga, where he met the Redemptorists and joined the Congregation in 1994. He has exercised his missionary ministry in the mission territories of Putumayo (Southern Colombia), Vichada (Eastern Colombia), and the Mission of Ghana (Africa). He has also collaborated in the ministry of formation and Parish animation in the Province of Bogota.

Abstract • Fr. Cristian Bueno, C.Ss.R., begins this presentation with the comment that "not infrequently very fundamental values are disassociated from the daily living of the faith". This is also seen in the formation process when the commitment to social realities and the values of justice, peace, and integrity of creation (JPIC) is subjected to individualism, spiritualities and theologies alienated from reality. Treatment of our spirituality as understood from the perspective of solidarity is presented in the context of being rooted in the theology of the Incarnation. The life of our founder, St. Alphonsus, and his vision, his distacco, is a model of the total response to the call we have received, as are the lives of St. Gerard Mayela and our other Saints, Blessed and martyrs. The 25th General Chapter's motto: "WITNESSES OF THE REDEEMER: In Solidarity for Mission to a Wounded World", reflects solidarity as central to the mystery of the Incarnation. We discover our identity as consecrated persons when we contact those who live on the periphery of society. Formation should trigger creativity to ground and concretize our call to solidarity and the JPIC values. In the spirit of solidarity with the poor, formation should also challenge our lifestyle, which, consistent

with our history, should be simple. Fr. Cristian Bueno ends his reflections with an interesting and practical listing of 17 other aspects that can be considered in our formation houses.

Keywords • solidarity, Mission, poor, justice, peace, the integrity of creation, formation, Incarnation, spirituality, shared Mission, insertion, marginalized communities, lifestyle.

Solidarity for the Mission, solidarity with the Poor

Formation for Mission

Constitution 78 states that the goal of formation is “to lead the candidates and the members to such a degree of human and Christian maturity” that they are able to dedicate themselves to the service of the missionary Church to preach the Gospel to the poor and “become true missionaries”. Now, what is the mission of the Church in which we Redemptorists participate and for which formation prepares us? A brief answer could be: the primary mission of the Church is to extend the Kingdom of God, which is a kingdom of peace, truth, and justice, where the poor have a privileged place. From this, we can appreciate the close relationship between the values of justice, peace, and the integrity of Creation (hereafter JPIC)¹ and formation, which weave together the complex reality that we call “the redemptorist mission”. More than principles, justice, peace, and the integrity of Creation are concrete realities that project us

¹ Until a few years ago in Latin America, the expression “social pastoral” included all those values related to social justice, peace and reconciliation. Since the promulgation of the encyclical *Laudato Si*, on June 18, 2015, awareness of the care of our *Common Home* has been growing, and justice and peace have been increasingly linked to the care or integrity of creation. Thus, many of the so-called Justice and Peace Commissions, at the level of ecclesial jurisdictions or religious communities, have been taking the name of Social Pastoral – Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (PS-JPIC). This is the case of the Justice and Peace Commissions at the level of the General Government, Conferences and some Units within the Congregation.

towards constructing this Kingdom in the here and now, which finds its consummation in the eschatological Kingdom.

To many, it might seem obvious to affirm that the values present in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12) constitute an integral part of being a Christian. In the same way, it might seem obvious that, within the formation curricula of our formation houses, JPIC should be considered constitutive values of our missionary identity. But the truth is that this is not always the case. These fundamental values are not always evident in the daily living of the Faith in our communities. There have been, for example, situations where the formative structures, which could have worked well in specific contexts, are transferred and superimposed in other cultural environments. These structures generated drastic uprooting of the familiar environments or autochthonous lifestyles that are more in tune with the values of the Beatitudes and the simple lifestyle that characterizes the Redemptorists. Situations such as these show that formation structures do not always favor promoting these fundamental values. Hence, the need to situate formation for mission in a continuous process of contextualization and dialogue with the constitutive values of our missionary identity.

In the synagogue of Nazareth, at the beginning of his public life, Jesus manifests the scope of his mission and his redemptive work: *“the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of grace of the Lord”* (Lk 4:18-19). This biblical passage, with which we Redemptorists feel identified, shows us that from the beginning, the Redeemer’s mission was closely related to the concrete realities of people, especially those who were poor, sick, dispossessed, or subject to any oppression.

A tendency to disconnect formation processes from the commitment to social reality and JPIC values seems to be the by-product, on the one hand, of the exaggerated individualism promoted in today’s world and, on the other hand, of the tendency of certain communities to withdraw into spiritualities

and theologies that are disconnected from the reality of a wounded world. Some communities opt for this disconnection, perhaps as a way of facing the threat of a secularized world and thus being able to affirm their own religious identity. But such environments do not favor formation for mission as we Redemptorists understand it, hence the urgent need to strengthen the links between our Faith and charism with concrete praxis in favor of JPIC.²

Our missionary project and our way of life are understood and defined based on ecclesiology, theology, spirituality, and a set of values that support them. However, our way of life does not happen in a vacuum. It results from choices made, individually or together, with those who share the same vocation and charism. For this reason, we need to be always very attentive to cultivate those principles that we consider non-negotiable, the Gospel values, and the values proper to our charism that ultimately give us cohesion and identity as Redemptorists. They are the foundation on which the personality of the Redemptorist missionary is built. They are the “*Ratio Formationis*,” the fundamental principles that guide the being and the work of both the formator and the formandi. To lose sight of these foundations is to lose sight of who we are, where we come from and where we are going.

From this arose the need to favor the so-called “insertion experiences” within the structures of initial formation. In the beginning, St. Alphonsus wanted our houses located in strategic points where the members could contact the poor and the spiritually abandoned to be instructed and maintain contact with the devotional life. Many of our current houses had this same motivation in their origins. Still, with time and the

² In this regard, the Church’s social doctrine represents a treasure of wisdom yet to be explored. It is the Church’s proposal for the construction of a better world, and it is there that our formative plans can find guidance to make more effective the proclamation of the abundant redemption among the poor by those who are preparing for it.

progressive urban changes of the place, they ended up separated from the poor in exclusive areas of the population. It should be noted that, of course, formation houses have a particular characteristic. The emphasis often has to be placed on academics, community, or spirituality; however, the importance of the connection with the reality of the wounded world cannot be ignored. The simple and poor world is a reality from which many of us included come, and we are all sent to serve. The poor possess an evangelizing potential – “*evangelizare pauperibus et a pauperibus evangelizare*” – and a formative potential. They are a *locus theologicum* that shows us clearly the reason for our religious consecration: the following of Jesus Christ the Redeemer in the preaching of the Good News to the most abandoned, which includes the liberation and salvation of the whole person (cf. Cons. 3 and 5). Redemptorists have understood that, although the proclamation of the Plentiful Redemption is for all, it is obtained through the mediation of the poor. The option for the poor is the expression of our primary option, the option for God.

Consequently, our formation programs should be oriented not only to the assimilation of abstract principles. Still, they should also provide a moral framework for each generation of Redemptorists’ apostolic work and daily life. Our rich moral tradition has much to offer formandi and formators in this regard. The formative task in our houses of formation would be incomplete without formation in the values of JPIC, which are none other than the fundamental social principles of the entire Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church.

Suppose the values of JPIC are integral to our mission as Redemptorists and collaborators in the Church’s mission. In that case, the challenge is to incorporate them into formation programs and pastoral ministry, prayer, and daily life. In this regard, the words of Pope Francis can be enlightening:

Faith passes through life. When Faith concentrates purely on doctrinal formulations, it risks speaking only to the head without touching the heart. And when it concentrates on doing,

*it runs the risk of becoming moralizing and being reduced to the social. On the other hand, Faith is life: it is living the love of God that changes our existence. We cannot be doctrinalists or activists; we are called to do God's work in God's way, in proximity: close to him and in communion with one another, close to our brothers and sisters. Proximity: this is the secret to transmitting the heart of Faith.*³

Spirituality is the context of solidarity

One of the fundamental aspects of Alphonsian spirituality and Redemptorist spirituality is rooted in the theology of the incarnation; in Faith in a God who takes on the human condition and is in solidarity with our misery, lowering himself to rescue us to the point of participating in the very reality of death. Hence, for Redemptorists, it is not difficult to integrate into situations of poverty and misery from which many others would flee. Think, for example, of how our Founder lived the mystery of the incarnation as a continuous *distacco*: from the comforts of a noble family and a profession, from his comfort zones, from his tastes, from his own will, etc., to respond totally to the call he received. Or in the way in which Gerardo Majella, because of the poverty experienced in his flesh since his childhood, managed to empathize with the reality of the poor, the peasants, the women, and the abandoned of his time. In general, in each of our saints and blessed we find reflected, in one way or another, this same characteristic of our spirituality that led them to be in solidarity with the poor in their particular context, following the example of Christ the Redeemer to “lay down one’s life for the brethren” (cf. Jn 15:13). It is the same characteristic that today continues to shape our missionary identity despite ever-changing contexts.

³ POPE FRANCIS, *Homily* (Holy Mass during the conclusion of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, XXX Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 28, 2018).

In our days, this incarnation in the context of solidarity was made evident in the XXV General Chapter, with the motto: “Witnesses of the Redeemer, in solidarity for mission to a wounded world”. The environmental crisis, growing nationalism, migration, the continuing gap between rich and poor are diverse manifestations of that wounded world we have been called to withstand in solidarity. In this regard, the interconnectivity of which Pope Francis speaks is a timely concept that helps us understand that in a globalized world, solidarity has no borders. According to John Paul II, solidarity “is not a feeling of vague compassion or superficial tenderness for the ills of so many people near and far. On the contrary, it is the firm and persevering determination to work for the common good, that is, for the good of each one, because we are all truly responsible for each other”⁴ and we all form one family.

The Latin American theologian and thinker Gustavo Gutiérrez made this affirmation: “one believes in God starting from a determined historical situation”.⁵ Indeed, our history is not separated from the history of salvation because “there are not two different histories, just as there are not two superimposed planes of reality”.⁶ As we noted above, the tendency is to separate so-called “sacred history” from human history, forgetting that salvation history is also liberation history. When this separation occurs, the values of JPIC fail to be incorporated in the formative processes and the individual and group life of our communities because we come to believe that they belong to “another” sphere. In this logic of fragmentation, “spiritual things” are valued more in opposition to and to the detriment of the “things of this world”. Once again, the magisterium of Pope Francis reminds us that, because of the principle of intercon-

⁴ POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical, Sollicitudo rei socialis*, # 38.

⁵ Cf. G. GUTIÉRREZ, *El Dios de la vida y la liberación humana* (Salamanca: Ed. Sígueme, 1992), pp. 17 and 22.

⁶ Cf. J.C. SCANNONE, *La Teología de la liberación. Caracterización, corrientes, etapas* (Selecciones de teología) Vol. 23, 092.

nectivity, we cannot separate life from Faith, Christian morality from commitment to the social, our Redemptorist spirituality from our commitment to the poor. For St. Alphonsus, this link was evident, and he never made this kind of separation. Thanks to this, he had no difficulty assuming in his life and work detachment and solidarity with the poor as a consequence and expression of his following of the Redeemer.

An authentically Christian and missionary spirituality should translate into real and concrete solidarity with the most abandoned. The profession of vows is already an attempt to incarnate this solidarity, and from there, it continues to be concretized in the actions of daily life. The true meaning of Religious Life does not distance the person from the world but rather strengthens its commitment to the society in which it lives and helps it be a prophetic sign of the values of the Kingdom in the here and now.

In the face of “global indifference,”⁷ the witness of solidarity can be one of the remedies to help heal the wounds of the world and a way to find our place in it as consecrated men and women. In this sense, there are many examples of confreres and communities who live in areas of true insertion: in contact with the peripheries of society, welcoming immigrants, promoting social projects, in interreligious dialogue. They help us see that the closer we get to the miseries of others, the better we discover our identity as Redemptorists and our place in the world. For some, the future of religious life is decided today in the peripheries, where we encounter the wounded Christ.⁸

The Plentiful Redemption, of which our Congregation is the messenger and servant, is expressed in the liberation of the whole human person and all Creation since they share the same origin and future. This leads us to understand how the concept

⁷ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Message* (Celebration of the XLIX World Day of Peace, January 1, 2016).

⁸ Cf. Sister M. SUJITA, CND, *Solidarity with Life on the Periphery* (Rome: Talk to the UISG, May 9, 2019).

of Redemption needs to break out of the anthropocentric shell in which it seems to be enclosed. Redemption needs to touch also a wounded creation and all forms of life. Committing oneself to the values of justice and peace today means also committing oneself to the salvation of this Common Home, as Pope Francis teaches.

This also helps us better understand solidarity directed towards a common good, which embraces the salvation of the present and tomorrow's different forms of life. "The message of the social doctrine about solidarity highlights the fact that there are close links between solidarity and the common good, solidarity and the universal destination of goods, solidarity, and equality among men and peoples, solidarity and peace in the world".⁹ Faced with realities such as, for example, the ever-growing ecological crisis (with all its causes, effects, and ramifications), the new generations of Redemptorists will have to re-imagine and re-act their spirituality in the key of solidarity to show the relevance of our charism in today's world.

As we walk along the path of solidarity, we meet countless lay people who share our concerns and who want to respond, as we do, from the Redemptorist charism. Many of these laity, men and women, live more closely than Consecrated Religious to the realities that affect our societies. Many of them are even better able than we Religious to respond to many of these realities. The context of the Redemptorist mission in which they are gradually taking part gives professed Redemptorists the opportunity to learn more closely about many of the dynamics that shape today's world and explore ways of solidarity towards the healing of the wounded world. Thus, forming JPIC values in our seminaries also involves forming in working with the laity and carrying out our mission as one missionary body. Jesus Christ, the missionary of the Father, makes the Church a sharer in his mission. Redemptorists participate in the mission of the Church, which we now carry out in a shared way with the laity.

⁹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, p. 194.

Formation for Solidarity

We have pointed out that the values of JPIC are essential values of the Christian faith rooted in the Gospels and the teachings of Jesus Christ. But we must not lose sight of the fact that these elements identify our Redemptorist spirituality. The values of JPIC arise from a spirituality centered on God's redemptive plan for all Creation, manifested in Jesus Christ, who stands in solidarity with a wounded world. From this point of view, we could affirm that the solidarity and values of JPIC are part of the Redemptorist "DNA" that is expressed in an original way in every context, as a response to the cry of the poor and the cry of the world.

And since solidarity with the poor is not optional or tangential to our being baptized and consecrated, formation in solidarity acquires a particular relevance within the formation plans of our formation houses. The ideas suggested below are not intended to be articulated as norms incorporated into formation plans. However, these ideas can be considered ideas that can help us awaken creativity when we want to concretize our call to solidarity and the living out of JPIC values. If solidarity has to do with the commitment we make to people at a deeper level, especially to the most vulnerable, it will lead us to make decisions that affect our personal lives and the lives of our communities.

First of all, there must be an approach to the fundamental principles of the Church's social doctrine that creates the intellectual and affective dispositions for a formation in the social. In a processual way, our students could become involved in daily life issues that most affect the poor around them, understanding that our mission as Redemptorists also includes a commitment to the teachings of the Church's social doctrine. Critical reflection should lead our students to help their communities see beyond assumptions fabricated and communicated by specific sectors of society that defend their interests to the detriment of others. Without critical reflection, the tendency is to be content to live as spectators of the human drama and withdraw into our

comfort zones. Formation should empower our young people so that they, in turn, can empower the communities in which they will eventually find themselves inserted.

Secondly, we could establish in our calendars moments for the revision of our lifestyles. It is a matter of formation in a lifestyle and reviewing those individual and community behaviors that are not consistent with the values of JPIC. Conversion is a daily demand in the life of every Redemptorist, and the measure will always be the person of Jesus Christ, the model of all humanity. The current environmental crisis, for example, confronts us with our Faith and leads us to question the existing systems of production and consumption that are pushing our planet – and us with it – to ever more dangerous limits. The lives of our Redemptorist saints and so many others gathered here can be a point of reference. They have oriented their lives with their gaze fixed on God, as pilgrims and strangers of this world, living a life of great simplicity, consuming and possessing only what is indispensable. Precisely, the lifestyle they opted for stems from that sense of solidarity with the poor and with God himself, who suffers in the poor. In today's contexts, in the face of the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, solidarity with Creation is generating new behaviors and ways of relating to this world's goods.

Responsible use of the goods of Creation also depends on a deep commitment to justice and peace in the world. It is impossible to want to build lasting peace while living in open warfare with other living species. Moreover, today we are becoming aware of a fact that was not so evident in periods before the first industrial revolution. The extreme poverty in which so many people live is also closely related to the current environmental crisis; indeed, the poor are the first to suffer from the catastrophic effects of global warming.

The simple lifestyle of the Redemptorists is something that comes from our origins. Today we find ourselves with one more reason and motivation to take it up and thus enrich our whole apostolic life. We must adopt an attitude of simplicity in using material goods in solidarity with the wounded world. The

practice of a constant examination of the use of consumer goods available in our houses of formation and our communities can lay the foundations for the construction of prophetic signs today and tomorrow, the prophetic signs proper to religious life.

Other aspects to take into account in our formation houses might be:

- the defense of the dignity and sanctity of life in all its expressions and stages,
- conflict management through dialogue, with particular attention to those whose voices are ignored; to become agents of reconciliation,
- the practice of equality in mutual service without discrimination between persons; exclude abuses of power or clericalism in the use of money or authority,
- kind and fair treatment to employees and lay collaborators,
- promoting a daily work rhythm in solidarity with workers and wage earners who are adversely affected due to labor laws because of their condition and situation,
- express mercy to those who have fallen into drugs or gangs and struggle to get out of them. The same with immigrants, refugees, minorities, etc.,
- offer formation, *ad intra* and *ad extra*, in environmentally friendly behavior and attitudes, in the spirit of the encyclical *Laudato Si*.
- the administration of our goods in an ethical and evangelical manner,
- the avoidance of consumer goods that are or give the impression of being signs of power or ostentation,
- express signs of rejection of social evils such as corruption, extreme nationalism, injustice, discrimination, etc.,
- promoting safe spaces for children and vulnerable adults,
- encourage a prayer life that integrates and considers important aspects of the social reality of the environment,
- develop a culture that makes the preferential option for the poor the criterion for discernment in our pastoral work,

- involve our students in the planning, elaboration, management, and evaluation of social projects impacting the surrounding communities,
- provide experiences of real insertion in poor and marginalized communities,
- promote fasting and detachment during Lent and Advent, thus connecting our Faith, tradition, and spirituality with social realities.

Resilience in Consecrated Life

❖ CECILIO ALBERTO ESEVERRI, C.Ss.R.

Author • Cecilio Alberto Eseverri Laspalas was born on January 11, 1959 in Ochagavía, Navarra, Spain. After his studies in Salamanca and Paris he was assigned to the Redemptorist Mission in the Ivory Coast. He worked in various places for 10 years as a formator in various stages of formation in the Congregation, collaborating at the pastoral-missionary level in various parishes and the missionary team of CESPLAM of the Madrid Province. He is currently the Vicar General of the Congregation and responsible for the area of Formation, a ministry he has exercised for the past two sexennium.

Abstract • This article presents on an experiential level the importance of resilience, understood as the personal attitude of overcoming and not letting oneself be overwhelmed by life's difficult and complicated moments. After presenting the reader with life realities, at times of disappointment and discouragement, which challenges our fundamental option as Redemptorist Missionaries and persons of diverse life vocation, Fr. Eseverri emphasizes the basic need for Faith and Hope in Jesus Christ. The spirituality, words, and encouragement of Pope Francis are highlighted as well as the following of Jesus of Nazareth and the examples of St. Alphonsus and St. Clement, especially in the successive stages of life. Resilience is possible with the "cultivation of optimism, good humor, the building of stories, and tales of hope". The Holy Spirit is the best companion but each person needs the accompaniment of a well-prepared professional. He can accompany us by putting a name on things and guiding us in the dark to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Self-knowledge in sincerity and truth is basic, as well as a realistic Life Project. Fr. Eseverri ends the presentation with practical ways of working at resilience at personal and community levels.

Keywords • resilience, Jesus Christ, Pope Francis, Saint Alphonsus, Saint Clement, spirituality, accompaniment, self-knowledge, sincerity, truth, Life Project.

Resilience in Consecrated Life

Get up, take up your mat and walk...

(Mk 2, 9)

After years of service and animation in the formation of the Congregation, with an experience of Consecrated Life behind me, I can consciously affirm that, although I am a very happy Redemptorist Missionary, sometimes it costs and suffers internally and externally to be faithful to the call of Jesus Christ. Nothing different from what Jesus Christ himself lived and experienced in his passage through this world, but He paid with his life and suffered much to achieve our Redemption. A gift and grace lead us to reach the total happiness to which we aspire. For this reason, I feel great admiration for those holy people, full of faith and hope, who have known how to run this race of life, discreetly, dedicated from faith, being able, with the grace of God and the strength of the Spirit, to overcome so many trials and difficulties, offering their lives totally for the love of others and in fidelity, until the end.

1. A reality

Many of us live, today, in a society and culture of leisure, of pleasure, of the image..., where sacrifice, pain and suffering seem to be frowned upon. A cross in a school can be considered something 'aberrant' for children's education. However, we all know that life involves learning how to face difficulties, take steps, and make decisions, and this is not always easy and is carried out not without moments of worry, pain, or sacrifice. It is evident that all this has a serious influence on the personality of so many Christians, both lay and religious, who are in formation and many others who are already living their consecration, baptismal or religious, to God.

Of course, we all want to be happy, live a full life that fills us internally, and have the freedom to make different choices in life, make mistakes, and correct errors, all to live our life to the fullest.

As Christians in general, but particularly here, I want to refer to Consecrated Life, including our Congregation. Although it is not new, we are all suffering painful times in which many religious do not feel fully identified and abandon their choice of celibate, chaste, and obedient life in community. I do not intend here to analyze the situation. Still, I often wonder why some of these Religious have reached such a point of disappointment and discouragement that it is too late by the time they open their hearts to a person who might help them in the first instances of this situation. Thus, all are doomed to an end of abandonment of the option, fundamental in their lives until then.

Among many other reasons, and each case can have its own, I have the impression that in some situations, some people have not known how to confront and provide the adequate means, on the part of some, to seriously deal with, delicately accompany and definitively overcome these crucial moments in their lives. It is sad and painful for everyone to arrive at a decision where the only possible way out is to leave the Consecrated Life or the Priesthood after long and deep internal and sometimes external struggles. We all know confreres who go from one place to another, from one community to another, from one destination to another, and take a long time or never find their place in life. We know of confreres who do not feel at peace with themselves, others, and their situation.

On the other hand, we all have the experience of Religious men and women, Priests, married couples, separated, divorced, single people, etc., capable of overcoming very difficult situations, both on a personal and community or family level. People who have been able, despite the suffering, the difficulty, the apparent meaninglessness of life, the *dark night*, to remain faithful to their choice of life, or change direction, and move forward with courage and determination. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, according to Brian Kolodiejchuk, spent practically the

last 50 years of her life in such a situation, who would have thought it, seeing her give herself to others!

Thus, those who have struggled and suffered to find their true place in life could be said to be ‘resilient’ people, capable of facing life’s difficulties with a spirit of sacrifice, even knowing how to take advantage of what at first could be considered as negative, without being discouraged or destroyed by the latter.

2. Resilience

Therefore, I understand ‘resilience’, not scientifically but rather on an experiential level, as the personal attitude of overcoming and not letting oneself be defeated by difficult and complicated moments in life. For this, we have the help of our faith, prayer, personal and community accompaniment, as well as an attitude of hope and healthy self-esteem. In the same way, it helps to live through problems, difficulties, crises, and moments of darkness following the example of the life, passion, and death of Jesus Christ in which, without ceasing to suffer, he tried to put his concern, care and attention on others, especially on those who suffered with him.

In this way, the person, the group, and the community manage to get up, start again, move forward, and ‘rebuild’ itself. And all this to continue being able to renew ourselves and love again, give ourselves, and develop our mission. This will produce in us a return to our feet, but at that moment with more strength and conviction, since we all learn from our falls to gain new experience and maturity and thus face new challenges (cf. Cons. 78). The resilient person, I understand, is a hymn to life, to his or her vocation, in short, to the risen Jesus, where there is no room for negativism, pessimism, abandonment, resignation, etc. Of course, we all fall; we all get discouraged at some point in our lives. But the most important thing, even if it hurts and is not easy, is to get up again, as the Father of Mercy never ceases to invite us (Lk. 15). Everything in life has its place, and we can take advantage of it for maturity and growth. Therefore, from the beginning, I would like to invite you to participate in the spirituality of resilience.

3. Need of Faith and Hope in Jesus Christ

As a religious and priest, I feel that there is nothing more beautiful than the deep, joyful, and full-of-life testimony of those who, besides overcoming a lifetime of difficulties, are an example of resilient people in their choice of Life, faith, and Consecrated Life. Faithful and firm in the faith, bearing witness to the Redeemer and always with Joy and Hope. Ordinary people, like each of us, who do not appear in the news in the newspapers or on television, do not receive medals and decorations. Being happy in life is not exempt from limitations and challenges. Holy people who will not one day be on the altars of our churches, the “saints next door”, as Pope Francis says in *Gaudete et Exsultate*, but who are an example for all of us.

Pope Francis, without expressly mentioning the word resilience, constantly invites us to overcome all these complicated and difficult moments of our lives, lived from the Gospel, not as problems but as opportunities: “When everything seems paralyzed and stagnant when personal problems trouble us when social problems do not find the right answers, it is not good to give up” (*Christus Vivit* # 141). Opportunities to purify our deepest convictions, faith, and the value of a life that needs to be lived and worked on thoroughly to live it intensely according to the Gospel.

Promise and hope are fundamental in people’s lives and even more so for Christians. In them, the people of Israel and each of us, kept the illusion, the strength, and the desire to move forward. But, as religious Redemptorist Missionaries, we also have the power of the vow and oath of perseverance. As St. Alphonsus so often insisted, let us ask God for this grace and this gift.

We could say that in successive stages of our life, we have the possibility of taking a step, a leap even, from what it means to stop living a situation of ‘consumers of religion’ to be faithful followers of Jesus of Nazareth. This transition supposes leaving a materialistic, rationalist life to face the utopia of a dream in the style of our founder St. Alphonsus. Before us, many missionaries of the Abundant Redemption have done so, giving their

lives for the Gospel incarnating themselves in the concrete reality they lived.

In the end, the experience of Love of God in others and oneself lived from an incarnated human reality can be the primary source of authentic hope, fulfillment, and overcoming. Hope, seen as the one who feels expected by another in the Other, has a revaluing effect, gives confidence and motivation to live and fight in life.

Like St. Paul, we can say and ‘experience’: “...when I am weak, I am the stronger...” (2 Cor 12:10). How often do we experience in our daily efforts that we are support, help, and example for others even in moments of weakness? The mystery of the presence of Jesus Christ is produced, and we help and are helped, when in the personal encounter of going out of ourselves, we meet our suffering brother or sister. This is not a matter of sympathizing with the experiences of weakness and suffering and remaining there, since this could deepen the problem. It is about offering from the experience of suffering, the possibilities of healing, curing, getting up, and continuing to walk.

Here we could add that understanding that our life is excellent because it is permeated by God’s presence, grace, and gift. Therefore, the mission belongs to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are mediators, useless servants, but where we feel whole, happy, and fulfilled for having been chosen and, despite our limitations, we are apostles of the proclamation of the Good News to so many people and, sometimes, in such complicated situations.

4. Is it possible to train and grow in resilience?

This type of formation is not accessible in all parts of the Congregation at a technical level. Nevertheless, many of us grow and are formed as resilient people in the same ‘school of life’ and learn from our experiences.

It is important to remain in a critical position before life with a series of values to opt for and fight at every moment. In addition, it is important to maintain a profound position of

responsibility in faith, action, and thinking. The important thing is to be constant and make fundamental choices that guide our steps. Since today each of us bears a great deal of responsibility in this process, based on our Redemptorist Constitutions, we can choose a series of ‘non-negotiables’ where we can anchor our life, come what may. We usually learn, grow and mature very slowly, sometimes from our own experiences of falling and getting up again. So many times, we repeat the same attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, we can always be creative and move forward in our reflection and ability to move forward in life.

On the other hand, it will be very positive to cultivate patience, optimism, good humor, build stories and tales of hope. The resilient person is characterized by being able to solve problems that often demand a certain degree of effort, creativity, illusion, imagination, and faith. Something can be learned, and a positive lesson can be extracted from the thinking of every experience, situation, and relationship. The resilient person is an ‘eternal learner’. I often remember Father General Juan Manuel Lasso de la Vega y Miranda saying that there are no problems we encounter in life, but challenges to overcome and to which we have to try to find a solution. This will lead us to a greater acceptance of ourselves and others in all the good and positive things we have. It will help us grow in self-esteem and confidence to accept ourselves as we are with our values and our improvement aspects. We can even say that this natural acceptance will enable us to ‘laugh’ at ourselves when making mistakes. Accepting others and ourselves as limited persons – the ‘Perfect’ is only God, the thrice Holy One – the rest of us are imperfect and limited. Whoever thinks he knows everything, has the answer to everything, has nothing to learn from others, and has nothing to interchange, is the most limited of all. Therefore, it is vital to maintain an attitude of ongoing formation. We need to make our own the unique and unrepeatable path that we have to live with our confreres and with the precious gift of so many laypeople. Our laypeople give their lives for the Gospel in a shared mission and trust totally in the grace of God the Trinity, who walks beside us.

Above, we have been given great ways to grow in resilience. But, to grow and mature as resilient people, a constant work of personal self-knowledge in sincerity and truth is essential in aspects such as:

- writing one's salvation history,
- elaborating a realistic Personal Life Project,
- establishing solid 'non-negotiables' to which each person, usually, but more so in crisis situations, clings and where they can feel that God does not abandon them so that they can emerge from there stronger and more mature.
- continuous formation,
- community prayer and celebration,
- the personal practices of prayer, meditation, and contemplation of the Word of God and, in particular, of the Mysteries of the Redemption,
- reconciliation,
- personal accompaniment,
- the concrete mission to the poorest and neediest to whom we can bring Jesus Christ, but who, in turn, help us to find ourselves and God,
- fraternal life in community,
- moments and spaces of expansion...

All of them and others that are considered appropriate are essential in the process of fidelity and perseverance to carry out the Will of God for each one of us.

5. The companion in the resilient process

There is no better companion than the Holy Spirit, who guides and accompanies us every day of our lives. If we allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit in seeking and trying to live God's Will every day, He will lead and guide us better than anyone else to reach that grace.

Sometimes I feel that we do not allow ourselves to be adequately accompanied and guided. I even perceive that so often, we consider ourselves so self-sufficient that we think,

consciously or unconsciously, that we can solve everything with our strength and intelligence. Yet, it is precisely in those moments when we most need a companion, a person who knows how to put a name to things, to guide us in the darkness, and to see the light at the end of the tunnel. It is enough, at certain moments, to take out, to put in writing or verbally, our ideas, thoughts, feelings and try to articulate them adequately with a trusted person, a confrere, an expert who can help us. Putting out what we are living and experiencing helps us and allows us to begin to find a solution.

Therefore, although it is very important to be humble and ask for help, mainly specialized, I also understand that we are the primary agents with our effort, intelligence, perseverance, and faith to grow and mature in a resilient way.

There is nothing better than someone who is well prepared professionally, but the experience of someone who has gone through these situations and shares and helps from their own experience is always very practical. However, as in the relationship between formator and formandi, we all go through our process and journey of growth and maturity, each at their level, but we all have to be open and receptive to what life offers us. Just as we can help others, others also help us in many ways. This resilience situation is from our own experience of overcoming difficulties in the Spirit of wanting to grow, mature, and emerge when we can best empathize, guide, help, and accompany others.

6. The resilience process is the crucible of our vocation and mission. St. Clement is an example of a Christian, a resilient missionary.

We are Christians, Catholics, religious, missionaries, people of Faith and Hope. Thus, the best example of a resilient person, with the great mystery of the final triumph, is the risen Jesus Christ himself.

I understand that the first step when humanly we cannot, we do not know, we do not have the strength, etc., should be fi-

delity to God the Trinity, despite not having the strength, not seeing, not feeling the presence of God. The response to the vocation received is personal. Yes, I live in a community, in church, but I must respond, not others for me. Thus following Jesus Christ and the Gospel will be our fundamental reference.

The example of the Saints, of our parents, relatives, friends, formators, and so many others who have struggled in life and have remained faithful to the end, should be an example for us.

In St. Clement's personality, from a very young age, in the family home, we can find a very determined boy with clear ideas and very definite convictions, where there was no lack of difficulties, struggles, and much patience. After a search that lasted several years, all this was strengthened by his faith in Jesus Christ and his commitment as a Redemptorist Missionary. Thus, although many times in his life he finds himself 'buffeted' by headwinds, he continues to move forward, and little by little, he emerges afloat. We could say that he is a 'proactive' person who takes charge of his own life and continues to move forward despite all the 'regrets'. He wrote to Fr. Peter Paul Blasucci in 1801: "Remember, most venerable fathers and brothers, that we are here under the yoke of non-Catholic governments and we groan very truly in an oppressed Church" (Volume 4 *Redemptorist Spirituality*, p. 211). Clement was an optimistic, enthusiastic person, full of faith, passion for Jesus Christ and the Gospel. It could be said of him today that he was a 'resilient' person, that is, a person capable of overcoming and rebuilding himself, of getting up, despite so many stumbling blocks and barriers, of starting again when everything seemed already lost, despite so many difficulties he encountered in life. He was able to get back on his feet and start again in one place and another, in one circumstance and another..., always and despite the difficulties, with great enthusiasm, faith and conviction.

Therefore, our personality traits, beliefs, and life choices determine factors when facing crises and challenging moments in life. However, our faith and freedom will always guide and overcome the different situations we see fit.

Bibliography

There is a lot of bibliography on this subject, in different languages, both in digital versions and written publications. Therefore, it is easy to read, study and learn more about this field from different dimensions: spiritual, psychological, anthropological, etc.

Way of working

At the community level

- a) We can have a community meeting on: How did our saints, blessed, martyrs, confreres, relatives, friends, know how to be faithful to the point of giving their lives for the Plentiful Redemption despite so many adverse moments in life and mission? In other words, examples and models of resilience at both the personal and community levels.
- b) We all know that as Redemptorists, we carry out the missionary action in a communitarian way, apostolic and fraternal life in function of the mission. Yet, in every local community and every pastoral team, there arise complicated and difficult moments. Therefore, how can we overcome, grow, and mature from these intense moments?
- c) In a group or community: if the circumstances make it possible, we can also carry out community prayers, moments of sharing, etc., in which we can help each other with our testimonies, examples, and testimonies of others, etc.

On a personal level

- a) Write down your personal story of salvation and see how you have lived through those difficult moments in your life. What have you done in the face of them? What helped you to remain faithful? Where was God? This can be discussed with the formator, companion, or confessor.

- b) Draw up your personal list of ‘non-negotiables’, a shortlist that you and only you decide at the level of the spiritual, fraternal, missionary, and community life dimensions that you would not like to lose, nor abandon despite the good or difficult moments that you may have to go through in life.

Liquid perseverance in a fragmented world

❖ ROGÉRIO GOMES, C.Ss.R.¹

Author • Besides Doctorate and Licentiate degrees in Moral Theology from the Alphonsian Academy of Rome, Rogério Gomes also has Degrees in Theology from the *Instituto São Paulo de Estudos Superiores*, in Philosophy from the *Pontificia Universidade Católica de Campinas*, and in Spirituality from the Center of Teresian Spirituality (Carmelites). He has and continues to teach at different institutes of higher learning and is a member of several prestigious academic societies. In addition, he was Provincial Superior of the São Paulo Province, is currently a General Councilor of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (2016...), and a member of several Congregation commissions, among them, the General Secretariat for Formation, the Alphonsian Academy, and the Commission Commission for the Redemptorist Brothers.

Abstract • Fr. Rogério Gomes, C.Ss.R., reflects on the phenomenon of those who leave Consecrated Life, including Redemptorist life. He starts from “*Orientations, The Gift of Fidelity and the Joy of Perseverance*”, published by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (2020). It notes that the problem of crisis and perseverance is not only in Consecrated Life; it affects the post-modern human being in his choices and traditional institutions: Family, Church, School, and Politics. Philosophical, psychological, and sociological theories illuminate the current reality and interpretative ethical, sociological, psychological, historical, theological, and pragmatic models. Even if they have their limits, they seek to understand Consecrated Life’s crisis. In recent times, many confreres have left the Congregation requesting leaves

¹ <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3342824164751325>

of absence and exclaustation, passage to the diocese. Absences, exclaustation, expulsion, leaves of absence, *graviora delicta*, should lead all the Congregation members to a sincere reflection without choosing scapegoats. It is fundamental to ask if the causes of the abandonment of the Institute are not linked to a crisis of faith. It is necessary to insist on the vow and oath of perseverance and to consider the subject as a missionary body in a proactive way, to understand the cause of abandonment, to invest human and financial resources in vocation ministry, to prepare formation programs that are more participative and focused on discernment, to seek to reconcile missionary charism and self-realization, to raise awareness of ongoing formation and to work on personal and group resilience.

Keywords • Liquid Perseverance, fragmented world, desertions from Consecrated Life, discernment, fidelity.

Liquid perseverance in a fragmented world

Introduction

On March 27th, 2020, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life published the document, *Gift of Fidelity and the Joy of Perseverance, Guidelines*.² The text, within its limitations, touches on a recurrent and troubling problem in Consecrated Life, the perseverance of the members. In 3 parts: 1) looking and listening, 2) rekindling self-knowledge, and 3) separation from the Institute (canonical norms and the practice of the dicastery), the document presents some causes of abandonment, as well as some considerations and proposals to assist the reflection on the problem. Therefore, if the dicastery produces such a document, it is because the phenomenon affects the Church in general and wants to contribute a reflection on this reality that also touches us as a Congregation.

1. Some theories that shed light on this reality

The problem of crisis and perseverance is not one that only affects Consecrated Life. It influences the post-modern human being in his personal choices, especially traditional institutions: family, Church, school, and politics. Various philosophical, psychological, and sociological theories seek to explain the

² Cf. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *The gift of fidelity. The joy of perseverance* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020).

reality of today's world from multiple points of view. The metaphors "the illusion of the end", the "simulacrum"³, "pluralism and the crisis of meaning"⁴, "the society of the spectacle, of the tiredness and the transparency"⁵, "the society of individuals and self-consciousness"⁶, the "era of emptiness, of the ephemeral, of the twilight of duty"⁷, of the "weak thought"⁸ and the liquid: "liquid modernity, liquid love, liquid life, liquid fear, liquid times, liquid art and life in fragments"⁹ are attempting to understand the fragmented world in which we live.

We are experiencing a crisis of personal, collective, and institutional identity. Who am I? How do I relate? What do I expect from institutions? Faced with the impact of social and

³ Cf. J. BAUDRILLARD, *La ilusión del fin. La huelga de los acontecimientos* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1995); J. BAUDRILLARD, *Cultura y simulacro* (Barcelona: Kairós, 1998).

⁴ Cf. P. BERGER; T. LUCKMANN, *Modernidad, pluralismo y crisis de sentido. La orientación del hombre moderno* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1997).

⁵ Cf. G. DEBORD, *La sociedad del espectáculo* (Valencia: Editorial Pre-textos, 1999); HAN, BYUNG-CHUL, *La sociedad del cansancio*, (Barcelona: Herder, 2ªed., 2017); G. VATTIMO, *La sociedad transparente* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1994).

⁶ Cf. N. ELIAS, *The Society of Individuals*, (New York: Continuum, 2001).

⁷ Cf. G. LIPOVETSKY, *La era del vacío* (Barcelona: Anagrama: 1986); G. LIPOVETSKY, *El crepúsculo del deber. La ética indolora de los nuevos tiempos democráticos* (Barcelona: Anagrama. Colección Argumentos, 1996); G. LIPOVETSKY, *El imperio de lo efímero* (Madrid: Editorial Anagrama, 1990).

⁸ Cf. G. VATTIMO; P.A. ROVATTI, *Il pensiero debole* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2010).

⁹ Cf. Z. BAUMAN, *Modernidade líquida* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2000); *Amor líquido: sobre a fragilidade dos laços humanos* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2003); *Vidas desperdiçadas* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2004); *Vida líquida* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2005); *Medo líquido* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2006); *Tempos líquidos* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2006); *Arte, ¿líquido?* (Madrid: Ediciones Sequitur, 2007); *Vida em fragmentos: Sobre ética pós-moderna* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2011).

technological change, the individual has to reinvent himself at every moment, and there is no time to mature his options. In a way, the context itself forces him to do so, and it becomes a question of mimetics and survival. To cite an example: in the past, a person entered the world of the workforce, accumulated experiences, created relational links with other colleagues, had certain stability, and formed his family in the context of his work. Often his children ended up choosing their parents' profession because of specific identification. In today's context, in addition to the requirements of experience, competence, and updating, durability in the workplace is very short (in the interest of the system), and, to survive, the subject has to position himself in other jobs, taking away from time spent living with his peers: family, friends, and the possibility to think about fundamental choices, to mature them. In this sense, the current situation, with all of its advances, favors superficiality since the individual is attached to a web of relationships so complex and guided by speed and efficiency that while he matures chronologically, he can remain immature at the level of fundamental and lasting options.

Some years ago, Giuseppe Tacconi researched various authors who try to explain the crisis in Religious Life. He warned that all readings of the situation have their limits and cannot give an answer in themselves. They should be read together and with a mentality and attitude of openness. He distinguishes six interpretations:

a) *Ethical interpretation*, because of the crisis of values in society and the indifference to the Gospel and religion. Religious life is an affirmation of the preeminence of God and, as a consequence, becomes impractical and impossible. Added to that is the loss of the radicality of Consecrated Life, and its becoming secularized and less spiritual;

b) *Sociological interpretations*, the displacement suffered by Religious Life in the social and ecclesial context. With the significant social transformations, especially those Congre-

gations with very specialized social works, Religious Life loses its social relevance. This loss is due to the new realities of assistance such as *caritas* and new models of churches with greater participation of the laity, NGOs, and volunteers. Religious Life adopts a logic separated from society and does not utilize networking. The Church context provokes a marginalization of Consecrated Life that many times by accepting so many parishes, Consecrated Life becomes a supplement of the diocesan clergy and a security guarantee for itself. The decline in the number of vocations and the aging of the members places the apostolates in crisis. Very old communities with few young members do not offer room for change because control is in the hands of the elders. Another element is the influence of transformations in gender relations within religious life as religious women demand greater equality within the Church. The difficulty of managing the passage from a model of Religious Life that is positioned in a relatively homogeneous context of Christianity to a model in an ever more complex and secular context is a challenge.

c) *Psychological interpretations*, the problem of self-realization, and the conflicts between self-realization and community life that generate disillusionment and crisis. The lack of realism in living a loss of contact with concrete reality, the experience of time, and a manic hyperactivism often hides anguish, dissatisfaction, and pessimism. The fragility in the decision processes that are slow, fragile, and always postponed, without confrontation and of projecting results in time and space; the problem of self-reference, the difficulty of getting out of oneself and the impoverishment of relationships; the inertia, routine, and accommodation of what exists; the crisis of identity as Religious persons. The “how” of being a Religious person is known, but not the “why” of this identity. This crisis is not only that of individuals but also of a collective identity. This crisis challenges Religious to shift from a movement of simplification to that of complexity, with new dynamics and synthesis, and to bring together the different

identities that they live as men and women, Christians, religious, citizens, and professionals.

d) *Historical interpretations*, the transition between a past that no longer exists, and a new one that is not yet envisioned. This does not mean the end of Consecrated Life. On the contrary, to survive in time, many forms of Religious Life changed over time; many disappeared, others were born. To progress, it is necessary to renounce a deadly fixism. It is essential to remember the past to live the present time more consciously.

e) *Theological interpretations*: Some authors insist that the crisis is a lack of deepening in the theology of Consecrated Life and the difficulty of passing from a static theological model to a dynamic-evolutionary model, capable of entering into dialogue with contemporary culture. Others insist on the loss of the foundational reference, Jesus Christ, and the emergence of an ecclesial model that passed from the centrality in Jesus to social practice. Finally, others present the crisis as a descent, weakness, loss of the significance of participation in the cross of Christ.

f) *Pragmatic interpretations*: Consecrated Life was built on the model of Consecration and Mission(*the being for*). Secularized society has put in crisis the forms, mediations, and instruments developed in different historical contexts that today no longer respond to the challenges. Religious Life's inability to communicate *intra* and *ad extra*, the lack of global projects, and the post-conciliar renewal did not reach everyone and remained a model of the past. Self-criticism was not reflected in the elaboration of new models; it was demolished without development¹⁰.

¹⁰ Cf. G. TACCONI, *Alla ricerca di nuove identità: formazione e organizzazione nelle comunità religiose di vita apostolica attiva nel tempo della crisi* (Leumann (Torino): Elledici, 2001) pp. 35-57).

That being so, theoretical reflections are essential to understand the phenomenon comprehensively. However, we can run the risk of seeing it only as a sociological phenomenon caused by the current situation that arrives in our communities, affects us, and we continue to follow life as spectators. “The reality of defections in Consecrated Life is a symptom of a wider crisis that questions the various forms of life recognized by the Church. This situation cannot be justified only by citing socio-cultural causes or by confronting the resignation that leads to considering it as normal. It is not normal that after a long period of initial formation or after long years of Consecrated Life to decide to ask for a separation from the Institute”¹¹. This may be the time to touch our wounds and, without looking for culprits, take history into our hands and in an earnest, mature, responsible, restless, hopeful way and with faith in the Lord of the Harvest and Shepherd of the Flock, think about and address this reality in our communities. It is not a question of seeing reality from the perspective of pessimism, but of the realism and the search for better solutions to respond to a real problem.

2. A look at our reality

Looking at the statistics of the General Secretariat, in the last five years, we cannot count on an average of 50 to 52 confreres for the mission each year, due to leaves of absence, exclaustations, incardinations, expulsions, and *graviora delicta*. Of these, many relatively young confreres have left the Congregation opting to belong to dioceses. What happened to the confreres who came to this decision? Was it disenchantment with the lifestyle and mission, pastoral models not attractive to the confreres and the People of God, the lack of a consistent formation that did not lead them to a clear and adequate dis-

¹¹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *The gift of fidelity the joy of perseverance*, # 5.

cernment before perpetual profession, difficulty in dedicating their whole lives to a long term project, the lack of a spiritual and community life that did not offer support, conviviality and affective expression, the lack of resilience to work through community conflicts and face difficulties, incompatibility between the Congregation charism and personal gifts? Why have there been so many transfers to diocesan life and other institutes? These are points that should be reflected upon and discussed in our religious communities.

When analyzing the number of young men entering our Congregation formation process, we observe a high reduction in the number between those who make their first profession to those who profess perpetually and reach ordination.

Faced with this phenomenon, we must ask: what can we do as an institution (leadership, formation) to strengthen perseverance in the Congregation?

Examining the responses received from the [Vice] Provinces of the Congregation in preparation for the XXVI Chapter, we see that one of the most fragile aspects is linked to initial formation and, even more so, to ongoing formation. Formation for the consecrated life is, in the majority of the cases, limited to the novitiate as a panacea and a time of learning, especially regarding contents related to the consecrated life. Subsequently, attention is intensely focused on ministerial formation (doing) at the expense of consecration (being). How can we guarantee an initial quality formation without personal and community investment in ongoing formation? Another focus of tension and exhaustion is community life. On the one hand a communal life where authoritarianism stifles individuality, controlling the other's life, and on the other hand, a "diocesanization" and weakening of the missionary body in which the individual is distanced from everything and everyone. How to reconcile personal values and charisms to balance the experience of our apostolic life and be a resource to strengthen fidelity and perseverance? In what way can the process of restructuring help us in this?

3. Fidelity and the vow and oath of perseverance (Cons. 76)

The word fidelity (*fidelitas-atis*) has both a theological and anthropological content. Fidelity is linked to the act of faith in oneself, in God, and in the other (person and institution). That is, the observance of the faith “giving-to”. The faithful (*fīdēlis*, derived from *fides*) is he who observes the faith given, which corresponds to the trust in the one in whom the faith has been placed. Therefore, it is a reciprocal act. In this sense, it is fundamental to ask ourselves if the causes of the abandonment of the Institute are not linked to a crisis of faith: faith in God, in the Consecration itself, the mission, and its recipients. When a person consciously and courageously discerns to leave, it is because he does not any longer find meaning in his Consecration. The opposite is true and can be a problem both for the Institute and the People of God.

Faced with the problem of perseverance in the early days of the Congregation, Alphonsus instituted the vow and oath of perseverance. This fourth vow is a way of counteracting the current view of the transience and liquidity of commitments, especially those that require people to commit their lives to another or an institution. In this sense, the vow of perseverance is a sign to the world that it is possible to make lifelong commitments to those who have no one on their side. In this case, we commit ourselves to the explicit proclamation of the Good News and the Kingdom, and for this, we devote our lives.

To persevere is not to hold out in time chronologically until death. A confrere can have many years in Redemptorist life and is not be persevering. There may be only a formal adherence to the institution as a form of survival and not a lifelong commitment to the mission. Perseverance entails the whole being with its weaknesses and strengths and the willingness to give the best of oneself.

The vow of perseverance has as its essence Christ, who persevered in his mission until the end, giving his life on the cross. It goes beyond the daily routine through creative fidelity and

conforms the person more and more to the mission of Jesus himself and the Congregation. Only in this way does it make sense “[...] the vow and oath of perseverance, by virtue of which they oblige themselves to live in the Congregation until death (Cons. 76).

Conclusion: to reflect as a missionary body

Reflecting on this complex issue that affects Consecrated Life and marriages, friendships, and the labor world, we realize that the answers are neither obvious nor magical. The answers are the result of a birth experience that we must face together as a missionary body. Perhaps some indications can help us be more aware and start thinking concretely about strategies to optimize this situation. Below are some elements:

Understanding the cause of abandonment. Each (Vice) Provincial Government and each formation house has an idea of the factors that led the person to leave his way of life. It is important to discern the difficulties / the (dis)motivations of the individual and the incapacity of the institution in helping him. A coherent analysis is also willing to make an institutional self-evaluation.

Investing human and financial resources in the pastoral care of vocations. There are realities in the Congregation where there are young people, but the (Vice) Provinces do not invest in confreres to free them for this missionary work. It is necessary to provide confreres who have a *feeling* for the work with young people or at least allow themselves to be guided into doing a good job. Today, more than publicizing the charism, it is necessary to understand the young person, his world, wounds, qualities, and openness to make a lasting commitment. A vocation ministry that seeks out perfect young people is condemned to failure. In this sense, Restructuring can offer significant human and economic resources and solidarity possibilities.

More participatory and discernment-oriented formation programs. The challenge of forming people today is enormous, and it is not an easy task. Dealing with people all the time, talking, listening, offering content, helping to discern is exhausting and a job that is not seen with the naked eye. In the past, formation was a mass production: one entered the formation house, participated in the study program, lived the discipline, professed, and was ordained. Today, there is a double task since the formator has to work with the formand in a personalized way and then return him to the broader context of the community and work with him from there. The present generations bring new questions to the formators that past generations did not have. Besides the personal and community work of the formators, it is important to rethink the ways of planning formation programs. Imposing a program in the formation house decided by the Secretariat of Formation without involving the formandi in the preparation can be less laborious but less effective. To involve the young people in the formation process is to believe in them and make them subjects of the formation process, since they can give their opinion, bring their concerns about the world, sexuality, and affectivity components that need attention. How can we reconcile the contents of formation that cannot be renounced, so that young people can give their opinions, making them important and the program more attractive? This requires a dialogical formative process, which listens, focuses on reality, and discernment, and prompts young people to more difficult tasks, taking them out of passivity and opening the world for them (Cons. 20).

Reconciling missionary charism and personal gifts (self-realization). Throughout the formation process, the person must discern that the congregational charism persists in time, adapts, renews itself with the breath of the Spirit, and reads the signs of the times but does not adapt itself to persons. Otherwise, it would not respond to its mission in the Church. The Congregation's charism is not to take care of hospitals or education, which means that if the young person has this charism, he must

be helped to find his way consciously and accompanied with joy because he has found his true direction. However, this does not mean that, at a given moment, the major superiors, because of a necessity and a project that responds to the needs of the charism, do not entrust to the confreres a formation in medicine or education or other areas. It is important that those in leadership have a vision and a broad knowledge of the confreres and seek to reconcile pastoral work with personal gifts, which is a challenge to help the formandi in their self-realization. The protagonists are often rigidly characterized in negotiating the charism and personal gifts. Different is the selfish protagonism in which the individual makes his own life and identifies himself as the mission (*la mission c'est moi*). The confrere who understands the service of the Congregation puts his personal gifts to use and fulfills himself without departing from the missionary body.

Awareness of continuous formation. We must be humble and recognize that one of the deficiencies we have in the Congregation is continuing formation. In the context of today's world, basic formation in philosophy and theology is minimal. It requires constant updating on our part, and a continual updating of the awareness and interest that each of us should have in keeping up with the world's challenges and seeking the means to open different horizons to the themes presented to us daily. It is not about specialized formation. This is only one aspect of continuing formation. It is about processing information into knowledge (knowing, reflecting, meditating, praying) for life and mission. Ongoing formation is not just about filling us with content. It also has its spiritual and mystical dimensions. In general, the (Vice) Provinces offer annually a time of formation for the confreres that is not always appreciated. The lack of continuing formation causes us to give old answers to new problems. This accommodates and leads us to love the pastoral work of maintenance. The continuing formation will not give us all the answers, but it teaches us that qualitatively listening is already a great answer if we do not have it. To

disregard continuing formation is, at minimum, a sin against poverty! If we want quality initial formation, we must be aware that continuing formation is fundamental for the formators and each confrere.

Work on personal and group resilience. One of the weak points of our initial and continuous training process is the work of resilience and conflict resolution. In general, we are not trained for this. Most of the time, a simple problem that could have been resolved at its genesis through dialogue and understanding branches out and becomes more complex, generating a series of damaging personal and community consequences. Conflict is anthropological. However, it goes through an educational process, learning and focusing energies towards the common good. Currently, coaching consultants have successfully worked on this issue in work environments, families, etc. Considering this reality in formation houses and religious communities can be a learning experience and a significant contribution to the quality of community life.

This present text has its limitations, especially as it may not respond to all the presented situations. However, we must discuss all of this openly and clearly in our communities, without fear, without pessimism, without prejudice, without accusations, and without indifference. Fidelity is an act filled with faith, perseverance, patience, the desire to do one's best and to love God, the Congregation, and God's People. Fidelity helps us touch wounds with courage and serenity, as surgeons who heal have to have the courage to open bodies, deal with pain, be persistent, accompany, and care. *Liquid perseverance in a fragmented world* raises many concerns and should not discourage us. As a missionary body, we have to take our story into our hands as a story of Redemption. "The first witness we give to the Redeemer as consecrated religious is to read and grasp our own personal story as a story of Abundant Redemption"¹³.

¹³ Cf. *Communicanda* 1 (2017), # 2.

In this story of redemption is present the memories of our journey, “The Way”, the discouragements, the weaknesses, the failures, the crosses, the fidelities and infidelities, the desire to do it well, and the daily resurrections that help us to persevere. To assume the story of Redemption is also to assume the story of those who left and those who continue with the desire to respond to the questions of the Spirit, which always reflect the true source of our charism.

FORMATION IN A SECULARIZED WORLD

(From three different perspectives: North America,
Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and Oceania)

Formation for Mission and Evangelization in a Secularized World

In order that future Redemptorist missionaries will be better equipped to evangelize in a secularized society, each Conference Secretariat of Formation will engage the assistance of qualified professionals and confreres whose study, research, and expertise in this area can be put at the service of Redemptorist formation.

(25th General Chapter, Pattaya 2016, Decision # 31)

Consecrated Life and Formation today in a secularized World

The North American context

❖ DENNIS BILLY, C.Ss.R

Author • Dennis Billy, a Redemptorist of the Baltimore Province, taught the history of moral theology and Christian spirituality for more than 20 years at the Alphonsian Academy of Rome's Pontifical Lateran University and currently holds the Robert F. Leavitt Distinguished Service Chair in Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. He is the author of more than 40 books. In addition, he has published more than 400 articles in many academic and popular journals. He is also very active in the Redemptorist retreat ministry apostolate and the ministry of spiritual direction.

Abstract • Fr. Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R., approaches the theme of this article by seeking to provide some practical suggestions for future growth on how to deal with the many facets of the secularized culture in which we live, and how to preserve the integrity of the community and personal lives of its members in the various stages of initial and ongoing formation. The article begins with a description of secularized North America and its relativistic outlook on life, “one that denies the existence of truth outside of a person's subjective experience”, and the Catholic Church's response to each of the characteristics of a pluralistic worldview. The section on *Christ and Culture* looks at five ways the Church has typically interacted with the culture of its day, giving us a helpful metaphor for the question. The following section, Consecrated Life in the North American Context, introduces the three models of Religious Life (intentional, bureaucratic, and associational), identified by Patricia Wittberg, with a conclusion of how to forge forward. After treating “honest assessment” and “vision and reality” in the following section, the article affirms that concrete communal

and personal strategies will help in *living in the gap*. The article then presents seven concrete suggestions for communities of consecrated life wishing to engage the secular culture of North America. In conclusion, the article finishes from the perspective of faith, hope, and trust in God, supporting different aspects of these virtues with statements made by Popes Benedict and Francis. The final seven “reflection questions” are fashioned to heighten awareness at the level of the communities on secularization in North America and ways that the community can reach out to others.

Keywords • secularization, secularized culture, community, personal lives, stages, initial and ongoing formation, relativism, Christ, Consecrated Life, assessment, vision, reality, strategies, living in the gap, faith, hope, trust, Pope Benedict, Pope Francis.

Consecrated Life and Formation today in a secularized World The North American context

Many challenges face the prospect of living the consecrated life in today's North American context: how to deal with the many facets of secularized culture in which we live, how to preserve the integrity of the vowed life in the life of the community and the personal lives of its members, how to form members in the various stages of initial and ongoing formation – to name but a few. In this essay, we will lay out the general contours of these challenges and seek to provide some practical suggestions for future growth.

Secularized North America

As a valued offspring and important contributor to Western civilization, today's secularized North American context has been described in terms of “a pluralism that is simultaneously postmodern, secular, and liberal.”¹ It is postmodern in that it has an underlying suspicion of modernity's exaltation of reason. It is secular in that it has lost its sense of the sacred that arises from a deep personal and communal faith. It is liberal in that it makes individual autonomy the ultimate value to be preserved in society at all costs.²

¹ N.P.G. AUSTRIACO, *Biomedicine and Beatitude: An Introduction to Catholic Bioethics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), p. 249

² *Ibid.*, pp. 249-57.

From this description, a relativistic outlook on life arises, one that denies the existence of truth outside of a person's subjective experience. In other words, there is not one Truth in today's secularized North America, but many truths vying for prominence in the political-social-economic arena. Tolerance is the value that supposedly holds everything together in such a society. Theoretically, each position has an equal footing in this relativistic and pluralistic society. One wonders, however, how such tolerance can be sustained in an environment where, instead of listening to one another, competing voices struggle in a fight for ultimate dominance. In their quest for prominence and political power, each side engages in hand-to-hand verbal combat by demonizing the other to gain popular support and even stooping to the level of creating Fake News. Hence, we have the rise of the so-called culture wars in North America that have led to hard-fought battles regarding such basic questions as religious liberty, the dignity of the human person, care for the environment, and the right to life.

The Catholic Church has a response to each of the characteristics of this pluralistic worldview. In contrast to postmodernism, it values and promotes the use of reason while recognizing its limitations as a final arbiter of truth. In contrast to secular culture, it fosters a sense of the sacred that underlies all reality and underscores the importance of faith as the key factor sustaining such an outlook on reality. In contrast to the liberal stance, it limits individual autonomy according to the needs of the common good and promotes a fundamentally different outlook toward freedom, what Servais Pinckaers calls the difference between the "freedom of indifference" (individual autonomy) and the "freedom of excellence" (virtuous living in the Truth).³ It also warns against what Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger in his homily at the Conclave before being elected

³ S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), p. 375.

Pope calls the “dictatorship of relativism.”⁴ In contrast to this postmodern, liberal, and secular mindset, the Church emphasizes a genuine pluralism of peoples rooted in the love of God, the common good of humanity, and the dignity of the human person.

Given the above, it is clear that, even when confronted with the secularized outlook of today’s North American culture, the Church must remain faithful to the commission given it by Christ to preach the Gospel to all the corners of the earth. The question before us now is: How should the Church proceed, and what specific role do members living the consecrated life have to play in it? To answer this question, it is important to look at the various ways in which Christians in the past have interacted with the various cultures in which they were living.

Christ and Culture

Almost seventy years ago, the great Protestant theologian H. Richard Niebuhr identified five ways in which Christians typically interacted with the culture of their day.

First, there is “Christ *against* culture,” whereby Christians placed themselves squarely at odds with the evils surrounding them by cutting themselves off from the world to preserve the faith’s purity and integrity. The early monastic movement of *anachoresis*, or retreat from the world, would be one example of this approach.

Second, there is “Christ *of* culture,” whereby Christians, unlike those who retreat from the world, seek to accommodate themselves to the surrounding culture, while at the same time affirming their Christian identity. The twelfth-century theologian Peter Abelard and the ethics he developed in his *Scito te Ipsum* represent a mannered attempt to make peace with the world while seeking to affirm one Christian identity.

⁴ JOSEF CARDINAL RATZINGER, *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice* (Homily, Mass, April 18, 2005).

Third, there is “Christ *above* culture,” whereby Christians view Christ as the higher reality and hence someone who can place himself at the very center of the cultural reality and bring about a synthesis of Christianity and the culture of the day. Medieval Christendom is perhaps the example par excellence of this approach. Fourth, there is “Christ and culture *in paradox*,” whereby Christians find themselves in tension with the exiting culture, at one and the same time, both *in and out of* relation to it. This tension expresses itself in a kind of dualism. Martin Luther’s understanding of the Christian being both in the world and out of it, both thoroughly sinful, yet justified by faith, would be an example of this approach.

Finally, there is “Christ, *the transformer* of culture,” whereby Christians engage the surrounding culture, affirm what is good in it, reject what is evil in it. In doing so, they seek to act as a spiritual leaven that raises society to new heights. The documents of the Second Vatican Council and Pope Saint John Paul II’s emphasis on the new evangelization would represent, at least in theory, this transformative approach to the Church’s attempt to engage the world around it.⁵

This cursory look at Niebuhr’s five models gives us a useful metaphor for understanding how the Church should act in the context of today’s secularized North American context. First, however, we should note that the Church today is itself deeply divided in North America between traditionalists and progressives, globalists and nationalists, conservatives and liberals. It is fair to say that the Church itself has been deeply influenced by the society in which it finds itself and that, despite the good intentions of the Second Vatican Council, it is in danger of succumbing to the secularizing tendencies surrounding it. Although the Church may be called to be a transformer of the world around it, it runs the risk of itself becoming deeply secularized in the North American context. Although this may

⁵ H. R. NIEBUHR, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), pp. 45-229.

not be so in its official statements, it is certainly true in the outlook of many who fill the pews and especially in those who, because of the scandals in recent decades, have lost confidence in both the institutional Church and its leaders and, as a result, have ceased practicing the faith altogether. Hence the rise of the sociological group called the “*Nones*”, that is, people who identify with no organized religion whatsoever but consider themselves deeply spiritual and seek ultimate meaning in life.

What is more, it would be a mistake to think that those living the consecrated life have been immune to the forces outlined above. On the contrary, they are equally divided between traditionalists and progressives, globalists and nationalists, conservatives and liberals. In varying degrees, they themselves have been influenced by the secular culture around them, some so much so that they themselves have become skeptical of reason, lost a sense of the sacred in their lives, and place the value of individual autonomy above all else. What is more, it is fair to say that in today’s pluralistic environment within the Church, they have, in all likelihood, employed with varying degrees of success each of the five outlooks described by Niebuhr, with some members possibly employing more than one in varying circumstances. Questions arise. How can consecrated life live in today’s secularized North American context? What approach(es) should it take? And what does it mean for its members’ initial and ongoing formation? There are no easy answers to such questions.

Consecrated Life in the North American Context

One way of looking at the pluralistic nature of the today’s Church in North America (and its impact on consecrated life) is to gage it against Cardinal Avery Dulles’ classic work on the models of the Church. Crafted in the mid 1970s, Dulles writes about five distinct yet interrelated models present in the Church of his day and which, to a large extent are also present in our own: (1) the Institutional model, which focuses on the hierarchical structures making up the Church’s governing body,

(2) the Mystical Communion model, which emphasizes the deep spiritual unity throughout history and beyond of the Church the purgative, militant, and triumphant, (2) the Sacramental model, which looks to the Church as a visible sign and instrument of Christ's redeeming grace, (4) the Church as Herald model, which highlights the prophetic call to proclaim the Good News to the four corners of the earth, and (5) the Church as Servant model, which views the mission of believers as one of serving the needs of their community and all people in need, especially the poor and marginalized.⁶

More often than not, a variety of these models can be at work in any particular historical epoch, in any specific community, or in any individual person. That is to say that, in any given instance, a variety of models may be at work at any level of the Church's makeup and that when juxtaposed with one another in this way, may also provide a deeper sense of the Church's nature, identity, and mission. To be sure, the same can be said for communities of consecrated life or in individual community members. The possibility that one or more of these models may be operative at any one time in its historical circumstances provides religious with a unique moment of decision in their lives. Either they can seek common ground and live together in peace in what Pope Saint John Paul II referred to as a "spirituality of communion,"⁷ or they can vie with one another for theological and spiritual prominence and face the possibility of a gradual disintegration of the very nature, purpose, and evangelizing mission of consecrated life. When living in a secularized North American context, the way forward for them must involve a combination of intense prayer and discernment, inner personal and communal reflection on the meaning of consecrated life, and a critical analysis of how a renewal of its

⁶ A. DULLES, *Models of the Church* (Garden City: Image Books, 1974), pp. 39-108.

⁷ POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Novo millennio ineunte* (Apostolic Letter on the New Millennium, January 6, 2001), #s 43-45.

internal structures and missionary outreach can impact the secularized culture in which they live. Although the path ahead will be difficult, we must recall that the crosses we bear are rarely without their share of difficulties and that they become easy only when carried with humble faith in Christ. Even in our present circumstances, there is much that inspires hope.

Some thirty years ago Patricia Wittberg provided an interesting tool for helping members of consecrated life (and members of religious congregations in particular) to pave the way forward in confronting the challenges of secular culture. She identified three approaches to religious life that either had continued or developed in the wake of the changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council. The first, the intentional model, controls every aspect of community life from when they get up in the morning, to the clothes they wear, the food they eat, when they pray, what they do during the day, and when they go to sleep. The strength of this model is that it gives a very strong and unified corporate witness. Its weakness is that it can be harmful to the individual's personal identity and stunt in him or her mature, authentic growth.

By way of contrast, the bureaucratic model organizes the community's identity around the work it does and gives its members ample personal time during their off hours for tending to their private personal pursuits. The strength of this model is its flexibility and efficiency in its orientation toward mission and the apostolate. Its weakness lies in the subtle dilution of its corporate witness and the community's counter-cultural witness.

Instead, the associational model is described as "a group of persons who have invested a certain amount of their resources in the attainment of some common goal or objective, but who retain more personal autonomy and competing loyalties than would be possible in the intentional community."⁸ Loose-knit ties that gather them around a common spiritual outlook hold

⁸ P. WITTEBERG, *Creating a Future for Religious Life: A Sociological Perspective* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), pp. 61-62.

them together. The strength of this model is that it optimizes the personal freedom of its members and allows them to work toward their common goal in a way that best suits their own personalities and individual needs. Its weaknesses are a tendency toward individualism, a lack of community, and loss of a strong sense of corporate identity.⁹

Wittberg concludes that the best way for religious congregations to forge a future would be for them to incorporate aspects of each of the three models' strengths. That is to say, they should make an effort to project a strong corporate witness, emphasize flexibility and efficiency in the apostolate, and foster a sense of personal dignity that allows for mature development and authentic freedom.¹⁰ The question before us now is: How can this be done?

Living in the Gap

What follows are some general reflections on how communities of consecrated life can live out their commitments in today's secularized context of North America.

1. *Honest Assessment.* Communities of consecrated life first need to assess the extent to which the secular world around them has already influenced them. Questions arise. To what extent do they suspect the role of reason as a building block for a society based on the dignity of the human person and the common good? To what extent have they lost their sense of the sacred and the role of faith in their communal and personal lives? To what extent have they allowed the quest for personal autonomy to interfere with their living out a true freedom based on the virtuous life? How do they understand the way or ways they should relate to the surrounding culture? What models of Church do they exhibit? What kind of community do they embody? What combination of these

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-81.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-41.

various models is at work in its members' daily lives? Progress can be made only after a thorough and honest assessment of their current state of life has been made.

2. *Vision and Reality.* After this honest assessment, these communities need to get back in touch with the vision that inspired them and look at the various ways in which they have fallen short. In a secularized world such as the one found in North America, there is a slippery slope the ideal and the real, one that fosters thoughtless compromise and subtly merges vision into the reality to the extent that the former ultimately disappears. Rather than striving to live up to an authentic vision of consecrated life, individual members and, in some cases, entire communities can easily accommodate themselves to their secularized environment and settle into a life of carefree comfort and compromise. No sincere candidate would ever wish to join a community that offers little or no corporate witness, presents itself as a bureaucratic workplace rather than a vibrant community of believers, or offers no sound counter-cultural witness to the world around them.
3. *Living in the Gap.* Once the gap between vision and reality has been recognized, these communities need to identify concrete communal and personal strategies that will help them narrow the distance between them. Their present structures of communal and personal living need to be critically evaluated and adapted to the needs of the present. Each community needs to ask itself on a regular basis if together they are gradually narrowing the gap between vision and reality or allowing it to grow. Consecrated life cannot properly engage the secular culture around it if it does not have a deep sense of the vision that has brought its members together and an awareness of its need fundamental need for daily conversion. In response to the secular environment in which they live, consecrated communities are called to base themselves in a spirituality of communion dedicated to Jesus Christ. It should be one that fosters a healthy under-

standing of the reciprocity faith and reason, nurtures a deep reverence for the sacred, and promotes an understanding of freedom that leads a person to what is authentically true, good, holy, and even beautiful.¹¹

Some Practical Suggestions

Here are some concrete suggestions for communities of consecrated life wishing to engage the secular culture of North America. Especially in their programs of initial and ongoing formation, communities of consecrated life could implement a variety of innovative changes:

- They could dedicate themselves to rediscovering for themselves, the faithful, and those who have been estranged from the Church a deep sense of the sacred. They could do so by adapting concrete practices of liturgical and popular devotion structured into the daily routine of communal and personal life to the needs of the day. Such adapted practices could include such things as an emphasis on the role of silence in the sacramental mysteries (especially the Eucharist), common daily meditation, a personal holy hour, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, Marian devotions, a weekly review of life, examination of consciousness. Adapting such practices to the needs of secular society requires imagination, creativity, and a desire to meet people where they are.
- They could focus their apostolic work on outreach to the poor and marginalized, protecting the unborn, and caring for the environment. At the same time, they should recognize that work is an important but not defining part of their mission. The community needs to find ways of identifying itself as a family knitted together by a common

¹¹ For more on this process, see D.J. BILLY, *Living in the Gap: Religious Life and the Call to Communion*, (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2d ed, 2014).

purpose. They need to identify with one another outside the workplace (e.g., small group sharing, common prayer, retreats, and recreation).

- They could find ways of fostering personal maturity and responsibility in service of the community and to the overall common good of society (e.g., actively promoting the need for spiritual direction among its members, encouraging a weekly day off, making regular sabbaticals available, encouraging projects of personal apostolic interest).
- They could encourage members to develop active listening skills that encourage authentic dialogue with those of differing points of view (e.g., train their members in an approach to spiritual direction that reaches out to members of other religious, philosophical, and ethical traditions).
- They could try to identify ways to offer a counter-cultural witness to the surrounding culture (e.g., adopting apostolates that challenge the postmodern outlook of suspicion of reason, loss of the sense of the sacred, and autonomous freedom).
- They could examine the ways in which technology and social media can be used not only to interact with but also to transform the world in which they live (e.g., creating blogs, websites, and massive open online courses that show how the secular outlook influences everyone in North American culture, even themselves, and that offer ways of looking beyond it).
- Finally, they could promote their corporate identity by wearing the religious habit at appropriate moments (at least in liturgical functions) and adopt some external symbols representing that identity (e.g., a pin, a cross, a special shirt) to be worn by members even when they are not specifically engaged in the official apostolic work of the community.

While by no means exhaustive, these practical suggestions outline just some of the ways that communities of consecrated

life can reorient their lives in a way that would enable them to reach out to the secular world around them. The present situation calls for a strong sense of community and corporate identity, a profound sense of apostolic purpose, and an even deeper desire to meet people where they are and help them to take the next step toward true and authentic freedom.

Conclusion

In secularized North American society, people have access to the richest products and most advanced technologies the world has ever produced. At the same time, they find themselves increasingly isolated from one another and often bereft of family and community ties. In such a context, communities of consecrated life present an enigma to postmodern liberals when they live the vowed life in such a way that fosters genuine relationships of friendship among its members and by offering them the Gospel message of God's personal love for each human being as a way of filling the void of the secularized soul.

For this reason, programs of initial and ongoing formation for communities of consecrated life need to foster authentic experiences of communal living that radiate a deep sense of belonging to a loving personal God who assures them of his love, gives them hope in something beyond the present world, and offers them faith in God as the key that unlocks the door to true happiness. Formators involved in such programs should seek a proper balance between the communal and the personal and do so in a way that preserves the community's common corporate identity yet allows for authentic personal growth and development.

This challenge may seem daunting and perhaps even overwhelming. At the same time, we may draw comfort from two important realities. First of all, North American culture is not yet completely secularized. If care is not taken, however, it may be well on its way of becoming so. As human persons, we have a deep longing for transcendence. Although this desire may become numbed, no cultural ideology, not even postmodernism,

can completely stamp out our desire for something beyond ourselves. We, in other words, are hardwired for God and nothing can change that reality. As Pope Emeritus Benedict puts it, “Let us put it very simply: man needs God, otherwise he remains without hope.”¹² Finally, it is important to remember that God is actively at work in the world and accompanies us as we confront the current crises both within the Church and in the secular environment in which we live. We are called to live in hope and trust that God will use us to bring good out the evil that surrounds us and help us be instruments of society’s gradual (and final) transformation. As Pope Francis himself reminds us: “Our hope as Christians is strong, safe and sound on this earth, where God has called us to walk, and it is open to eternity because it is founded on God who is always faithful.”¹³ So may it be. Thus, may it come to pass.

Reflection Questions

- To what extent has your community been influenced by the surrounding secular culture?
- How does your community presently relate or react to the surrounding secular culture?
- What models of Church does your community currently promote?
- In what sense is your community intentional, bureaucratic, or associational?
- How does your community live in the gap between vision and reality?
- What are the positive and negative elements of the surrounding secular culture?
- How can your community reach out to the people of North America?

¹² POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Spe salvi* (Encyclical Letter, November 30, 2007), # 23.

¹³ POPE FRANCIS, *General Audience* (St. Peter’s Square, April 10, 2013).

Secularism and the necessity for Spirituality in our Initial Formation as Redemptorists

❖ LORENZO KEARNS, C.Ss.R

Author • Laurence (Lorenzo) Kearns was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1939. He made his Religious Profession in 1960 in the Baltimore Province and his priestly ordination in 1965. He pursued his Master's degree in Religious Education and his second Master's degree in Latin American History. He was sent as a Redemptorist missionary to the Vice-Province of Campo Grande in 1968. He spent 30 years as a formator in all the levels of Redemptorist formation. He was elected first Provincial to the new Province of Campo Grande and reelected for a second term. He has written ten small books on Religious Life and spirituality. He also served on the General Government's Spirituality Secretariat for six years.

Note: before the publication of this Volume of REDEMPTORIST FORMATION, Father Kearns had passed away on January 12, 2022 in Curitiba, Brazil. May he rest in peace!

Abstract • Fr. Laurence Kearns, C.Ss.R., begins this article by explaining “secularism” as a process where religion, in general, has lost its influence over many facets of life. He says that secularism is perhaps one of the greatest challenges to our initial formation system, at both the personal and communal levels, in the fomenting of the spiritual life according to Gospel norms. Fr. Kearns presents five principles of secularism (rationalism, relativism, absolutes, hedonism, materialism) that need to be confronted in formation. The presentation of these principles offers a working context for the formation elements. He points out 18 commentaries from his 32 years of experience in all the initial and permanent Congregation formation levels. Among the 18 commentaries are an emphatic emphasis on the quality of and true spirituality that cannot be reduced only to spiritual exercises or holy

places (chapel) or only to community prayers, and that “cannot separate the spiritual from the profane”, arising from our baptismal consecration and nourished by personal prayer. In addition, of course, intimacy with and the following of the “Master Jesus” is fundamental. The forming of authentic evangelical communities is part of the hard work of the formators. Permanent formation is seen as “food” to nourish vocation, and spiritual direction is an essential spiritual source of growth. Some of the obstacles highlighted are *spiritual anemia*, *spiritual accommodation*, and *renunciation*. The reality of renunciation, the importance of continued education and spiritual direction, the process of conversion, etc., are also considered. References are made to the thoughts, life, and model of St. Alphonsus, the Redemptorist Spirituality, the Sacred Scriptures, our Constitutions, General Chapters, etc. This article will undoubtedly enrich our formators as they live out their ministry of accompanying our younger confreres.

Keywords • secularism, Gospel, rationalism, relativism, absolutes, hedonism, materialism, principles, spirituality, baptismal consecration, personal prayer, intimacy, Master Jesus, permanent formation, vocation, spiritual direction, spiritual anemia, spiritual accommodation, renunciation, Sacred Scriptures, St. Alphonsus, Constitutions, General Chapters, ministry, younger confreres.

Secularism and the necessity for Spirituality in our Initial Formation as Redemptorists

Secularism is a process where religion, in general, has lost its influence over many facets of life such as our political, economic, social, and moral principles, which causes an immense difficulty in forming an integrated spirituality and above all a personal experience of God's intimate love so essential in our initial formation system in search of seeking to assume a religious consecration vocation.

According to Max Weber, the term "secularization" refers to the gradual process of "the abandoning of cultural precepts that used to be based on religion". In secularism, questions and explications are now based only on reason and materialism, eliminating all possibility of Christian faith as an influence in our discernments.

I feel that it would be a serious error if our formators thought that our candidates for the religious and priestly life as Redemptorists were not touched and influenced in one way or another by the principles of secularism. Our candidates, in general, were bombarded with propaganda about the values of secularism and the rejection of religious principles. Perhaps this reality is the greatest challenge in our initial formation system. Formators need to present (if not sell) to our formation men Christian and basic moral principles to "form" them in Gospel norms that are in total contradiction to what they possibly learned if not practiced in our secularized world. We are speaking here of a personalized and community formation about the spiritual life in preparation to assume a vocation to the religious and priestly vocation honestly.

Some principles of secularism that need to be confronted with our candidates about secularism are the following:

- a) Reason as the only and supreme norm of life. To question a philosophical theory that prioritizes reason in prejudice to faith and eliminates all concepts of a *personal God*.
- b) Relativism teaches that nothing is absolute like religious and moral principles. Without any recourse or responsibility to faith issues, the individual now determines all.
- c) Narcissism is a psychoanalytical concept that defines the individual and promotes the individual in an exaggerated lifestyle and promotes an excessive love for oneself. Compromise with others just does not fit in here.
- d) Hedonism – consists of a moral doctrine in which the need and seeking of pleasure is the only authentic norm of life and, as such, seeks to justify all that fulfills one's satisfaction.
- e) And finally, there is Materialism. Materialism is an attitude that only understands life as seeking the possession of material goods exclusively. Material things now are always in the first place in one's life. It is perhaps in the first principle in this secularized world.

These five signs of secularism are motivated and communicated by all the modern sources of communication that affect especially our young people and our future candidates to the religious life. Religion simply bothers our youth and makes impossible their seeking and living of religious principles because religion clearly interferes in their “human liberty”. It would be impossible to live freely and happily a religious consecration, a community life, and a self-giving Redemptorist apostolate with these five orientations.

Unfortunately, some of these principles of secularism influenced our candidates in different ways. The formators need to touch on these principles of secularism both in the initial and extended formation before and even after religious profession. It is a question of entering in an effective way of conversion according to clarified evangelical principles that touch on our spiritual and community life (Chapter 2) and our apostolic life (Chapter 1) of our Redemptorist Constitutions and Statutes. This necessitates confrontation – necessitates conversion –

necessitates questioning influences of secularism according to the evangelical and orientation principles of our Constitutions. In a few words, we need a planned formation system according to each candidate's present conditions and their condition to assume a religious life.

Here I would like to share some personal orientations about our formation system. I have been a formator for 32 years in all the Congregation's initial and permanent formation levels. These are personal commentaries, and I hope to animate our formators to exercise this most important apostolate in our Congregation.

1 – It is impossible to sustain a Christian life and more so a religious vocation without practicing some type of spirituality. *The purpose of all spirituality is to facilitate some experience of God and His love in our candidates' concrete life.* Spirituality is an amorous encounter between “oneself” and “God”. Spirituality is the process of one discovering a God who descends to love me, to call me to a specific vocation, and the candidate responding to His love by loving Him in obedience to His will. It is an alliance that terminates in consecrating one's whole life to Him for love. Spirituality speaks of a process of mutual love. Spirituality is the way to affirm and grow in this love alliance in the life of the candidates as future Redemptorists. *The practice of spirituality is a priority in all stages of formation.* This seems obvious, but there is a serious lack of this in our formation system. We have “religious” acts but not necessarily a love alliance.

Spirituality is a process of growing in intimacy with God, but that necessarily needs to end up loving our neighbor in community or apostolic service. Authentic prayer always terminates in the love of our neighbor. Authentic prayer always ends up in some practice of charity simply because in intimacy we discover that God first loved and continues loving me. His love is without conditions. And He calls those in formation to continue His love through our religious vocation. Without spirituality, this process simply does not happen.

We are talking here about *quality spirituality* and not so much of a series of religious practices.. It is not a question of how much I pray, but how I pray and how this prayer leads me to be an expression of whom I experience. And God is love! Prayer leads one to conversion in the being and actions of God.

All spirituality begins when the candidate experiences that God is a Person that loves him and loves him without conditions that unfortunately secularism preaches that you have to earn love. It is not a gift. Spirituality begins when the candidates begin to experience God's love in their daily lives. Formators need to help the candidates to discover God's love. Formators need to purify the candidates' many false images of God, which secularism helped to distort. False images that were invented and assumed in the personal history of each candidate. All of us were formed with certain erroneous preconceptions of God, and unfortunately, we demanded that God be whom we preconceived. We judged and concluded that God is such a person, and then in formation with the help of spirituality, we let God enter into our lives and say, "I am not this Person, and you need to change your image of Me". It is the important moment of conversion. Therefore, begins the whole and continual process of purification to welcome the true image of God – a God of love and mercy, and Plentiful Redemption. And because of this, the candidates do not limit God's presence only to prayer and can experience Him in life and others. Spirituality begins the intimacy with God that opens the door to help the candidates who want to respond to His love through religious consecration. And it is here that the formators are those who must show them the way to make these steps. The first step is to encourage personal prayer and intimacy with God. Teach them to become "*madly in love with God*" as Saint Alphonsus did and taught us to do.

2 – A true spirituality and experience of God's love should lead us to *some type of commitment with humanity*. It begins with learning that God's love for us is grace and then feeling His call to be and act as He does. God reveals to the candidates his desire to save all humanity without exception, and as such, He

invites future Redemptorists to participate in this same desire. To be a continuation of the Holy Redeemer as consecrated persons in the Church. All genuine spirituality ends with this commitment with humanity to continue this salvific plan of God's love. Spirituality cannot be only between God and the candidates. It does not treat personal intimacy with God and only my necessities that secularism would teach and certain movements in the Church preach. Personal intimacy without commitment is wrong. Some candidates come from the wrong spiritual formation. The formators need to show them another spiritual way that starts with intimacy with God and ends with some service of God's people. Spirituality and mission are the correct way that is in total contrast to what secularism has taught us.

3 – Spirituality needs to descend to serve concrete people and the necessity to go out of ourselves to love these people. This is totally against the influences of secularism that many candidates were formed in. Right from the beginning of our Redemptorist formation system, these “people” have a concrete face – they are the members of our community and the poorest. *“Among groups of people more in need of spiritual help, they will give special attention to the poor, the deprived, and the oppressed. The evangelization of these is a sign of messianic activity (cf. Luke 4:18), and Christ, in a certain sense, wished to identify himself with them (cf. Matt. 25:40) (Constitution 04).* Unfortunately, intimistic spirituality does not permit a candidate to encounter the face of Christ in the confreres and the poor that we are called to love and serve.

4 – Spirituality is the search to know and experiment God's true personality. It is the process of helping the candidates to let God be God in their lives. And God is love. And *His love is grace*. This was the great conversion in Alphonsus' life when he discovered the word “gracel” helped by the writings of Saint Theresa de Alva and Saint Francis de Sales. One cannot earn grace – it is a free gift of God's love. This is totally against the teaching of secularism, where one must earn God's love. Grace

speaks here of a mutually loving relationship with God that the candidate, with the help of his formators begins to search for with spirituality and develops this the rest of his formation and religious years.

5 – A great error in our formation in the past was the orientation to limit spiritual life and an experience of God to what we called “religious practices” like common prayer, the Mass and the rosary, etc. However, a spiritual life includes a totality of all that we are and do. We could experience God’s loving presence the whole day, which is the aim of all spirituality. *A true spirituality cannot separate the spiritual from the profane.* We can find God in all people and all things. Spirituality aims at an integration of both. God is not only in the chapel. The problem begins when the candidates lose their sensibility to capture this living presence of God in everything. God is in the sacred but also in the profane. Spirituality is to awaken our insensibility to capture God in everything the whole day.

God is with us always 24 hours a day. And especially in our Redemptorist spirituality, this awareness of God’s presence helps us discover His will, a principal orientation of Saint Alphonsus. More than ever, this needs to be orientated to our young professed confreres after the Novitiate. It seems that this awareness begins to become forgotten and not experienced. Formators on all levels should introduce the candidates to break their insensibility to find God’s loving presence in all things. *This simply does not happen without a life of personal prayer.* It must be a priority on all levels of formation. Only moments of silence in contemplative prayer will the candidates begin to accept God’s presence even in difficult times. I feel this is the modern problem in formation. With so much time with cellular phones, they simply say, “that they did not have time”. There are too many distractions in our lives to be honest about the search and the experience with God. The formators in personal colloquiums with the candidates must question their personal prayer time. Secularism does everything possible to distract one from personal contact with God’s love.

6 – A second concept of spirituality is about our baptismal consecration. Baptismal consecration is a fascination for God's person and the desire to live an alliance of love we made with God. It brings us to the basis of all spirituality and morality. To live what Christ reduced to two commandments: love God and love our neighbor. And this same baptismal alliance one day will be confirmed through their religious profession. But this love alliance needs to be animated through some spirituality. *Without spirituality, it is impossible to live our religious profession.* This seems to be an obvious fact, but it is precisely this that many in formation do not live, and that is so essential, especially for those in temporary vows. The first thing that young religious in formation forget is to live personal prayer. They become insensible to their 'first love', and their apostolic prophecy also begins to suffer. As Christ said in Apocalypse, "*But I have this against you, that you are turned away from your first love*" (Ap. 2,4).

7 – All spirituality is a process of falling in love with God to use the words of the prophets and especially of Saint Alphonsus in his writings that came from his own personal experience. Spirituality is a growing process of intimacy with God and God with us. Intimacy needs to grow in our candidates for religious life. It is a process of grace in which God always takes the initiative because He wants to love our candidates concretely. It is not a question of theory but a life experience. Formators must show the candidates that God's love is not theory. It is an everyday experience that needs to grow during all the time of formation. God is faithful in His love even in the midst of our infidelity. And the formators need to help the candidates to respond to God's love especially wanting to assume religious consecration as an expression of their love. In many spiritual directions, I have experienced that religion does *not give space for God to love them*. It is an alliance – it speaks of both sides. We loving God, but letting God be God with us and God is love. This orientation is missing too much in our formation system. Live grace – live God's love – respond to His love.

8 – This orientation is important to eradicate any concept of merit in our spirituality. It eliminates all possibility to manipulate God to win His grace and love. Secularism and postmodernity value only what we can earn because spirituality means that we are in control. The word “earn” does not exist in Christian spirituality. God’s love is grace! The process of growing in God’s love only happens when we discover in contemplation that God wants to love me with a passion. He begins the process. We greet this love as grace. The danger in philosophy or theology in various levels of formation is to experience God as an idea and not as a loving person. I cannot love an idea but, yes, a person. God is the Father – He is Jesus Incarnated – He is the Holy Spirit. And spirituality calls the candidates to have a loving relationship with all three Persons of the Trinity. Only faith can help us to initiate this loving experience with God. I can love our God, and He can and wants to love us. This is the great challenge of the formators today in a world trying to eliminate God and religion. Saint Alphonsus taught us to seek a loving dialogue with God every day (*Visits to the Blessed Sacrament – Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*). It is interesting to note that Alphonsus wrote the Visits to the Blessed Sacrament for those in formation, especially those already in vows.

9 – The spiritual process of intimacy and dialogue with God does not happen automatically, especially by magical formulas where we try to control God according to our whims. *Spirituality needs the element of discipline*. Spirituality needs moments of quality time between two “lovers” who need moments of profound dialogue and intimacy. Moments of mutual sharing and loving acceptance. Moments of profound openness without shame or fear of showing God who I really am with all my faults and weaknesses. It is a moment without fear of showing God that I am holy and a sinner and experiencing His total acceptance of my reality. But the only way this can happen is through some discipline of true prayer. Without spirituality, this beautiful meeting of two hearts simply does not happen. It becomes only theory and not experience.

Because of this, spirituality cannot be reduced only to religious practices or holy places (chapel) or only to community prayers. The candidates need to be taught by the formators that they can contact any moment of the day in whatever place or circumstance. God is everywhere and makes His presence felt in nature, in the community, in the apostolate. It is what we call rapid moments of contemplation. It is a short but intense moment of intimacy with mutual love.

10 – Before this fact, the formators need to fraternally confront the candidates (especially those in vows) with the possible danger of “*spiritual anemia*” that comes with the effects of secularism. Spiritual anemia indicates a notable distancing of intimacy with God. The candidate begins to forget that he wants to be or already is consecrated to a Person – God and His Church. Candidates are not consecrated to a Congregation, nor to a special type of apostolate or charism but to a Person. In addition, spiritual anemia creates a spiritual deficiency that weakens the growing process of intimacy with this Person. And this anemia begins to have evident deficiencies in all aspects – consecration – community life – apostolic zeal. Part of secularism has been the necessity to erase the “Sacred” in our lives to justify anti-evangelical principles and immorality. Unfortunately, without continued formation, our candidates prophetically lose evangelical values because they buy the propaganda of secularism that is all around them in social communications. Without serious orientations of the formators, it is easy for the candidates to fall into *spiritual accommodation*. Without a life of prayer (which is the first thing they abandon), there is no life of transformation in the being and action of Christ the Redeemer. The first thing professed confreres in formation disregard is personal prayer where God is permitted to question their loyalty to their consecration. Once again, limiting prayer to only community prayer does not sustain religious consecration. More and more, they will drift away from intimacy with Christ. Thus, begins spiritual anemia. There begins a cold relationship with Christ and a separateness from

the full living of concretion and prophecy. Christ formed with the twelve apostles a spiritual and apostolic school. Jesus was the Rabi, and the twelve were disciples. The purpose of this rabbinical school was not perfection in the observance of the Mosaic law. Still, Jesus insisted that the new Law consisted primarily in the intense observance of only two commandments, which constituted the essence of the alliance of baptism – love of His Father and our neighbor. The Rabi Jesus first lived these two commandments intensely and invited the twelve to freely “follow me”. A candidate in formation assumes in his consecration to follow the Master Jesus in his way of living His consecration to his Father. To follow Christ is to be a disciple of Christ who needs, therefore, constant contemplation of how Christ lived his consecration – Incarnation – Eucharist – Cross (Saint Alphonsus). Once again, to follow Christ calls for intimacy with the Master through contemplation of the Master. Only contemplation will help the disciple to welcome, live and continue the Master Jesus prophetically. It would help the candidate to become a “living memory” of Christ spiritually and apostolically. And here, the formators will need to help the candidate gradually discover the way to live and animate their desire to be a true disciple of the Rabi Jesus.

11 – I feel that the great setback in initial formation is the lack of honestly contemplating the Master Jesus. To follow Christ is to be called by Christ (vocation). It is Christ who chooses and the candidate or professed that welcomes His invitation to follow Him. Christ wants a special intimacy with those chosen to live with him in His school. This demands much humility because it is not a question of meriting this invitation to live more closely with the Master. It is the Master who calls the candidates to follow Him. Jesus has a special love for those he chooses. Christ does not want a superficial relationship with those he chose to follow him and to consecrate their lives to His Kingdom. And part of this invitation is an invitation to intimacy with the Master Jesus. And this simply will not happen without the discipline of daily encounters with the Master and the

Master with his future or already consecrated loved ones. Once again, I feel that the vigilance against spiritual anemia is one of the most important duties of the formators on all levels of formation. Only through monthly colloquies between formator and candidate could indicate an X-ray of the true living of their spirituality. Even not being their spiritual director, the formator has the right to touch on the subject matter on their spirituality's progress or lack of progress.

12 – The regression happens when in place of the only Master Jesus, the candidates put other things and distractions in the first place in their lives, and soon the fascination for Jesus dramatically diminishes. The candidates simply stop looking at the being and actions of the Master. And soon comes other deviations from the obligations of poverty, chastity, and obedience which the Master lived and invited us to continue His prophecy. It is God's people who eventually suffer from our infidelities. It is no longer intimacy with the Master, but the Rabi became an idea, a dry theology but not the person who for love invited one to follow Him. The first love begins to dry up, and Jesus is no longer the Master who loved his followers with a passion. Without the prayer of contemplating the Master, it is impossible to know Him – impossible to imitate Him. And the setback in the religious life was precisely this lack of contemplative prayer, which calls us to a commitment with God's people. This possibility must be questioned with our candidates on all levels of formation.

13 – Another sign of regression in formation is when the candidates begin to diminish the force of Jesus' preaching because of the continual propaganda de secularism in all types of social communications. Jesus never hid from his disciples the need of renunciation in order to follow him. The twelve apostles were even invited to participate in his final destiny, the cross to continue His salvific gesture to save all humanity. Our candidates are invited to continue the same salvific mission of the Rabi, who freely gave up his life to save all humanity. *Without renunciation, there is no true following of Christ.* The

modern world tries to negate any form of renunciation. Unfortunately, some of our candidates begin to fall into this error. Some do not let that the Word shake up their attitudes clearly against Jesus' teachings. Some fall into a personal interpretation of God's word, justifying their error if not sins. They do not permit that the Word calls us to conversion in the being and actions of Jesus. Formators cannot hide the necessity of renunciation in our religious and priestly vocation from the candidates. The world preaches precisely the opposite. The formator needs by word and example to show them the element of evangelical renunciation to live charity in our community life and our apostolic services.

14 – Normally we study the contents of our Constitution during our initial formation period, especially in the Novitiate in order to appreciate and begin to assume and practice the rich contents of our Rule. We felt attracted by the Holy Spirit to be a continuation of Jesus Christ whose being and acting are writing between the lines of all our Constitutions according to the vision of Saint Alphonsus. Another challenge of the formators is to constantly renovate this study of the Constitution according to the stages of the candidates in formation. Initial formation at all level needs to pray and deepen the study of these Constitutions periodically. I feel there is possibly a lack of doing this, especially on the already professed confreres still in formation. Unfortunately, the Constitutions have become more a reference book than a guide of discernment in living our charism. Maybe at least once a week, the Constitutions could be the topic of our community meditation and a source of conversion. The Constitutions indicate sources of fidelity in our religious consecration and the faithful fulfilling of our Redemptorist charism. The more that this can be done in community sharing, the better the effects in their formation.

Together with this is the prayerful study of documents from the General Government and our provincial chapters that should be presented to the candidates to see how the Holy Spirit is directing the Congregation.

15 – Another preoccupation that should call the attention of the formators is the necessity of formation to live in community. No future religious is capable of living his consecration faithfully without the help and good example of his fellow confreres. There is no doubt that community living has recently suffered some setbacks. We live together but not necessarily do we create evangelical fraternity. Unfortunately, the cellular phone merits more attention than our confreres. Exaggerated individualism also had destroyed the meaning of community where only my ego is the only source in community discernment. These are only some of the negative effects of secularism in community life. Assuming the principles of secularism, a very strong egoism is created in our community life and discernments. The norm ever more evident is that “I” is more important than “us” which destroys community life. There is a lack of true and creative friendship amongst us.

Once again, it is the hard work of the formators who need to invest time and patience to form true evangelical communities. There is a need to confront the lack of evangelical principles like the lack of acceptance of others, lack of pardon, the need for reconciliation, and the healthy dependence on one another to maintain fidelity in their vocation. The second and third Chapters of our Constitutions could help the formators to deepen our mutual community life.

16 – Another item of concern is about the permanent formation of our consecrated life. It is evident how, after the Novitiate in our future clerical candidates' lives, they cease in deepening the meaning of their religious life through studies and readings about religious consecration, which is our fundamental vocation. Sadly, the emphasis is only on the priesthood. Yet, our Constitutions dedicate a whole Chapter to the meaning and living of our religious consecration (Chapter III). Formators at the professed level need to study this Chapter and help it be a source of questioning about fidelity in our consecrated life.

Even though there is sufficient material to provide sources of reflection in articles and courses about religious life, it seems that

there is no sign of procuring these means after the Novitiate. It seems that what they learned in the Novitiate suffices. There is a lack of assuming that religious life needs “food” to nourish this vocation and supply true questioning about the living of this specific vocation in the Church. Without these means furnished by the formators, there is no continued conversion in this way of life. Therefore, we do not assume that means, ways and age change with times and circumstances in order to live our religious consecration with more fidelity and prophesy. Without this search, there exists the sad result that some stop growing and remain stuck with the minimal, and there is no more growing. Therefore, accommodation takes over, which kills the meaning and prophesy of our consecrated vocation. This is a danger sign that the formators need to address and heal.

17 – Finally, the formators on all levels should promote that the candidates need a spiritual director. In addition, such direction should be something regular and as a suggested norm once a month. Looking for spiritual direction once in and awhile simply is not spiritual direction. In a monthly colloquium, the formator should question if the candidate is really looking for this important spiritual source of growth and he should motivate fidelity in searching for spiritual direction.

May the Holy Spirit inspire all the formators in our Congregation and comfort them at difficult moments. The Congregation needs you all at all levels of formation. Thank you for assuming this Redemptorist mission.

Consecrated Life and Formation in today's secularized World

❖ KARL M. GASPAR, C.Ss.R

Author • Carlito “Karl” Gaspar is a Redemptorist Brother who is currently a member of the Davao Redemptorist Mission Community, based in Davao City in southern Philippines. He was born in this same city in 1947. He finished A.B. Sociology at the Ateneo de Davao University, M.S. Economics at the Asian Social Institute, and Ph.D. in Philippine Studies at the University of the Philippines. He was arrested and became a political prisoner for almost two years under the Marcos dictatorship in the early 1980s. Upon his release, he joined the Redemptorists and was professed in 1987. As a Redemptorist, he has been engaged as a member of an itinerant mission team, training lay missionaries, heading the Office of Social and Ecological Concerns, and professor of the St. Alphonsus Theological and Mission Institute. After the XXVth General Chapter, he was appointed a member of the Brothers Commission.

Abstract • Brother Carlito Gaspar, C.Ss.R., begins reflecting on the difficult ministry of formators because, among other reasons, of the differences between generations (older and millennials). The latter was born in this era and entered a secularized world. The significance of a non-religious world has its history of development. In this article Bro. Gaspar treats the topic in two main sections: *Secularism's Impact on Religious* and *Pope Francis and Secularism*. “To be secular means to be non-religious”. Fortunately, there are regions in the world where secularism is not yet taking place. As inter-acting in cyberspace becomes a highly dominant element in everyday lives, the young are desensitized. They tend towards individualism, consumerism, and apathy to their surroundings. The challenge is to embrace the crisis for the Church's opportunity in terms of her Mission. For Pope Francis, to resist secularism, we do not engage in intellectual arguments but “out

of love”, do “battle” with the opponents of the faith and thereby draw people to the Church.

Other elements that need to be considered include the fact that formation takes place in the community and through an enhanced fraternal life and engagement in the apostolate. In addition, openness to the challenge of the revealed word and the signs of the times needs to be promoted. Consequently, a new breed of formators is required to best contextualize themselves within the new challenges brought about by shifts in people’s attitudes, values and behavior.

The article concludes with Nine *Concrete Proposals*. The presentation suggests further readings and is accompanied throughout with corresponding footnotes.

Keywords • ministry, generations, millennials, secularized world, secularism, Pope Francis, cyberspace, desensitized, individualism, consumerism, apathy, challenge, faith, openness, community, fraternal life, apostolate, challenge

Consecrated Life and Formation in today's secularized World

Introduction

It is not surprising that in the congregation today, hardly anyone among the confreres would volunteer to be assigned as formator. When a superior consults with a confrere and brings up the possibility that he be assigned as formator, the first impulse is to refuse the assignment. In a number of instances, it is only because of the vow of obedience that the formerly reluctant confrere would eventually accept this assignment. In many local units today across the different Regions, there has been a crying need for more formators as the available number of those who are trained, have the needed orientation, and are willing to take on this assignment for the moment is rather slim.

Why is this so? There are a number of reasons behind this but one commonly known factor is that being a formator to the present generation of formandi is not an easy task and can involve a lot of tensions and stress. This is especially in consideration of the specific characteristics of the young men who consider becoming Redemptorists who, as a group, is labeled as millennials (although there could be some who may be a bit older if they are “late vocation”). Those of the older generations recognize a world of difference between them and the millennials in terms of their worldview, life's perspectives, lifestyle, attachment to technological gadgets, sense of entitlement, social interactions and various behavioral patterns. Oftentimes, the tendency on the part of the older generations is to pass judgment on the millennials that can be unfairly critical and patronizing.

The Secular World

But of course, the youth of today would be quite different from their elders. After all, they were born into a world that has entered into the so-called post-modern age.¹ It is a known fact that human beings born during this era enter a secular world, which is so unlike the one their ancestors inhabited.

To be secular means to be non-religious. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is “indifference to, or rejection or exclusion of, religion and religious considerations”. A secular world is therefore constituted by a growing number of people who, in the words of Zucherman would rather “maintain a naturalistic worldview in which belief in anything is always proportioned to the evidence available” and are engaged “in a variety of activities that are understood as this-worldly, and to identify with, or be a member of, non-religious groupings or associations.”²

It does not follow that they lack belief because secular people believe in many things like the value of education, love of family, the need to care for the earth in view of ecological devastations,

¹ This article does not aim to give a detailed explanation as to the meaning of the post-modern age, its origin and who theorize this concept. Ward provides a way to understand this term in relation to postmodernism which to him is a philosophical discourse to denote a critical stance to modernism (as he refers to Jean-Francois Lyotard assertion that is incredulity towards grand-narratives of the 18th and 19th centuries, such as the dialectics of the Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth). The post-modern age refers to the sociological notion of post-modernity, which describes certain cultural conditions pertaining to developed countries in the 1970s and 1980s. Cf. G. WARD, *Introduction, or, A Guide to Theological Thinking in Cyberspace, in the Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (ed. Graham Ward, Blackwell Publishers, 1997) p. 24.

² PHIL ZUCKERMAN, Ph. D., *The Secular Life*. Cf.: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-secular-life/201407/what-does-secular-mean>.

and the like. They may even engage in “spiritual” activities e.g., *zen* or meditation but nothing that would be considered religious. They just don’t believe in supernatural realms and deities. They even join religious festivities and rituals but not because of spiritual convictions but to enjoy the company, the music, and food. These persons are known for various labels, some of which are quite derogatory: atheist, agnostic, humanist, freethinker, apostate, heretic, and infidel.

There is, however, another way to understand secular which Wax refers to as mainly the reality of Western nations today where “the conditions of belief” has shifted to a movement from “a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently is not the easiest to embrace.”³

Thus, believing is no longer *the only* option, but it is now one of many options. No longer is there a split between the sacred and the secular as before. With this mindset change, human beings live their lives no longer about something higher or more transcendent than their own human flourishing.

How did secularism as a theory, belief, ideology, or political modality arise and has been cemented in this post-modern age? To determine the narratives that marked humanity’s significant changes, one must go back to various historical epochs – from the Italian Renaissance to the Reformation and the Enlightenment periods. These included “an increasing confidence in human capabilities, reason, and progress... together with an increasing distrust in organized and state-supported religion”; (this was) “responsible for the ushering of modernity... which brought all facets of human life including religion under the purview of reason and thus became responsible for the freeing of education, society, and

³ Cf. T. WAX, *Three Definitions of ‘Secular’ and Why They Matter for Our Mission* (Cf.: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/3-definitions-of-secular-and-why-they-matter-for-our-mission>) 2014.

state from the domination of religion; in other words, the development of modern secularism.”⁴

Secularization is also linked to pluralization and privatization. In a pluralistic society, there are many worldviews, and not one is dominant. According to Zacarias: a pluralistic society is where “(t)he only thing we could be sure of was that all moral choices were relative and there was no point of reference to right and wrong;” which could ultimately result “in the death of reason.”⁵ To be able to accommodate the religiously-minded, there arises privatization of religious practice. It is okay for people to be spiritually minded so long as they keep their practice private and not bring this into the public sphere. For some believers, this means the loss of meaning in terms of their religious practice.

Secularism's Impact on Religion

At the moment, secularism is much more prevalent in the highly developed, capitalist First World countries. This is not surprising as secularization and industrialization are interconnected. In these societies, according to Bullard, “the religiously unaffiliated, called ‘nones’, are growing significantly... today, ”they’re the second-largest religious group in North America and most of Europe.”⁶ When there arose disturbing signs of the impact of secularism on religion, it was predicted that as the rest of the world moves towards modernization,

⁴ Cf. *Secularism* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularism#cite_note-13)

⁵ R. ZACHARIAS, *Interview by Richard L. Schoonover*. (cf.: Enrichment Journal. <https://www.rzim.org/read/just-thinking-magazine/defending-christianity-in-a-secular-culture>).

⁶ G. BULLARD, *The World's Newest Major Religion: No Religion* (cf. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2016/04/160422-atheism-agnostic-secular-nones-rising-religion/>).

religion would lose its relevancy. Statistics today show that this remains a trend still among industrialized nations, including China. According to Merlini: “The traditional European churches, both Catholic and Protestant, appear to be approaching their twilight hour, despite the spiritual richness of certain circles. There are, to be sure, occasional high-profile and successful media events, but ordinary worship services are increasingly deserted and pollsters who ask about faith are receiving fewer and fewer positive answers.”⁷

There are, however, regions in the world where this is not yet taking place, including the sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Latin America, and Asia. Moreover, the rise of fundamentalism among various faith traditions – Islam, Hinduism, and even Christianity, especially evangelical Protestantism – have fueled the passionate embrace of their ancestors’ belief systems. But in the urban centers of all nations globally, it cannot be denied that religious practice has dwindled among the middle class and elite households.

A growing percentage among the ‘*nones*’ are several years younger than the population average. After all, many of them being born during the post-modern era have been raised in families where parents no longer practice any religious beliefs. As the millennials who are mostly secular today grow up and have children of their own, their own children will probably follow the same path. Financial security and academic achievement are frequently the main reasons for people’s shift to being ‘*nones*’, But apart from age, gender and race are also factors in the demographics of the unbelievers. Mostly white males constitute the highest percentage. Even in the West, women, the blacks, and the poor are least drawn to atheism or agnosticism.

But what about those who commit to continuing their religious beliefs and convictions, including the Catholics among

⁷ C. MERLINI, *A Post-Secular World?* (cf.: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-post-secular-world/2011>).

them? For Merlini, “the very fact that our culture has built its empire on the idea that we can live life without a commitment to some vision of ultimate reality creates a tension within us. The idea that there might be some other true answer out there can, and does, cause many who grow up in the church to leave the faith.”⁸ Many young people who struggle through the tensions of maintaining their faith practice go through such experiences as the social and moral conditions that helped to nurture belief have slowly eroded. This trend has evolved because the elite who controls the academic, media, cultural and legal institutions have created a new way for people to live their lives. The concepts of what is good, just, true, and beautiful no longer interface with religious ideas and spiritual values. Everything is open to contestation; one can believe even as one doubts.

As inter-acting in cyberspace becomes a highly dominant element in their everyday lives, the young are desensitized, and they tend towards individualism, consumerism, and apathy to their surroundings. Such kind of existence can easily result in a sense of isolation, loneliness, and boredom, driving them to an unhealthy lifestyle. But even as skeptics predict that the search for God and meaning is over, there is still a segment of the population – including among the youth – who long for a sense of the mystery and mystical. God’s presence in the world continues to haunt those who intuit that there are things much deeper than what is constituted by the material and secular world as they come to realize that a life of seeking pleasures could turn out to be empty and hollow. What follows is the desire to dig deeper for answers to some basic questions, e.g., Is there anyone out there who can hear my pain and emptiness and can actually do something to help me escape the boredom?

Has the Church responded to this kind of challenge? Unless there has been a comprehensive study based on solid data indicating trends worldwide, it would be difficult to come up

⁸ *Ibid.*

with a categorical answer to such a question. But a theory could be advanced, namely, that by and large, the Church has had difficulties coming up with creative and innovative approaches to arrest the increasing numbers of non-believers. This is certainly true in North America and Western Europe, as well as in Australia and New Zealand and many urbanized centers of even the Third World countries. Otherwise, the statistics involving the ‘*nones*’ would decrease through time.

The fact is that, according to Stetzer, “as Christians and non-Christians become more distinct in their beliefs and practices, new opportunities exist for genuine expressions of the Christian faith” as “the polarization, and even the marginalization, can remind Christians of our mission: not to moralize the unconverted, but to reach the broken and hurting with a gospel message of hope that changes everything.”⁹ Therefore, the challenge is to embrace the crisis for the Church’s opportunity in terms of her mission. This has implications for religious congregations as they seek to recruit and form the new generation of missionaries.

Pope Francis and Secularism

How has our Holy Father discoursed on secularism? Words uttered by Pope Francis during a meeting with a delegation of European rabbis manifests what he thinks about the secular world; he posits: “Today, in Europe, it is more important than ever to emphasize the spiritual and religious dimension of human life. We risk living as if God did not exist in a society increasingly marked by secularism and threatened by atheism. People are often tempted to take the place of God, to consider

⁹ E. STETZER, *Nominal Christians are becoming more secular, and that’s creating a startling change for the U.S.* (Cf.: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/11/04/nominal-christians-becoming-more-secular-and-thats-creating-a-startling-change-for-the-u-s/>) 2015.

themselves the criterion of all things, to control them, to use everything according to their own will.”¹⁰

In his message for the 2019 World Mission Day, Pope Francis wrote: “Rampant secularism, when it becomes an aggressive cultural rejection of God’s active fatherhood in our history, is an obstacle to authentic human fraternity, which finds expression in reciprocal respect for the life of each person” and that “without the God of Jesus Christ, every difference is reduced to a baneful threat, making impossible any real fraternal acceptance and fruitful unity within the human race”.¹¹

And how to deal with secularism? In the words of Allen, “clearly, Pope Francis has shifted the focus away from the wars of culture in the West and open confrontation with secularism, towards a more pastoral and social action-oriented approach” where his aim “isn’t giving in to secularization – (but rather) it’s staging the battle on a different field, away from abstract debates towards hands-on pastoral proximity – what Francis likes to call *vicinanza*, “closeness” – especially to people in greatest difficulty.”¹² For the Holy Father, to resist secularism, we do not engage in intellectual arguments but “to out-love” the opponents of the faith and thereby draw people to the Church.

This is why he wants missionaries to be close to the people. He wants parish priests to maintain close relations with their parishioners, suggesting that parishes be genuinely open and critical of practices that make it difficult or expensive to have

¹⁰ POPE FRANCIS, As reported by the National Catholic Reporter. (cf.: <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-s-quotes-marked-secularism>).

¹¹ POPE FRANCIS, (SIR News Agency.Cf: <https://www.agensir.it/quotidiano/2019/6/10/pope-francis-message-for-world-mission-day-rampant-secularism-is-an-obstacle-to-fraternity-no-culture-should-remain-closed-in-on-itself/>)

¹² J.L. ALLEN Jr., *Pope Francis suggests the way to beat secularism is by ‘out-loving’ it*, (cf: <https://cruxnow.com/analysis/2016/08/pope-believes-secularism-will-bested-loving/> 2016).

access to the sacraments. To confront “today’s illiteracy,” he proposes an approach using “three languages – the language of the mind, the heart and the hands, all three together harmonically.”¹³

Clearly, a new breed of missionaries needs to be formed to serve people living in a secular world. Even as there are still parts of the world where secularism has not become dominant and that in some mission areas, the local inhabitants are still living in what could still be a pre-modern landscape, it is still to be assumed that the situation could radically shift as more people leave the rural villages to flock to urban centers. Thus, within the lifetime of those who plan to join the religious life today, they will encounter mostly mission areas characterized by pluralism and secularism. Thus they are to be formed given this eventual reality.

In 1996, St. John Paul II issued the Apostolic Exhortation on Consecrated Life, which followed the Synod of Bishops on this theme in October 1994. Among other things, this magisterial document, entitled *Vita Consecrata*, provided some guidelines on the kind of formation that religious congregations should take to heart. The document states that:

The primary objective of the formation process is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church’s mission... Since the very purpose of consecrated life is conformity to the Lord Jesus in his total self-giving, this must also be the principal objective of formation... If this is the purpose of the consecrated life, the manner of preparing for it should include and express the character of wholeness. Formation should involve the whole person, in every aspect of the personality, in behavior and intentions... Indeed, at every stage of life, consecrated persons must be offered opportunities to grow in their commitment to the charism and mission of their Institute. For formation to be complete, it must include every aspect of

¹³ *Ibid.*

*Christian life...(including) a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation.*¹⁴

Other elements that need to be considered include: that formation takes place in community through an enhanced fraternal life and engagement in the apostolate that promotes openness to the challenge by the revealed word and the signs of the times. Such an apostolate is contextualized within the new evangelization demanded by the contemporary times. It could be as varied as taking a preferential option for the poor through works of justice and peace, inter-religious dialogue, inculturation, ecological advocacy, and the like. This formation program should also help the candidates to “gradually to develop a critical judgment, based on the Gospel, regarding the positive and negative values of their own culture and of the culture in which they will eventually work” even as they “must be trained in the difficult art of interior harmony, of the interaction between love of God and love of one’s brothers and sisters; they must likewise learn that prayer is the soul of the apostolate, but also that the apostolate animates and inspires prayer.”¹⁵

Initial formation is crucial as it can either further promote or hinder the growth of the candidate’s vocation. Some of the important elements in initial formation should include a community life that discloses “the essential missionary dimension of consecration. Thus, during the period of initial formation, Institutes of Consecrated Life do well to provide practical experiences which are prudently followed by the one responsible for formation, enabling candidates to test, in the context of the local culture, their skills for the apostolate, their ability to adapt and their spirit of initiative.”¹⁶ As initial formation is to provide a formand with a process of development involving various stages of personal maturity involving the psychological,

¹⁴ POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata* (Apostolic Exhortation, March 25, 1996) # 65.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, # 67.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, # 67.

emotional, spiritual, theological, pastoral-missiological elements, there is therefore a need to make sure that the time allotment of this formation is sufficient but suited to the reality of each candidate.

This kind of initial holistic formation has become more demanding than the previous models, especially those in place before Vatican II. Consequently, a new breed of formators are required who can best contextualize themselves within the new challenges brought about by shifts in people's attitudes, values and behavior. *Vita Consecrata* spells out the kind of formators required today:

*Those in charge of formation must ...be very familiar with the path of seeking God to be able to accompany others on this journey... But above all they will disclose the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism by which this is accomplished. They will combine the illumination of spiritual wisdom with the light shed by human means, which can be a help both in discerning the call and in forming the new man or woman, until they are genuinely free. The chief instrument of formation is personal dialogue, a practice of irreplaceable and commendable effectiveness which should take place regularly and with a certain frequency.*¹⁷

Personal dialogue between formator and formand is absolutely necessary, for what most candidates need is for someone just to be there with them "to recognize the pain of life and existence itself, that getting up each day and putting on clothes can be a desperate act of faith in such a world as ours."¹⁸ Formators need to be available to provide the candidate with a safe place where the latter can "question things, look and dig for answers" in a way that the formator can "give plausibility to the faith once for all delivered to the saints by having sacrificial lives of love and forgiveness."¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, # 66.

¹⁸ MASSARO, *Growing up Christian in Secular America*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

As millennials today are far more exposed to data and information and are more inquisitive about various aspects of the faith, chances are a candidate of this generation would ask all kinds of questions. So, he has to be assured that having questions is okay. But this means that the formator must be, on the one hand, knowledgeable enough to provide some answers, but on the other hand, to be also humble to admit limitations of his knowledge.

Along the way, there will be questions regarding the resurrection of Jesus, the reliability of Scripture, the problem of evil, the goodness of God and his character, the relationship of science to faith, the belief in saints, the practice of devotions, etc. In such occasions, all parties involved must invoke the grace with each other and journey through the doubts and tentative answers, hoping that they can all commit to the belief that God's grace is greater than all their failures, doubt, and shame. Because of these, the formator needs a deep sensitivity and compassion. While he may have the innate gift to be such a person, nonetheless, he should be prepared to take on this task through suitable and adequate training

The candidate will grapple with a major question: why he should pursue his search for meaning by exploring committing to consecrated life within the chosen religious congregation. He is constantly haunted by the question: what is the significance of his vocation for the contemporary world? The formator will need to be able to respond to his need for an answer in the context of "the world, where it often seems that the signs of God's presence have been lost from sight," and that what is necessary to combat this is "a convincing prophetic witness on the part of consecrated persons."²⁰

For the formator to accomplish this difficult task would "entail *the affirmation of the primacy of God and of eternal life*, as evidenced in the following and imitation of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ, who was completely consecrated to the

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, *Vita Consecrata*, # 85.

glory of God and to the love of his brethren.” These three major challenges in terms of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience provide the prophetic task of the consecrated life, which are perhaps more radically demanded by contemporary society. The initial formation program then should be able to provide an explanation to the vows that neophyte candidates can easily digest and take to heart. This initial inspiration can then deepen later in the novitiate.

Some Concrete Proposals

What are possible concrete approaches, programs, and activities that can be pursued in our congregation's initial formation program:

1. How the whole process of initial formation begins is most crucial. If possible, the formator should not burden the candidates immediately with set objectives and goals, highly structured schedules, and heavy inputs. As *millennials* have a deep sense of entitlement, they would appreciate very much being involved in decision-making processes. Since there might be a small number of candidates, there is time and space for formators and formandi to get to know each other. The first few days should be spent – in the most relaxed manner – getting to know each other: where each one is coming from, each person's identity (ethnicity, nationality, cultural tradition), description of family life, academic and work background and what brought him to the circle of the Redemptorists.
2. After getting to know each other better, the next step is for everyone to express his expectations of this initial formation. For example, they could be asked what might help them clarify their search for meaning by entering a religious community? And how can this formation nurture their desire for this kind of vocation? The objec-

tives and goals of the formation program can then consider the candidates' comments.

3. The timeframe of their everyday activities could also be discussed based on the candidates' suggestions. Schedule should not be too highly structured as candidates are just starting to adjust to a new kind of lifestyle. A major consideration is to maximize moments of being together so that a fraternal life lived in a community begins to take shape for the candidates. All meals, prayer schedules (especially the daily Eucharist), doing housework and forms of recreation are to be done in the community.
4. Their prayer life and moments of mediation could be made more varied, creative, and free-flowing, not too highly structured and formulaic. If candidates have had meaningful types and forms of prayer life, these could be encouraged and tapped.
5. Their pastoral immersion should take into consideration the following: academic and work background, their past involvements and advocacies, areas they want to explore, available engagements within the locality where formation program takes place. Perhaps it would be better to choose only a few rather than have too many exposures considering the length of the formation program. This makes it possible for them to have a more in-depth immersion.
6. For every major activity, there be debriefing and processing. Questions to be asked and reflected on: How did the experience affect me as a person? What were my dominant feelings as I had this experience? In what way did this experience help me discern my vocation better? What message is God sending to me through this experience?
7. If the candidates' sense of maturity is to be deepened at this stage of formation, they need to assist in being more in touch with themselves. Depending on the candidates' exposure to psychological tests, the kind of psychological tests they should undergo should fit their needs. In a

Third World setting, the formator should not totally rely on Western-oriented tools but instead look for more culture-contexted tests. While these tests are helpful, the formator should also find other tools that can help him and his team assess the psychological maturity of each candidate.

8. No longer can we set up a program, “the size of which fits all,” no matter how varied the backgrounds and realities of each candidate. Instead, the program will need to take each candidate’s pace and growth individually. There may be those who only need one year for this initial formation, but others may need more time. So, the end of the initial formation should not be prescribed for all, but to adjust according to the needs of each candidate.
9. The final decision as to the suitability of the candidate to have satisfactorily completed the initial formation should also be decided on with everyone involved: the formator and his team, the candidate and his fellow formandi. While there could be a general guide that lists down the criteria for making such a decision, this should again consider each candidate’s specificities. The process by which each candidate ends his initial formation should also be done in such a way as to make it a ritual of affirmation. For those asked not to consider the next stage of formation – efforts should be made to avoid feelings of rejection by assisting the candidate in searching for other meaningful options for his life.

For further reading

- W. PANNENBER, *Christianity in a Secularized World* (Paperback, 2012).
- J. K. A. SMITH, *How Not to Be Secular?* (Eerdmans: May 2014).
- POPE SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata. On Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and the World* (Post Synod Exhortation, March 25, 1996, Rome).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Decisions on Formation, XXV General Chapter, Pattaya 2016

CHAPTER IV: FORMATION OF THE APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

“The Congregation is continually in process of formation and development” (Cons. 82).

In a world that is evolving and changing dramatically, the General Chapter was aware of the need to promote formation in the Redemptorist Charism that is serious, interdisciplinary and continuous. Each Redemptorist Missionary is called to give witness to his own vocation through a life-long process of being formator and being formed (cf. Cons. 77). An integral formation that synthesizes life and knowledge will better enable us to be more authentic in our mission in the world and in the Church.

29. Vocation Ministry as an authentic priority

Vocation Ministry as an authentic priority Vocation Ministry must be a priority in the pastoral planning of all Units and local communities, ensuring that the necessary personnel and material resources are made available in order to realize the objectives of this ministry. Every Unit, by itself or in collaboration with other Units, will appoint fulltime Vocation Promoters who will work together as a team to promote the Redemptorist missionary vocation.

30. An Evaluation of Every Formation Program in the Congregation

The General Government will task the Secretariat for Formation to work with the Executive Secretary for Formation

and each Conference Coordinator to ensure that during this sexennium, every Unit and Conference will engage in a complete and detailed analysis of its initial formation program at all levels, ensuring coherence and compliance with the *Ratio Formationis* of the Congregation and to determine whether its current program is truly preparing future Redemptorists for the Mission of the Congregation as embodied in the missionary priorities of the Conference.

31. Formation for Mission and Evangelization in a Secularized World

In order that future Redemptorist missionaries will be better equipped to evangelize in a secularized society, each Conference Secretariat of Formation will engage the assistance of qualified professionals and confreres whose study, research and expertise in this area can be put at the service of Redemptorist formation.

32. In solidarity with the poor

All Units will ensure that initial and ongoing formation programs include components of "formation by insertion" which allow for experiences of real closeness to the poor. They will develop programs that will make provision for a period of a more stable sharing in the life and lifestyle of the poor whom we serve.

33. Preserving the vitality of the Redemptorist tradition in Moral Theology

Since knowledge of Moral Theology is part of our tradition from the time of Alphonsus, the Congregation will pursue a variety of ways to preserve and develop the teaching of, and research in, this science. Familiarity with the science of Moral Theology is to be considered a requirement of the ordinary formation of every Redemptorist. As such, it is to be given priority in the initial and continuing formation of all confreres.

Those confreres with a particular aptitude for study and research will be encouraged to pursue higher studies in this science to ensure the continuation of our tradition.

34. Continuing Formation

The General Government will expand the membership of the General Secretariat for Formation. This expansion will allow the Secretariat to take responsibility for both initial and continuing formation more effectively. The work of the Secretariat will endeavour to develop programs that aim at conversion of hearts, at more effective ways of achieving the vision we have in common, and at deepening our specific Redemptorist identity.

35. Regular Courses for Formators

The General Secretariat for Formation will continue to offer regular courses for the preparation and ongoing training of Directors of Formation, either in Rome, in the Conferences, or *on-line*. The same Secretariat shall continue to produce resources to aid Formation Directors in carrying out formation for Mission in the Congregation. Particular attention must be given to the "importance of missionary availability" as a determining factor in a vocation to Redemptorist life.

36. Training of Laity in Moral Theology

Each Conference will arrange for the regular formation of lay partners on the moral teaching of the Church, and investigate the possibility of sponsoring a capable Lay Partner in the pursuit of an advanced degree in the area of Moral Theology.

37. Communications and the New Media

Each of the five Conferences of the Congregation will appoint a confrere who will undergo study and training in the area of Communication. He will then assume responsibility for

the Communication needs of the Conference and act as a direct link or liaison person with the Units of the Conference and the Office of Communications of the Congregation. He will also be available to work with the various Formation Programs of the Conference to ensure that future Redemptorists are equipped to avail of the evangelizing possibilities of various forms of new media.

APPENDIX 2

Formation Website

To respond to some of the necessary processes of Initial Formation and before the XXVI General Chapter, one of the General Secretariat of Formation's strategies is creating a new, exclusively dedicated website. The address of this website is:

<http://www.cssr.news/formation>

The objective of this website is to serve as a sort of “data-bank” for the documents and resources that may be needed.

The website has two main sections, each of which is in an official language of the Congregation (English, Spanish and Italian).

The main section is that of essential and important documents and *power-points* that will support the different processes. Another section is practical resources for formation (referred to as “tools for formators”).

The information on formation in this webpage will be of particular importance regarding initial and ongoing formation for the Coordinators, the Conference and Unit Secretariats of Formation, the major superiors, the Congregation's formators and formandi, and the members of the General Chapter.

The website is managed by the General Secretariat of Formation. However, it would be very useful if all of us, especially formators and formandi, consider the website as their own, and collaborate, enriching and contributing materials, articles and all those elements considered valuable for formation in the Congregation.

REDEMPTORIST FORMATION

1. Manual for Formators C.Ss.R.
2. Witnesses and Missionaries of Redemption
3. New profile of the Redemptorist Missionary
4. Lasso de la Vega, *Communicanda* and Documents
5. Joseph W. Tobin, *Communicanda* and Documents
6. *Ratio Formationis Generalis* (2020)
7. Witnesses of the Redeemer: In Solidarity for Mission to a Wounded World

Realizzazione editoriale



Ingegno Grafico

SERVIZI INTEGRATI PER LA GRAFICA
LA STAMPA E L'EDITORIA
www.ingegnografico.com



CONGREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER
General Secretariat for Formation